Interviewee: Hui Shilan, female, born in 1950, Baiyun Village, Fengqing county, Yunnan Province

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

Time: Feb 23, 2012

Location: Hui Shilan’s home

Transcript

Hui: To talk about the collectivization, I need to talk about 1958 and after. I was quite young in 1958.

Min: Yes. How old were you?

Hui: I was born in 1950, so I was like 7 or 8 in 1958. I was only 7 or 8 years old.

Min: Which year were you born in?

Hui: 50.

Min: 50.

Hui: Yes.

Min: You were 8 years old then.

Hui: I didn’t know much at that time.

Min: Ok.

Hui: Should I still talk about that time?

Min: Yeah, say whatever you like.

Hui: I don’t know how. What should I say. I don’t remember that much.

Min: Just say what you remember. There are no guidelines.

Hui: 58, 59,60. The starvation started in 1958.

Min: Ok. What were you every day when starved? What did you eat when there wasn’t much food?

Hui: In 1958 I was still in school. The first half of that year was good. Hunger started in the latter half of 1958. One person could only get 1 liang 5 qian of wet dough or thin porridge. We ate sugarcane dregs, corn husk, wild berries and some other stuff. We picked up these foods when we went out grazing the animals. Your great grandpa was there and sometimes he would cook for us. We had books made of rough straw paper and wrote stuff with brushes. When we got older, we were put into production. I was 18 when I came to Huamulin. When I was 22 years old, my husband died and I had to take care of my two babies. I worked in the morning and came home to cook for them and went out working at night again. I ploughed the terraces. I went through things without my husband. I carried logs and rocks, and built houses in the daytime. Huamulin’s conditions were tough and I did a lot of hard work. I was 28 years old when I went outside of that place. Life was less hard. So piteous. Nothing was good about Collectivization. After production was contracted to households, things improved. I don’t know what else to talk about. You will think it’s not enough.

Min: Can you talk about how your husband died?

Hui: He had a periosteum inflammation. He had a disjointed arm when working in the field. She went to Chinese medicine doctor and had a surgery on her swollen hand in Lincang. It turned into a periosteum inflammation. He died in Lincang. There was also a girl who died at the age of 13.

Min: How about your daughter?

Hui: Yes. My first child was a girl.

Min: Did she die of some sickness?

Hui: Yes. Li Geng’s sister died and now it is just Li Geng and me. That girl was often sick as a child and we brought her to see a doctor in many places. But the doctors couldn’t cure her. I came here after she died. It used to be three of us. At that time, if we had breakfast, we wouldn't have dinner. None of us was man so we didn't know how to find food and clothes. We could only get a little bit of food on the street. Corn today is one yuan but 7 or 8 jiao in those years. We couldn’t buy one jin of rice with one yuan, because it was difficult to buy things at the time of collectivization. Now the market is opened up, which is much better. We couldn’t find places to buy stuff back then. My daughter would exchange things with others with her child. She would ask for little things from our neighbors, or ask them to give her baby a little bit of cooked vegetables. You great grandma helped us out. She secretly gave me things once in a while and we survived.

Min: What did you eat at the time of the collectivization, Third Great Aunt?

Hui: I had sugarcane dregs, corn husk starch, Huangpao and Juejue root. We made the starch at Xiaonanshan. We carried the sugarcanes from Daxing, dried them in the sun. We made ate corns and maize kernels. We ate kernels at the mill like that. Even planting some vegetables would be good. Plant nothing and eat nothing. Where could we find food then? Nowhere.

Min: So can you swallow the kernels?

Hui: Yes, because we were hungry. But it is hard to shit out.

Min: Made it hard to poop?

Hui: Sugarcane dregs were like that too. Easy to swallow but hard to shit. Bran is similar too. Hard to shit. But corn husk starch is good. Huangpao tasted astringent. When your grandpa was alive, he would pick up chestnusts when grazing the animals... I ate lots of things, such as Baihe . Jue root starch was good too. No one would eat it today, but it was desirable then. We didn’t have grains. We don’t have much land now and don't work that much. In those years, people farmed but they didn’t really work hard. People cheated people. During the collectivization, we were hungry and we worked, but we produced nothing to eat. We didn’t have fertilizers either. Now we have fertilizers. We couldn't buy fertilizers anywhere.

