Interviewee: Luo Shiying, female, born in 1921, Huamulin, Baiyun Village, Fengqing county, Yunnan Province

Interviewer: Li Xinmin, female, born in 1988, Caochangdi

Time: March 2, 2011

Location: Luo Shiying’s home

Transcript:

Luo: It’s too hot. Can’t take it. Where is your mother?

Min: She’s at Old Aunt’s place.

Luo: You will only be back for New Year after this visit?

Min: I will be back for New Year.

Luo: Have you earned a lot of money?

Min: I spent it all the money I earned with hard work. Is your dog fierce?

Luo: Your salary is over 1000 yuan per month?

Min: Yes.

Luo: Which one of you works further from here, you or Little Long?

Min: I’m further away.

Luo: You are further away but she can’t make 1000 yuan a month.

Min: I don’t know.

Luo: Less than 1000 yuan.

Min: Okay.

Luo: Her place is called Guizhou, right? Can 1000 yuan get you there?

Min: No.

Luo: Are you coming?

Min: Yes.

Luo: Let’s chat a little bit before going.

Min: Yeah, that’s what I am here for. Little Aunt isn't home?

Luo: No. She can’t come back yet. It’s only been a month. She wasn’t married till she was 26. The dog is not here. Sweetie, push the door and come in side.

Min: Is the dog locked up?

Luo: The water doesn’t come out. Is the tube broken?

Min: Maybe. It doesn't bite people right?

Luo: No.

Min: No biting.

Luo: It doesn’t bite people. Squat down and have some water.

Min: I don’t want water.

Luo: Wanna squat down?

Min: Okay.

Luo: Want some melon seeds?

Min: No. It makes my tongue hurt and blistered.

Luo: Let me get you some?

Min: No, no. Let’s sit down and chat. The kitty is running away.

Luo: My back hurts. Is your Little Uncle at home?

Min: He is.

Luo: Okay.

Min: He’s with my mother visiting Mei.

Luo: My health is good. Your grandmother was younger than me and she’s already passed away. They were working during the day.

Min: You don’t have any pains anywhere?

Luo: What?

Min: No pains anywhere?

Luo: It doesn’t hurt that much. I can't work anymore. I eat rice from rice cookers. My eyes can't see. The rice cooker is over there.

Min: Cook for them?

Luo: Yes. I don’t work every day. They say Yang Fa’s fell over. Who’s to make an injection?

Min: Yeah. Little Dingsheng.

Luo: Oh, Little Dingsheng. Another fucking year has passed. Are you getting married outside the village? Are you not coming back?

Min: I’m not sure yet. Still young.

Luo: You are as old as 20 now.

Min: 23.

Luo: 23 years old. People say that an early fortune is not as good as an early son. It’s good to have kids early, sweetie. In my case, I have money but nobody to spend it. We need people to spend the money. Are you eating something?

Min: What to eat?

Luo: Do you drink wine?

Min: No.

Luo: White wine is really strong. I had some just now. Bitter and spicy. You want some?

Min: No. I don’t drink often. It makes me dizzy in the daytime.

Luo: I heard that you were going to get married in Beijing

Min: I don’t know.

Luo: Is your sister here?

Min: She’s married at Baiyun.

Luo: To which family?

Min: I don’t know the family.

Luo: Then I don’t know.

Min: Yeah, some family in Baiyun.

Luo: She’s working in other places too?

Min: Yes.

Luo: How about her husband?

Min: Also working out there.

Luo: No one is at home anymore. Is your big brother Shi away?

Min: He’s my big uncle.

Luo: Little Three went to Lijiang. Shi went to Lincang to take some test. I didn’t hear him.

Min: He’s taking a driving test.

Luo: Oh?

Min: Yes.

Luo: I don’t know anything about it?

Min: People here usually go to Lincang for the test.

Luo: He said it cost a lot of money?

Min: Yes. It’s expensive.

Luo: He said it cost 3000 to 4000 yuan!

Min: I don’t know exactly. A lot of money.

Luo: Or 4000, 5000?

Min: Yes.

Luo: I didn’t know that. He asked me for money. They don’t give me money from their work. I’m only staying here, not spending anything.

Min: They asked money from you?

Luo: Yeah, they would make a gesture indicating a number. “Fuck your mother.” I said that I didn’t have any. I went to my neighbor’s place and he followed me there. I can’t go to the city to take my money—after my little son died, they give me money. I don't go to the city for money and they will take my money without giving me anything. They think I don’t shop anyway. They only asked money from me. Fuck them. I should have 500 yuan and Xiu took 200 away. Only 300 left and he took the rest away. Fuck. I can’t spend any.

