**Translated by Torrance Yang, Georgia Tse, and Michael Liu**

Interviewee: Binghong Qi, Male, Born in 1933, Sunguyuxueshan Village, Kuanzhuang Town, Fumin County, Kunming City, Yunnan Province, China

Interviewer: Wenguang Wu, Male, Born in 1956, Caochangdi Work Station

Interview Date: August 19th, 2010

Interview Site: Qi’s Home

Interview Length: 50 minutes and 14 seconds

In original interview transcripts, the interviewer Wenguang Wu is referred to as "Wu", the interviewee Binghong Qi as "Qi".

Wu: Are you over 80 years old?

Qi: 83 now.

Wu: Are you still well?

Qi: Not really. Are you 50 years old now?

Wu: 55. Your ears are still working, your eyes can still see, and your health is still good. Are you the oldest person in Jade Mountain?

Qi: Yes.

Wu: Do you have great-grandchildren?

Qi: I have grandchildren.

 (The next part discussed family matters - Omitted)

Wu: Do you still remember the commune canteen?

Qi: Yes. I do remember.

Wu: Could you tell me a bit about it?

Qi: The commune canteen started in 1958 when we did “the great collaboration”, regardless of villages, everybody just worked together. Dining in the commune canteen was not easy, the food was good at the beginning but turned really bad later on.

Wu: What was bad about it?

Qi: The food was flavorless and we mixed in basioo root and aniseed.

Wu: What is aniseed?

Qi: It’s the wild plants up on the mountain that we would dig up, scrap clean, and wash to eat with beans and corn.

Wu: Could you eat enough to be full?

Qi: When you’re hungry you must eat anything you can find. If you were not hungry, the food would have been impossible to eat.

Wu: Have you been starving before?

Qi: I was never starving but ate poorly then. I ate basioo root and aniseed.

Wu: Was it enough to eat?

Qi: No matter what, you are fed with food by weight, 8 liang (400 grams). It may or may not have been filling enough. This was the allocated amount for each meal.

Wu: At the time, why did you have to eat in the canteen?

Qi: Why we had the commune canteen? Nobody knew exactly. That was the policy by Chairman Mao and the Party. If we did not have the commune canteen, we would not get all the laborers together. With the commune canteen, labors from the villages in the vicinity are all organized together. Within the commune canteen, every family had to get meals. You cannot have food at home. Food is in the custody of the working team. We all stayed at Ma Jie ( a village close to the community, about 7 kilometers away). We had meetings, motivational speeches, then harvested millet together with everybody taking care of a part of the field. If you worked fast, you would get some prizes.

Wu: What were the prizes?

Qi: Towels, notebooks, pens, or a sickle.

Wu: That was during the Great Leap Forward period?

Qi: Yes.

Wu: Where did you live?

Qi: You lived wherever you worked. The babies and old people were left at home in the villages. Everyone went to do “the great collaboration.”

Wu: How long did you do this?

Qi: I did this for a few damn months, harvesting millets from Ma Street, through ShenJia Village, ReShuiTang Village, Duo Yi Jia village, all the way to Xugudi Village. Then, we went to Yuxue Mountain to cut corns. After cutting down the corn, we didn’t harvest it, just left it on the field. The conscientious people did their work well, the others, well, I can't even begin to describe, they were very wasteful. Whatever village we worked at, we ate there in the commune canteen.

Qi: I worked for a few months, day and night, suffered a lot.

Wu: Did you like working like this?

Qi: Ay! Who would like working like this? That was the Party’s policies, you had to work, there was no other option.

Wu: Were get married then?

Qi: Yes, I was.

Wu: Did your wife go work too?

Qi: No, she stayed at home.

Wu: While working for the “great collaboration,” did you eat at a canteen?

Qi: We ate at whichever village we worked at. Every production team had a canteen, after you were finished with work, you would bring a bowl there to eat.

Wu: At that time, how old were you?

Qi: Over 20 years old.

Wu: Did you have kids yet?

Qi: Yes, I did.

Wu: Did you join the Party then?

Qi: Yes, I joined it in 1958.

Wu: Oh, were you enthusiastically involved? Who introduced you?