Min: How about eating in the canteens?

Hui: Canteen served less than 2 liang or just one and a half liang of rice. Sometimes, they gave you a small bowl of steamed rice. Children could eat that much to survive, but adults needed 3 or 4 liang. Adults labored. So how could children eat? Kids—my sister and brother and me—went to eat first, and they would give us some soup from the porridge. My father was sick, we ate the watery part and brought the residues to our dad. Since he was sick, there was no one to carry food for him. They only carried food to families with labor force. We brought the residues to our dad, boiled some little squashes to put on the residues. That’s how we four people ate.

Min: Has anyone died in the family at that time?

Hui: No. Your grandfather died then but he was sick. No one died of hunger in my family but some did in other families. Your grandfather was 59 years old when he died. He wasn’t starved to death. He didn’t have much to eat but was not totally starved. He was first at Dashuijin, and then Damaichang and then Xiangzhulin. He also spent some years at Huangdi. Your grandmother was in production. She was to pick up the corns others spilled. After she got the corns, your grandfather got some food back from where he grazed. Down here people were starved but there not so much. Your grandfather died of illness instead of hunger.

Min: Which year did he die?

Hui: I’m not sure. Should be a year of monkey. What year was that? Now a person born in the year of monkey should be in his 40s, so your father has died for more than 40 years.

Min: Not at the time of communal canteens?

Hui: No. When eating at canteens, your grandpa was doing well. They were producing things and weren’t hungry. Per capita grains were 30 or 40 percent while work point grains were 60 or 70 percent. With work points, people weren’t that starving. They were still hungry though. I don’t really remember how those years went.

Min: Do you know about something about the Cultural Revolution?

Hui: The Cultural Revolution.

Min: Yes.

Hui: I don’t know what year it was.

Min: Talk about it. I don’t know either.

Hui: During the Cultural Revolution?

Min: Yeah.

Hui: Which year was that? I was still young. I think my Li Geng was already born. I didn't know the Cultural Revolution and I don't remember much. Your Big Uncle Hui Shixue was a clerical worker. Yang Yingchuang was the secretary of the village or maybe Da Liyun was the secretary. They were criticized in the village. Bi Jinyan helped to denounce Hui Shixue, Yang Yingchuang and Da Liyun. I don’t remember which year it was during the Cultural Revolution. After these things settled, those Red Guards themselves were criticized. I only remember this much. Don’t know which year it was.

Min: How did they conduct the criticisms?

Hui: Just to criticize their capitalisms. They put a large hat on the head of the criticized and put a big-character poster on him.

Min: They even put a big-character poster?

Hui: Yes. They wrote “Overthrow Hui Shixue”, “Overthrow Bi Jinyan” or “Overthrow Yang Yingchuan” and posted those on them.

Min: Oh, like that.

Hui: Yeah, they wrote down one’s wrongdoings and scolded him while keeping his head down. They didn’t really curse at him or beat him but they said how dishonest he was.

Min: Did the person under criticism ever speak?

Hui: Not really. They always had their heads down and answered some questions. If one admitted his mistake, he could avoid the next criticism. If he denied it, they would further accuse him of being rebellious. We were young and probably only in our 20s. I don’t remember that much now.

Min: So what did you at the time of collectivization?

Hui: Collectivization?

Min: Yes.

Hui: Let me see. I was in school at the time of collectivization. After school I joined them in production. I did whatever they did, such as carrying shit, transplanting rice and digging up the ground. Generally, those in the countryside. I also carried rocks and logs with other people. Bi Guang Rong’s family had a warehouse. My sister-in-law Lao Hei, Xiao Cuiying, Shibaodi and me went together to carry logs. Two carried one once to Xiangzhulinpo and dragged it down to the river, and then held the log up again. We also broke the terraces and did production. Picking tea or grazing. After my husband died, Li Zhong asked me to take care of the sheep there. I grazed 8 cattle for a year and began doing production work again. That should be in 1984 or 74. Should be in 74 when I joined the Party.