Luo: Your little son was executed as a soldier?

Min: Yes.

Luo: That’s why they give me 4800 yuan per year.

Min: 4800 per year.

Luo: This year.

Min: I see.

Luo: They go to Luodang to take my money. They say that they will buy me food. I said, “Fuck, you should give me the money and take a little away.” They only ask me for money, even when I don’t have any. My older son doesn’t think I need anything. Fucking Xiu took all my 500.

Min: Yes.

Luo: Yesterday Shi took 200 too. No money. Is this a camera?

Min: It’s a video tape recorder.

Luo: I don’t know anything now.

Min: What happened to your little son、

Luo: He joined the army and died.

Min: Is he the one who went with my father?

Luo: I don’t know. I don’t remember.

Min: Ok.

Luo: He never came back.

Min: I see.

Luo: Your father went too?

Min: Yes. What is the name of your little son?

Luo: He didn’t come back.

Min: Yes.

Luo: He died in Lincang.

Min: Oh.

Luo: He went after your father was back. He was born in the year of dog. This fucking flea is biting me everywhere. Did you pass by my granddaughter’s place when you were out of the village?

Min: No.

Luo: For sure.

Min: I have never been there.

Luo: She’s in Guizhou.

Min: Yes.

Luo: I don’t know where she is there.

Min: My father was born in the year of dog too.

Luo: My son was 19 years old.

Min: 19.

Luo: Yes. They brought his body to me. Fuck. It has been more than 60 or 70 years. He would have been in his 90s if he didn’t die at the age of 19. Ah, so much time has passed. Fuck.

Min: Were you carried here by a sedan chair?

Luo: Yes.

Min: When was that?

Luo: In those times, people who were married to close places were all carried by sedan chairs. Like being married at Damaichang and Dujia Village. They put a red carpet on the ground. They had sieves hung at the doors—pretty women’s sieves had small meshes and ugly women had big meshes. My grandmother and a grandmother here were sisters. If I weren’t from Xincun, why would I come here. Fuck.

Min: You were 19 when you got here? Do you remember anything?

Luo: We had 22 people to feed. You’ve never lived like that. We were so poor that we had nothing. The wooden steamer was this tall. Fuck. We picked up bitter wheats back and put them in the sun if it was sunny. If not, we just cook them a little bit. Fuck. We didn’t have large potatoes, only small ones. We were hungry. Over 20 people shared the potatoes and bitter wheats. Now dogs don’t even want corn rice. Fuck.

Luo: People riding motorcycles would fall down, rolled twice and hit the ground.

Min: Oh.

Luo: Hurt on the ribs.

Min: How much do you remember of those hard days?

Luo: What?

Min: Do you remember those hard days?

Luo: It was so hard but I have lived to this old age. Every day was hard. We had night shifts that we had to go. Rice was cooked together at Dashuijing. They didn’t give us food or only gave us a little bit. Everyone got a little bowl. You guys haven’t gone through that. It was fucking like this everywhere. We mixed bran with Shangyao. Fuck. We don’t even care about corn rice now. We only ate bran mixed with Shangyao to survive. We fucking ate like that. Do you want me to get some melon seeds?

Min: No, my tongue hurts. Can you tell me about the things happened when you were young?

Luo: What?

Min: I asked you if you could tell me your stories.

Luo: Yes. We had nowhere to go. Life was fucking hard. People today have so much free time. We had to get up before sunrise. Fuck.

Min: Oh. When you ate at the canteens?

Luo: Ah?

Min: When you ate at the canteens?

Luo: Yes, here. Meals were cooked at Dashuijing and people from Baiyun all ate here. Everyone only got a little bit by measurement. Children only had 2 liang. Fuck. I didn’t think I would survive. Heavens. Hard life. We worked hard during the day and still had to do the night shifts. If we didn’t work at night, we wouldn’t get breakfast. Our absences would also be written down in a notebook.

Min: What did you do for night shifts?

Luo: Harvesting crops and a lot of other things.

Min: You did harvesting at night?

Luo: Yes. People in Baiyun were considered as a group and it was group work. After the harvest of corns, if you wanted some to eat, you couldn’t—the crops were locked up. We went to Dashuijin waited for out portions. Lots of people were there. We were so hungry that we didn’t feel it anymore. Fuck. So many days has passed since then. I’m the only one alive at this age in Baiyun.

Min: Oh, are you 90?

Luo: 92.

Min: 92. When were you born?

Luo: Which year?

