Interviewee: Lv Zhuangai (Female, b. 1928, Zoujia Village, Shangdian Town, Binzhou City, Shandong Province)

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

Interview Date: February 22, 2010

Interview Site: Home of Lv Zhuangai

Interview Length: 1 hour, 8 minutes, 35 seconds

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

Ping: I just want to ask you about the three years of starvation.

Lv: When we starved?

Ping: Those three years, natural disaster? Do you still remember?

Lv: Only remember being starved, but can’t remember anything else. Eating chaff and wild herbs, looking for herbs in the field. I’d eaten anything except the rats, nothing else that I wouldn’t eat.

Ping: Were you married then?

Lv: Yes, I starved here.

Ping: What did you do everyday when you starved?

Lv: I worked in the farm of the Production Team, who measured a unit for you. They didn’t allow you to go home if you didn’t finish working. We ate in the field, only sweet potatoes.

Ping: There were still sweet potatoes then. When did you eat wild herbs?

Lv: Eating the herbs with some salt, (names of wild herbs). Elm leaves were taken from the trees, your Aunt Zhu (Lv’s daughter) passed me the basket and I picked them. Your Aunt Zhu picked clovers. Her father went for a meeting, and she didn’t come home after his meeting was finished around 11 or 12. He went looking for her everywhere and wondered: “where did the child go? Did she starve to death?” I screamed around the village: “Little Zhu! Little Zhu!” That kid fell asleep in the field with the basket, and came home crying. I said: “Come back kid, it’s late outside.” There was not much to eat at home, either. There was half a basket of clovers, so I picked some and cooked in that small copper pot. Other people still had chaffs when they starved, or could buy something, but we simply had nothing, and totally depended on the herbs.

Ping: Did anyone starve to death?

Lv: Starve to death?

Ping: Did you have children who starved to death?

Lv: There were a few.

Ping: Your children?

Lv: There was one old enough to run, who held chaff in the hands before dying. Three or four starved to death.

Ping: Your daughter or son?

Lv: All of them were daughters.

Ping: Daughters?

Lv: Only your Uncle Douqiu (Lv’s son) was a boy, what to do about it?

Ping: Are you 83 years old now?

Lv: Yes, 83.

Ping: And you were in your 30s then.

Lv: Yes, working in the field. Grandma Changceng took care of the kids. Her yard had a grape trellis, and all the leaves on the ground were eaten.

Ping: Even leaves on the grape trellis were eaten?

Lv: Yes, your Aunt Zhu, and Yuzhai from Shuanling’s, the two of them. Grandma Changceng said, other children wouldn’t do this, only that one from Jin’s and that one from Shuanling’s would. They just ate the leaves under the grape trellis, and it’s good that they didn’t starve to death.

Ping: Did many older people die in our village?

Lv: Yes, many starved to death.

(Uncle Kun came to chat with Uncle Douqiu, conversation left out here)

Lv: Didn’t we grow corns at the backyard? The child felt hot and cried, asking me to stop burning the fire. I came home after working in the field, I thought about getting some leaves behind the house for burning, so I put a corn in my pocket. Xizeng’s wife saw it at the corner and asked: Old Jin, did you take the corn？ I said no. “No? I saw it.” I said: “I just didn’t even if you saw it.” I wanted to cook it and give it to the child so that I could burn the fire. She followed me and took it out of my pocket. When you were starving, did a corn matter much? She still left with the corn and looked for your grandpa and Zou Peixi. In the evening they criticized me during the criticism sessions, and your grandpa also criticized me.

Ping: My grandpa?

Lv: Your grandpa. Zou Peixi also criticized me. I didn’t do anything else, but only stole a corn. My child was hot and crying, and I also wanted to cry.

Ping: Whose corn did you take?

Lv: The Production Team’s.

Ping: There were grains but not allowed to be eaten?

Lv: No, not allowed to eat the grains.

Ping: Why not?

Lv: The Production Team had tons of grains, just couldn’t eat them.

Ping: Why?

Lv: Corns were all saved in your fourth grandma’s room, all sprouting but not distributed. When we worked in the field, sweet potatoes straws and corns were tender, and we just put them in the mouth. When your grandpa couldn’t see us, we just ate them secretly. And Yutang, too, we would stop eating when we saw him coming. So awful now I think about things back then. Also begged for a while.

Ping: You?

Lv: Together with Changen’s wife, I walked to Xiaowangjia. There were some workers over there lying on the road, but we didn’t feel afraid. We went to their field and picked dry cabbage leaves, putting them in the mouth. We begged outside people’s doors and asked for vegetables by saying “Auntie, please give us some vegetables.” They’d say that they were taken out just now, but we kept asking, “please give us some, we didn’t eat a thing the entire morning.” Then they gave us a handful of vegetables and we would save it until we had a bowl of radish, vegetable and sweet potato. We brought that home for the kids, and we kept starving.

Ping: How many children did you have?

Lv: Two.

Ping: Do you still remember when did starvation become the worst over here?

Lv: Not really.

Ping: Only remember you were starving?

Lv: Yes, only remember I was starving, nothing else.

Ping: Now you’ve remembered many things.

Lv: Only remember being starved, the chaffs and wild herbs, the sweet potato vines, such bitter days.

Ping: What did my Grandpa Jin (Lv’s husband) do back then?

Lv: What do you think? He used to be the Production Team leader. Other officials would become rich, but he just starved. He was so honest and didn’t get anything from others. We decided to eat something good for the New Year; on the day before the New Year’s Eve, we went to the market. I fought with you Grandpa Jin because he didn’t have anything. Your Uncle Douqiu came home, wasn’t he a teacher? He was paid five yuan a month, and saved his salary for two or three months. He spent it all in the market and got some flour and meat, so we could eat dumplings.

Ping: When was that?

Lv: Your Uncle Douqiu was not old then, about eighteen or nineteen years old.

Ping: It was not easy to have dumplings at that time.

Lv: It was not bad to be able to have dumplings. Young people now don’t starve any more, they wear good clothes and eat well. Now is really a good time.