

Village Cadres

10 I had heard a lot about political campaigns during my residence in Lin Village. Based on what I learned from villagers, the very phrase “political campaign” conjured up mass rallies, public struggle sessions, and the use of brute force to carry out specific policies. Never in my wildest dreams did I expect to witness such a social drama unfold in real life, at least not during the last month of my stay in Lin Village. But then, unexpectedly, a campaign descended on the village and fundamentally changed the villagers’ way of life and family structure. This particular episode, a birth control campaign, although not as brutal as earlier ones described to me by the villagers, still tremendously impressed me because of its highly dramatic effect and intensity.

Family Planning Campaign

In the middle of May 1985, rumors began to circulate among villagers that a new birth control campaign would soon be launched by the national government. The rumored new policy was to allow only one child per family in rural areas, instead of the current two-child policy. It was also claimed that all pregnant women who were carrying their second child would be taken to the rural hospital for induced abortion.

As the rumors spread, the village atmosphere became tense. Village women who were carrying their second child were especially nervous. One such example was Tiger’s wife, who was already six months pregnant with their second child, and their first one was a daughter. Tiger had been counting on his wife’s second pregnancy to bear him a son. Had the rumor been true, Tiger might have his family line severed because he lacked a son, the most unfortunate event for any family. During the last week of May, Tiger became very edgy. He was a good friend of P.S. Ye, and often visited him in the evenings. Several times Tiger became provoked and argued with Ye over insignificant issues. At the time, I noticed that Ye’s attitude changed quite significantly too. He seemed to become more tolerant, avoiding any open confrontation with Tiger.

I tried to clear up the situation with Ye by privately asking him whether the rumors I had heard were true. Ye was unusually tight-lipped, insisting that rumors were rumors. He sometimes ignored my questions completely. But because Ye, Lin Qifa, the village security head, and Hou Lingli, head of the Women's League, were meeting frequently and secretly in the village or attending meetings at township headquarters, I sensed that the rumors were probably not completely groundless. A new campaign seemed to be brewing. Villagers were anxiously waiting.

That moment came one evening at the end of May, through the loudspeaker systems. It was Lin Qifa's terse, stern, and detached voice broadcast succinctly throughout the village: "The village government has received instructions from higher authorities to change current family planning policies. From now on, village families will be allowed to have only one child per couple. The village government has formulated the following rules to ensure compliance of all villagers with this new policy: First, any villager getting married without permission from proper authorities will be fined RMB\$500. Second, from this day on, any village couple who has a second child without proper permission from the authorities will be fined RMB\$800. This illegally conceived child will not be recorded on the village household registers. He (or she) will not be covered by village medical insurance, and will not be accepted by the village primary school. Without proper registration, this person will not be eligible for rationed goods. Third, all village women who have already given birth to one or more children must come to the village office for examination at 2 P.M. one week from today. Those who do not come will be fined RMB\$10 per day for each day of delay. Finally, any village family who does not comply with this new policy will be cut off from the village office's regular business operations."

This announcement hit the village like a bombshell suddenly shattering a tranquil, pre-dusk moment of leisure and relaxation that most village families enjoyed before their evening meal. Even though most villagers were anticipating this announcement, they seemed to be stunned by its harshness. I was chatting with my landlord, Lin Qishan, in his living room when this new regulation was broadcast. He listened intently, and fell silent when it was over. A few moments later, he shook his head and sighed, "This is tough, very tough. Few villagers will dare to challenge this new regulation."

"You mean because of punishment for those who don't comply?" I asked.

"Yes," Lin confirmed, "especially the last point: Any family violating this new regulation will be disassociated from the village government. Frankly, the first three measures would have very little effect on the villagers. Most families now have a lot of cash. If they were allowed to have another child and thus carry on the family line, they would probably be more than willing to pay the RMB\$800 fine. As far as the household registration or rationing are concerned, very few people care much about them either. The government is doing away

with rationing systems. There is only rice rationing left in the countryside. Most people believe that even this will be abolished next year."

"But why would villagers worry so much about being disassociated from the village government?"