Min: What’s your zodiac animal?

Luo: Rooster.

Min: Rooster.

Luo: Yes. All the others are dead. When I came here to get married, your grandmother wasn’t born yet. So many years has passed. Your grandmother once said to me: “I will probably die before you do.” “Fuck,” I said, “You weren’t even born when I got here.” She did die first. I watched her be born and growing up.

Min: When you went to night shifts, how about great grandfather?

Luo: We were together in the same team.

Min: Oh.

Luo: We had to go to Dashuijing to get our food. We set out at sunrise and couldn’t be back with food till much later. The food we brought back was very little. Children only got 2 liang of food, which couldn’t fill a small bowl up even when put loosely. We were so poor that we had nothing, and I lived. Fuck. When your grandmother was still here, three people ate in their family. Then Fa was brought here by your father after her husband died. Fuck. It’s not been one day or two. It has been 92 years! Fuck!

Min: Did great grandmother teach back then?

Luo: Yes. He was a teacher in the city. He stayed there for a few years. People talked about it much. Nowadays, who cares where you go. At that time, my husband was away but we weren’t divorced. No one wanted me and I suffered alone. Fuck him. I just stayed where I was, not daring to leave. Then my husband had a new wife and abandoned me. There were lots of gossip about me. He fucking didn’t divorce me. I was like in my 20s or 30s, as old as Little Cuiying. I had a child but it died after 4 months.

Min: Your child?

Luo: My child was only 4 months old. Many people told me that my husband had a new woman somewhere else. Those fleas went into my shoes. Where are they fucking from?

Min: So great grandfather had a new woman?

Luo: No.

Min: Why did people say so then?

Luo: He was away for almost 8 years. His family had lots of people—6 sons including my husband. 6 sons with nothing to feed them. We cooked bitter wheat for dinner. Fuck. People were all doing the same. You needed to be landlords to have rice. Where could we have rice? Fuck. Nothing was sold in the street.

Min: So your family wasn’t doing that bad since great grandfather was teaching?

Luo: We were a large family that lived together and it was fucking hard. Teaching salary was 60 or 70 yuan per month. It is like 1000 or 2000 yuan today. But we had nowhere to buy food. No food in the street. You don’t know those times, since your grandma grew up after I came here. Fuck. Heavens! I have such a long life. No one alive is as old las me. Fuck. Are you leaving early?

Min: Yes.

Luo: Are you taking a night bus?

Min: Yes.

Luo: Who knows how many places the bus goes at night. Sweetie, when you get married, you should choose your groom carefully.

Min: Yes.

Luo: Be careful. There are many fucking ruffians who get married over and over again. Fuck. Did Little Qiaowang went battering rocks?

Min: No.

Luo: No? I’m in my 90s now. Over 90 years have passed! Your little uncle only had three people at home including your grandfather and grandmother. Your grandmother had several cows. Your grandmother was got by Hu Jiaqing. Your grandfather died. Little Fa married here too. She was married to someone and didn’t have kids. Then she married your grandfather.

Min: Mhm.

Luo: Before that your grandfather only had your father. Then they had six sons. Old Fa. Little An. What is Little Ju’s husband called?

Min: Little Laigou.

Luo: Little Laigou and Little Suozhu

Min: How many children did you have?

Luo: What?

Min: How many children did you have?

Luo: Who?

Min: You?

Luo: 7. 3 sons and 3 daughters. The oldest one is the same age as Little Cuiying. Now only your big grandfather is still young. Fuck. The one who went to the army was born in the same year as Little Fa. They were born in the year of dog.

Min: Do you know how he died as a soldier?

Luo: I know they beat him up. Then he was burnt into ashes. His ashes were brought back in a little box.

Min: Didn’t they tell you?

Luo: What?

Min: Didn’t they tell you?

Luo: They were there and we didn’t have telephones like now. He died and his ashes were brought here in a box. They sent some wreaths. The box was buried in near Little An’s home. The only young one is your big grandfather. Monkey, rooster, dog. He was born in the year of dog. So you are going alone?

Min: Yes.

Luo: Go early to catch the bus. Have you bought the ticket?

Min: Yes.

Luo: Okay. How much is the ride?

Min: From here to Kunming costs 200 yuan.

Luo: Oh, from here.

Min: So you had 7 children?

Luo: What?

Min: I asked if only 1 of your 7 children died?

Luo: Yes. Your big grandfather is still single. The one born in the same year as Old Fa died as a soldier and was sent back as a box of ashes. I just can’t die. Fuck. Who’s having a wedding banquet at Dashuijin?

