Interviewee: Gao Yurong (Female, b. 1941, Zoujia Village, Shangdian Town, Binzhou City, Shandong Province)

Interviewer: Zou Xueping (Female, b. 1985, Caochangdi Workstation)

Interview Date: February 26, 2010

Interview Site: Home of Gao Yurong

Interview Length: 20 minutes, 6 seconds

In the original transcript, the interviewer is referred to as Ping, and the interviewee as Gao

Gao: I was in Xiaosang in 1960, carrying baskets. As for eating, I had chaff and wild herbs, just those. Later when I came back home and ate at the mass hall, what did we eat? Pumpkins, with thin skins, people secretly ate them raw, making them into big dumplings. Full labor got one spoon of porridge, and half labor got half a spoon. Starving people just sat there, with their eyes wide open. Two people died in one day, for real, two died. Afterwards my mother and I mixed sweet potato leaves with cottonseeds to eat. The two of us hugged each other and cried. Your third grandpa (Gao’s husband) worked as a worker in Zibo (a county), and the two of us just cried at home. Couldn’t do anything about it, we were too starved to stand up. Later in November, my mother got edema disease and then passed away. Then I went to Damewang Village by myself, and came back again for the New Year. Then your third grandpa returned home. Others supported us with some food, such as white radish and water chestnut. Starving days where like this. No need to talk about it, people starved to death, two were carried out in a day! Some couldn’t even be carried. Four people in our family died. When my big grandma died, my mother and I were too weak to wail for her, and my mother couldn’t get to Xidi by foot but was taken there with a wheelbarrow in front of the coffin. We buried her (big grandma) like that. Need I say more?

Ping: Was it the worst time?

Gao: Yes, this was when we starved the most.

Ping: Four people died in your family?

Gao: My sister-in-law passed away, my mother, my big grandma, my grandma, and my nephew – that kid on your grandpa Jinling’s side, called Qiuming.

Ping: How old was he then?

Gao: Four years old, literally starved to death.

Ping: Did the others starve to death, too?

Gao: Yes, all starved to death. My big grandma had half a bowl of porridge and died, that’s because of starvation. In fact, that kid on your grandpa Jinling’s side was starved to death on purpose.

Ping: Why?

Gao: Then there was sweet potato already, and he was starved to death on purpose.

Ping: Didn’t it get better with sweet potatoes?

Gao: It was better after that, in the beginning there were sweet potatoes, but he was starved on purpose, really. That’s about our family, four people died. So hungry that we couldn’t even cry.

Ping: Too weak!

Gao: So weak! No one could even carry the hand frame, and just used the hoeing tool, not to mention coffin, there was none. And some veggies were given to us by others.

Ping: Where did they come from?

Gao: From Hengtai, the mountainous areas had white radish, which were given to us. But we had so many people here and that was not enough. When we first starved that was 1958, no need to talk about that!

Ping: Yes, talk about it.

Gao: Back in 1958, there was the “Five Winds” Campaign. Sweet potatoes and corns were stepped over, just not allowed to eat them. We went to each village to plow the soil, and threw sweet potatoes back and forth. Afterwards we really started to starve. Besides chaff and wild herbs, we got some clover in the field. It was also strange then, the clover would grow back the next day after you picked it. It’s like magic, that green herb, cut here after cut there, and it saved our lives. Every household went to pick the clover, and all survived. Those who were dying couldn’t move a bit, just got some porridge and had half a bowl, or a whole bowl. Some still died, what to do? That was towards the end of starvation in 1960. At that time, we only had that little porridge from the mass hall, what’s it enough for? Your grandma Chang’en, her son was about eleven, he just sat over there wearing a wadded jacket, literally starved to death. Picking the locust leaves and elm leaves, some of which were dried and some grinded, for porridge! Lives were saved like that. Elm trees were all stripped bare and the locust leaves were poisonous, one could get edema disease from them. Trees were bare all over. How nice is life now! We all looked forward to this time. How nice, there’s enough to eat and wear. How nice is the society now! That’s for people who have endured through, those who couldn’t make it all died.