"This is so because most village families are engaged in non-farm production. For instance, there are more than 100 hand tractors in this village now. One of every two village families has a hand tractor operator, who earns at least RMB\$500 per month. To buy a hand tractor, which now costs about RMB\$4,500, most villagers borrow money from the government's land bank or agricultural credit cooperative. Another example is that recently seven villagers raised RMB\$20,000 to set up a heavy machine shop in the village. Half of their investment funds came from government loans and credits. To apply for such loans a family must have the village government's stamp of approval. Without that, financial institutions will not consider any individual loan applications. The village government thus controls the villagers' investment plans. Unless a village family is content with farming on its meager contract land, which most villagers do not consider adequate now, it will have to deal with the village government in one way or another. That is why the last measure will ensure villagers' compliance with this new policy."

I wasn't convinced by Lin Qishan's explanation, and decided to verify it with P.S. Ye. As I walked to Ye's house, the sun was setting on the horizon, with a small pinkish-red glow cast behind the village's darkened silhouette. At Ye's house I found a dramatic event occurring. Ye was sitting in a rattan chair in his dimly lit dining room, with his head tilting up toward the ceiling, as if ignoring something. An old woman with silver hair and traditional black blouse and pants was kneeling in front of him. Her palms were pressed together, half raised in front of her as if she were praying. She was mumbling something inaudible to me.

Seeing my presence, Ye became embarrassed and tried to dismiss the old woman, "Go, go away! This is government policy and I had nothing to do with it."

As I drew closer, I recognized the woman as Tiger's mother. She made no move but insisted, "Just let my son have this second child! You and Tiger are cousins. How can you be so cruel to see his family line discontinued? Spare him this time and I will be willing to become a cow or a horse to serve you in my next life!"

Ye cast a desperate look at me and said to her: "What can I do? I can only promise you I will try my best to save Tiger. But there is no guarantee. But if you don't leave now, I will let the township office's birth control work team go directly to your house!"

The threat of the work team apparently had the desired effect. Tiger's mother promptly rose and said, "I am leaving now. Just don't send the work team over. You promise me that you will take care of Tiger, right?"

"Right!" Ye waved his hand impatiently for the woman to leave.

After she left the room, Ye's facial muscles relaxed and he signaled for me to sit down. I took a chair across the table from him and said, "So, all the rumors about this new birth control policy were true!"

"Yes," Ye replied. "But I couldn't tell you anything before because I didn't want to create unnecessary panic in our village."

"How do you think villagers will respond to this new policy?" I tried to steer the conversation to test Lin Qishan's view that economic punishment was the most effective enforcement weapon.

"To be honest with you, all villagers hate it," Ye answered without hesitation. He then confidently predicted, "But they will all eventually comply with this new policy."

"How can you be so sure?" I insisted.

"For two reasons," Ye replied carefully, as if he had been preparing for the question. "First of all, this is not the first time we have had birth control regulations in our village. The first time was the most difficult, just like when you put a yoke on an ox's back for the first time. It will resist and struggle. But once the yoke is accepted by the ox, you can tighten it repeatedly, even to the point of choking it to death. Peasants are like oxen. Once they accept something as inevitable, you can continue to tighten the screw. They will complain at first, but will come to terms with reality. The second reason I am confident the villagers will comply with this new regulation is that we threatened to ostracize any family who dares to challenge this new rule from the village's financial activities. Investment in private enterprises is the biggest concern of all village families now. Without the village government's approval, no village family could possibly borrow money from government banks or credit associations."

So Lin Qishan was correct after all, I told myself. I also found Ye's analogy between this birth control policy imposed on peasants and that of putting a yoke on an ox interesting. "When was the first time that birth control plans were implemented in Lin Village?" I asked.

"It started in the early 1970s.¹ In 1974, the government began to promote a three-child family policy in the countryside. It was definitely the most difficult one. At that time there was strong resistance to this restriction in the countryside. Not only were the peasants against it, many rural cadres also refused to follow this policy. Work teams were sent down periodically from the commune office to check and enforce this campaign. Women found to be in their fourth pregnancy were dragged to the commune hospital for induced abortion. After the delivery of a third child a woman was fitted with an IUD [intrauterine device] or had a tubal ligation. Those who accepted tubal ligation voluntarily were awarded some cash or gifts. Party cadres who failed to comply with this new regulation or refused to enforce it were promptly fired from their posts. Once the peasants realized that the government was determined to carry out this policy, they grudgingly accepted it.