Min: You joined the Party?

Hui: Yes. After joining the Party, I led people in the production. I became a woman group leader and people needed to wait for my instructions. If someone had a baby, I arranged her to feed her baby or something. I was 28 years old. I don’t know if it was the year of snake or something.

Min: Do you know about Land Reform?

Hui: I was only a kid at the time of Land Reform. I don't remember at all. It was the year when your Old Uncle was born, in the year of the snake.

Min: How old were you?

Hui: I’m older than your Old Uncle. Tiger, rabbit, dragon and snake. I was like 3 or 4 years old and couldn’t remember anything.

Min: Oh, 4 or 5 years old.

Hui: I am only 3 years older than him. When he was just born, Land Reform happened. When the household was responsible for production, we were adults. I don’t remember what they did during Land Reform.

Min: When was the hungriest time for you?

Hui: When I was little, around 58 and 59. In the latter half of 58 and 59. We were really young. We were hungry later too, but were less hungry because our parents could find us something to eat sometimes. In 58 and 59, individuals weren’t allowed to cook or even start a fire. If you wanted to cook some vegetables on your own, you would be denounced. Where could we find things to eat? That was the hungriest time, the latter half of 58 and 59. We were really young. Even when our parents found us wild vegetables, they couldn’t cook them for us. After these two years, we moved to Xiangzhulin and other people couldn’t see us cooking. We were in the mountains. Who could see us? After we moved in the mountains, we weren’t that starved. There was a quarrel and someone in the family moved to Fu Jingde’s place. They could only eat buns made of stove dust there. We were too young to remember much. Each person only had 1 chi and 7 cun of cloth for one’s own clothes. We wore clothes full of patches but we weren’t that cold. Now we are wearing thick clothes but we still feel cold. It was also a hard time after I had my own children and they couldn’t feed themselves yet. Now things are getting better. Policies are better. My children are grown-ups. They can find things to wear and eat now. We can’t compare us to many other families, but we have survived the hard times.

Min: So you were married to Huamulin at a young age?

Hui: I was 18 when I got married.

Min: Was the marriage arranged?

Hui: We had freedom. In the past, people got married when 17 or 18. Nowadays people don’t get married in their 20s. If people didn’t get married before their 20s at that time, they would be laughed at. You will not get married till some years later. I was 18 when I got married. When 19, I got my first daughter. I had Li Geng when 21. Li Geng was only 1 year and a half when her father died. The older daughter was 3 and a half and Li Geng was 1 and a half.

Min: She’s been away for 40 years.

Hui: Indeed, 40 years. If alive, she would have been in her 40s since she was born in the year of rooster.

Min: You don’t know how old Big Uncle is?

Hui: He’s 40 something. I don’t know his exact age. I don’t remember. Now this uncle of yours is only 30 something, 34 or 35.

Min: He’s married in to his wife’s family?

Hui: Yes.

Min: Where is him?

Hui: Down there, on the hill of Yang’s.

Min: Second uncle and little uncle are staying at home?

Hui: Second uncle was married too.

Min: Then how did he come back to build this house?

Hui: He didn't want to build one on the hill, so he built one here. He gathered some money from his brothers. He only had money to build one story. The other story was built by someone else.

Min: Third Great Aunt, what’s your name?

Hui: Hui Shilan.

Min: Hui Shilan.

Hui: Yes.

Min: Do you know how to write your name?

Hui: No. I was only in school till the third grade. I don’t remember anymore.

Min: You were born in 50.

Hui: Yes.

Min: What’s your zodiac animal?

Hui: Tiger.

Min: How old are you?

Hui: It’s been 63 years. 50, 60, 70, 80.

Min: Over 63. My grandpa was born in 46 and is now over 60.

Hui: What is his zodiac animal?

Min: Dog.

Hui: I am 4 years older than him. 63. 50 to 60, 70, 80, 90, 10. It’s 2012 now. Yeah, I’m more than 62 or 63 years old now.

Min: It’s called Baiyun Village here?

Hui: Baiyun Village or Baiyun Commune.

Min: Baiyun Commune.