Qi: A person from DuoYiJia Village with the surname Pan, who was an cadre in the commune, persuaded me to join the Party. So I asked him, what benefits are there from joining the Party. He said, you could lead the people.

Wu: You have been a veteran Communist party member for over 50 years. Were there any benefits in joining the Party?

Qi: There really weren’t any benefits. The situation then is different from now. I joined the party in 1955, and till then I had been a leader for over ten years. Later I became a warehouse guard, and worked all the way until the redistribution of lands to households (in 1980). At that time, I was very involved. Since the Liberation, I had been a cadre in the commune for many years, but whatever I did, whatever I ate, whenever I had meals at the meetings, I paid out of my own pocket. Not like the cadres today, who only work if there is compensation, if there isn’t money they won’t do it.

Qi: The commune canteen couldn’t do it anymore, they had the food, but they just didn’t give it to people.

Wu: Why wouldn’t they let people eat?

Qi: They gave the food elsewhere. If the people were more obedient, the village’s food was taken away.

Wu: So you couldn’t eat enough?

Qi: No, not at all.

Wu: What could you do then?

Qi: You just had to be hungry.

Wu: How hungry?

Qi: You just had to put up with it, only eat as much as there was.

Wu: What about children?

Qi: Only adults saved food for children to eat.

Wu: Were you allowed to raise pigs?

Qi: We weren’t allowed to raise pigs, goats, chickens or dogs. We didn’t even have a stove. All we had were bowls and chopsticks, so we had to go to the commune canteen for food. Before 1957, every family had a farm and their own oxen and goats.

Wu: When were the People’s Communes established?

Qi: In 1957.

Wu: What about before then?

Qi: Every family farmed their own land, and ate their own food.

Qu: But later everything was collectivized?

Qi: After establishing the agricultural cooperatives, all the land was taken over by the state. All oxen and goats were herded together and priced. No matter how much they were worth, they were taken by the State. Everything was collectivized. After they were collectivized, the oxen and goats were then distributed back to the people. Each family was given a certain number of oxen and goats to raise. However, the livestock didn’t belong to us anymore, they belonged to the collective group.

Wu: After the collectivization, was money rationed?

Qi: There was no money.

Wu: In which year did the land reform begin?

Qi: I believe it was 1957.

Wu: No, that was agricultural collectivization. The land reform should have been 1952 or 1953.

Qi: Right. It was 1953 when the fields and land were distributed.

Wu: Did Yuxue Mountain have any wealthy peasant landlords at the time?

Qi: No. Only middle class peasants and poor peasants.

Wu: How about your family?

Qi: My family and ancestors have always been poor peasants.

Wu: How much land was distributed to your family?

Qi: About 10 acres.

Wu: Which family’s land did you get?

Qi: All the land in Yuxue Mountain belonged to the Jade School (a private school) down the Bazi. The people of Yuxue Mountain rented this land to farm.

Wu: If all the people here rented land to farm on, how can there be middle class peasants?

Qi: Even if you didn’t have any land, but had oxen or horses, you would be considered higher “class.”

Wu: Who decided the social classes?

Qi: It was determined by the party working team. At meetings, we were told that every family would determine their own class status (which included landlords, rich peasants, or poor peasants). They (the party working team) flipped the rulebook and said: “Think of how much farmland you own, how many oxen or horses you own, or whatever you have, when you determine your own class status. If you think you have livestock and your life is easier, then you should consider yourself a middle class peasant or upper middle class peasant. If you own land, then consider yourself a rich-peasant. Class status was determined in this manner. In Yuxue Mountain, there were only a few families, namely the Chen family, Tianpei Wu’s family, Fayou Yang’s family, and Jicai Huang’s family, that considered themselves middle class peasants. Everyone else considered themselves poor-peasants or lower middle class peasants. You determined this by yourself, nobody forced you into a social class.

Wu: What is your impression of the Cultural Revolution?

Qi: Ah, the Cultural Revolution. There were a lot of meetings, meetings every three days, sometimes every two days. You didn’t even have time to work. There was a meeting with the commune when Chairman Mao passed away. There was also a meeting when the Gang of Four. was smashed. During the meeting for Chairman Mao’s death, we even had to say vows, such as “We pledge our lives to following Chairman Mao.”

The End