Min: I have no idea.

Luo: I heard about a wedding? Who’s marrying their girl?

Min: One of your children died. How about the others?

Luo: He died there as a soldier.

Min: Only one died?

Luo: Only one. My older son doesn’t even have a wife.

Min: Oh.

Luo: Your other big grandfather was born in the year of monkey, 2 years older than the one born in the year of dog. Sweetie, they made 60 to 70 yuan a month teaching. Nowadays, that’s not even enough to buy rice. They fucking earn one thousand or two now. What the fuck could we eat?

Min: What did you eat?

Luo: Did you hear that?

Min: There.

Luo: Yang Fa fell from his motorbike. Don’t know who’s treating him.

Min: How many years is great grandfather older than you?

Luo: I am older than him. I’m a rooster and he’s a dog.

Min: Oh.

Luo: Rooster, dog. Monkey, dog. I am two years older. He was born in the year of dog.

Min: How old was great grandfather when he died?

Luo: How old…he has been dead for over 10 years. Yiyi is teaching in the city now. They made 60 to 70 yuan a month teaching in the past.

Min: Did great grandfather get sick?

Luo: What?

Min: Did great grandfather get sick?

Luo: They said that his stomach shrank. He couldn’t eat anything. He could only eat spoons of food offered by kids. When his stomach was totally shrunk, he died. He couldn’t eat anything and he didn’t have room for food. He couldn’t swallow things. After about 3 months—he spent 2 months in the city and was brought back—he could only lay down and have some water. They said that there was something wrong with his stomach. When his stomach diminished, he died. He received treatment in the city for several months. Ah, now, fuck. His parents had many sons. Did your father’s family have many sons?

Min: Yes.

Luo: They had 4 or 5 sons. The only one that has passed away is your father. Little Laigou, Little Suozhu, Little Qiaowang. Is little Laigou’s son still here?

Min: He went away. The daughter’s not coming back?

Min: No.

Luo: Sweetie, what do you work? Do you sell things?

Min: Well I do all kinds of things.

Luo: All kinds of things. I heard that it takes more than a day to get to my granddaughter’s place?

Min: I don't know.

Luo: I know Guizhou. I don’t know many things and haven’t been to cities. I haven’t gone to Yuanzhu Street. You earn one thousand yuan a month. That’s more than ten thousand yuan every year. During the collectivization, life was so fucking hard. We planted some tea trees. We had the fucking bitter wheat rice and steamed yams. I had fucking nothing. Ten to twenty people ate together from a big wooden bucket. Now we have aluminum pots. The bucket was so big that the food couldn’t be fully cooked. We had to get some out to fully cook the food. How could we take the food when it was not cooked? Vegetables were cooked in a big pot. Rice was cooked in a big pot too. We didn’t have many things. The cooking place only had that big iron pot. Vegetables and rice were all cooked in a big pot.

Min: How many people were eating in your family?

Luo: Twenty-two people. A big family. Ah. Nowadays you all have clothes to wear. In the past, even if you had money, where could you find clothes? Fuck. We couldn’t afford to throw away old cloths. We sewed patches everywhere, even at the crotch of pants. Fuck. Ahh, things are good now. Those fucking years! Everyone could get one cloth coupon of for one chi of cloth. How could we have clothes out of one chi of cloth? Fuck. Now there aren’t cloth coupons anymore. Pants that are too long are cut and the extra cloths are thrown away. How could we throw away anything back then?

Min: You had cloth coupons. How about food coupons?

Luo: We had that too. We could use coupons for food in the city. One person got one jin of food. I don’t remember that much now. But we fucking didn’t want to go with our empty stomachs. Even if we went there, there was nothing to eat. They only had some yam, bran. At some places, they had buns, but not corn buns. Think about it. What a life I had! Even if you had fucking money, you couldn’t find many things in the city. They say that you can find everything there now.

Min: Did anyone in your family die of hunger at that time?

Luo: Ahh?

Min: Did anyone die of hunger?

Luo: Some people died of hunger. People didn’t bring wild vegetables home. They brought Xiangcai home. They mixed Xiangcai into rice. Dogs won’t even eat that. Fuck. It was not that only one or two places didn’t have food. It was the same everywhere. They didn’t sell food in the city. Fuck.

Min: Did anyone in your family died of hunger?

Luo: No. We found food in the mountains. Xiangcai or juecai. We mixed them with flour. Or we had bitter wheat or corn flour. We don’t have rice like today. We were really dying for food.

Min: What did you do when you got really hungry?