"This three-child policy lasted for about three years, until 1977. After that, the government reduced the number from three to two per family. Not only were newlyweds allowed to have only two children, but they had to wait for at least three years between children. At that time there was still strong resistance in our village against this policy change. It was my most difficult task during my years in public service. Under this new policy, after the birth of the first child, a woman would have an IUD implanted at the commune hospital until two years after the first delivery. The IUD would then be removed for the second conception. If the woman conceived before this two-year waiting period, she would be required to have an abortion. If the family refused to obey the regulation and had a second child too soon, the brigade would fine this family RMB\$10 for each month this second child was born ahead of schedule. At that point most village families were still poor, and RMB\$10 was a stiff fine."

"What would happen to a woman after giving birth to the second child?" I asked.

"Four months after the delivery of the second child, the woman would be taken to the commune hospital for a tubal ligation. This was far more reliable than an IUD, which is not 100 percent foolproof. It could also be removed easily. So, after fulfilling the quota of two children, the women underwent surgery. In 1982, the government imposed further restrictions by extending the interval between the first and second child from three to four years. Many villagers were disgruntled about this new policy, but resistance was minimum. They seemed to realize that there was nothing they could do, so they accepted it with resignation. This two-child family policy lasted until now, when the government imposed this one-child-per-family policy in rural areas."

"Now, who actually formulates these policies? Is it the national government that issues a policy for the entire country, or the local government making its own rules? Somehow I have the feeling that the punishment adopted in Lin Village was formulated by the local government," I prompted Ye.

"You are both right and wrong, as usual," Ye replied in his half-teasing tone. "The national government only sets guidelines for birth control. For instance, the national government may set a growth rate target of eleven per thousand for the next year, and ask the provincial government to comply with the goal. The provincial authorities, upon receiving this goal, then figure out how many births can occur in this province during the following year. They then established rules for the entire province to meet this goal. In Fujian Province, for instance, the provincial government stipulated during the current campaign that all rural families can now have only one child per family. But under certain conditions a couple is allowed to have their second child. One condition is that the average farmland per person in an area exceeds 50 *mou* or more. Only a few counties in the western part of the province, where there are a lot of mountains and few residents, meet this condition. Another condition is allowing the miners to have a second child because the accidental death rate among coal miners is high. A high birthrate

allows coal mining communities to replenish the labor force needed for mining. The third condition for an exemption is if both the husband and wife were only children. They are then allowed to have two children so that each family will have an heir to carry on the family line. Even if one or both children are girls, the family can keep the girl at home and bring in a husband for her to carry on the family line. These specific, detailed regulations are formulated by the provincial government based on actual conditions in the province.

"While the provincial government sets the rules, it is left to the local governments at the township and village level to meet the goals. In our case, the village government decided what the most effective measures were to enforce this new ruling. In our village, business investment is the biggest concern among village families. We can threaten people with cutting off their business ties. But in a poor village where there are few business activities, this stipulation would be ineffective. Different localities have to develop different strategies in order to carry out the policy."

I seemed to remember that urban residents in China had adopted the one-child policy a long time ago, and didn't seem to resist it as strongly as the country people. I asked Ye, "Was it true that city residents adopted this one-child policy much earlier? How come this policy was so readily accepted by city people?"

"Cities in China adopted a one-child family policy in 1979." Ye scratched his head as if in search of the proper answer. "City people can easily adopt the one-child-per-family policy for practical reasons. First of all, city people generally don't have enough living space. For instance, the average living space for residents in Xiamen City is about two square meters per person. It is already very crowded. Besides, all city residents work in government offices or enterprises. By the time they retire, the elderly can live on their retirement pensions, which amount to 70 to 80 percent of their regular wage. They don't have to rely on their children to support them in old age."

"The situation in the countryside is completely different. Our living space is not restricted. The average housing space in our village now is about twenty square meters per person. Most city families don't even have that much space for the entire family. In addition, we peasants live on our labor. We have no retirement pension to draw on when we grow old. Who is going to support me if not one of my sons? We peasants are not prejudiced against girls or women. But, the fact is that girls are generally married out to another family when they grow up. You need to have at least one son to stay on with the family."