Luo: How can I tell you if I didn’t do it? The whole fucking family was competing for food. We ate bitter wheat mixed with yams. We wanted to eat more but we couldn’t find food anywhere. Food was scarce everywhere. We couldn’t find a single grain in the city. We sold a horse. Your father and Little Wu’s father gave out some peas. We grinded them and mixed them into the flour. One family could get a bowl or two. Fuck. Is your mother taking care of your sister’s child?

Min: Yes.

Luo: Is the child old enough to sit on a chair? Your sister’s married well. The one your sister is married to can make money. They can leave the village when they want.

Min: Great grandmother, do you receive pensions now?

Luo: Ahh?

Min: I said “do you receive pensions now”?

Luo: What?

Min: Do you have pensions?

Luo: Ohh.

Min: You do?

Luo: Money?

Min: Yes.

Luo: I know. I don’t have any. They say that we should have low-insurance money?

Min: Maybe?

Luo: I know that we have that?

Min: You don’t get anything?

Luo: No. Like the money after your younger grandfather died. I got 500 yuan back and Little Xiu got 200 away. Little Shitou wanted to have some exam in Lincang—I don’t know anything about it—and he got some away. Yang fa is sick and his daughter is away. Who’s going to take care of him?

Min: Yes.

Luo: I heard she’s grazing cattle away from here. She won’t be back till next winter. 。。。She was vulnerable. When she was a kid, she couldn’t even talk. Her grandfather was rich and brought her to the city for doctor. Then he brought her back for treatment. He also found some other doctor. She was cured later or she wouldn’t be able to stand. Her great grandpa is as old as your grandfather.

Min: Oh.

Luo: He was a teacher too.

Min: How old is grandfather?

Luo: Ahh?

Min: How old is grandfather?

Luo: What don't you know?

Min: I don’t know how old grandfather is.

Luo: He is 52 now. Has your father’s gravestone been built?

Min: Yes.

Luo: Ah, fuck. I was coming home and I heard Third Grandma. He was just fucking run over by the car. Is he buried in Gaotou?

Min: Yes. Xiaoshifo.

Luo: Xiaoshifo?

Min: Yes.

Luo: A house has also been built there?

Min: Yes.

Luo: Why is there noise from the door.

Min: It’s the wind.

Luo: It’s so sunny today. Even no wind. There are so many kinds of shoes today!

Min: Great grandma, what’s your official name?

Luo: Luo Shiying. I haven’t changed my name.

Min: Do you know how to write your name?

Luo: Ah?

Min: Do you know how to write it?

Luo: I was taught some in school.

Min: Do you know how to write now?

Luo: No. I was little and I hadn’t even come here. They have always called me Luo Shiying.

Min: Oh.

Luo: What is your official name?

Min: My official name is Li Xinmin.

Luo: Li Xinmin?

Min: Yes. Are you the oldest person at Huamulin?

Luo: At Baiyun, yes. They say that no one at Baiyun is older than me. Even Li Shaozong is younger than me.

Min: Oh.

Luo: The Li Shaozong from Dadi is 92 years old now. In our big Huamulin, I am the oldest one alive. Apart from us, Hui Congxiang is only 70 years old, right?

Min: 77.

Luo: Ah?

Min: 77.

Luo: Li Hao is probably as old as 80 years old now?

Min: Yes.

Luo: Or 81 years old. His sons are still young and not married. Now Little Xi is 48 or 49 years old. I don’t cook for myself. I eat whatever others cook. I can’t see and my hands are often shaking. Fuck. There used to be your grandfather and grandmother and some others living here. Many died. Fuck. Over there your great grandfather and grandmother died after I came here. Little Fusheng’s parents. So many people fucking died. Li Gui’s parents and grandparents also died after I was here.

Min: Great grandmother, do you come from Modaoshi?

Luo: No, Bazidi.

Min: Bazidi?

Luo: Yes. My grandmother there and grandmother here are sisters. They were from Xincun.

Min: Oh.

Luo: My great grandmother was from Xincun. My family adopted a child and raised him. He left when he was old enough. Three girls were married from Xincun here. My grandma and a woman who got married with Old Mao. Many people don’t know these things. There are so many fleas here. Has your aunt gone home and visited your grandmother?

Min: Yes.

Luo: She did?

Min: Yes.

Luo: She has been married here for 5 or 6 years. She hasn't had a child yet and she doesn’t do any work.

Min: Yes.

Luo: Your grandmother is just living like this. My granddaughter Little San is like this too. She’s working away from home a lot and doesn’t pick tea leaves. Fuck. She’s going out every day.