"In other words, unless the government can develop a comprehensive pension system for peasants, until then I feel the government should allow a peasant family to have two children. Even if you have two girls, you can still marry out one daughter and keep one home. The girl who stays home can take in a

husband from another family that has two sons. This way we can solve the problem of old-age support."

"How is the family planning policy carried out in Lin Village?" I changed the subject a bit. "Who actually enforces it?"

"I normally stay aloof from this birth control business," Ye lit a cigarette and answered. "I allow the head of the Women's League, Hou Lingli, to deal with this problem. She keeps records on all village women about the number of children, IUD implants, and tubal ligations. Because Hou is in charge of the village-wide family planning program, she also takes care of village men who are willing to undergo a vasectomy. It is amusing to see Hou accompanying men to the commune hospital for the operation. Sometimes a newly transferred nurse or doctor, who doesn't know Hou's official responsibility, might ask her, 'Are you related to this man? Are you his wife? Why do you come with him if you are not related?' She says she is often embarrassed by these questions. There are only seven men who have had vasectomies in this village. Vasectomy is not popular here because men believe the operation could make them impotent. These seven men have had a vasectomy either because they are dedicated Party members who responded to the call of the government to act as other people's models, or because their wives were in poor health and thus unsuitable for tubal ligation. Villagers believe that any cut in the body means the loss of essential bodily essence (*qi*). Both vasectomy and tubal ligation are considered detrimental to a person's health. That is one additional reason why villagers hate this birth control policy."

"But why can't the government promote pills or condoms, which are not as harmful to the body?" I asked about possible alternatives.

"The government doesn't believe the peasants would use contraceptive devices voluntarily," Ye responded. "This would be like inviting a wolf to guard the sheepfold. Peasants would do anything possible to have an additional child. Even when a woman has an IUD, she might have this device removed by an illegal midwife. I heard that in this area there is a midwife who comes to our village periodically to perform this service for RMB\$10 per person. That is why we need to round up all the women in the brigade once in a while for checkups to make sure their IUDs are in place. Of course tubal ligation is the safest method preventing unwanted births. But the government is reluctant to perform it liberally for practical considerations. A woman may have given birth to the maximum number of children she is allowed. But one of the children may die. When that happens the woman is entitled to have another child. Tubal ligation is very difficult to reverse, thus making it difficult for the woman to become pregnant again."

It was now quite late at night. I said goodbye to Ye and returned to my apartment.

Implementing the Policy

The week following the announcement of this new one-child family policy, horrible stories circulated among villagers about how this campaign was being conducted in other villages. I was told, for instance, in Hongshan Village, a work team headed by a deputy township mayor and a handful of cadres from the township office arrived with a van on the first day of June. Upon hearing of the arrival of the work team, several families with pregnant women fled, mostly to the women's birthplaces in other counties. A few families hid their pregnant women under the bed and locked the door as if no one was home.

The work team forced its way into the homes. If they found a woman hiding inside, they took her for a pregnancy test. All those with positive results were taken to the township hospital for abortion. If the entire family had fled, the work team would take household valuables—such as a television set, a sewing machine, or a bicycle—to the township headquarters. It would then leave word for the owner that if this family didn't come to claim these valuables in person at township headquarters within three days, the township office would simply confiscate all goods. For poor families that didn't have anything of value, the work team dismantled their house doors or windows as collateral.

On June 6, the day the birth control work team was to come to Lin Village, the village was unusually calm and quiet. All activity in the village ceased and villagers anxiously awaited their fate. A shiny blue van arrived at the village office at 9 A.M., carrying a deputy township mayor and three township office cadres, who formed the most dreaded work team. P.S. Ye and other village officials greeted them at the office and immediately had a closed-door meeting with them for the entire morning.

Lunch was a banquet prepared by Hopping Toad Wu, apparently out of the village coffers. I was invited by Ye to join the meal and sat next to Deputy Mayor Ho. During the meal I had the chance to talk with Ho about this campaign. He told me that the entire township (formerly the commune) had eighteen villages (formerly brigades), and was divided into five zones for this campaign. There were five deputy mayors at the township office, and each of them was in charge of a zone with three or four township officials that formed the work team. Each work team thus had three to four villages under its jurisdiction to implement this birth control campaign. Deputy Mayor Ho's zone included Hongshan, Lin, Mudhole, and Hilltop villages. He also confirmed that he had had a great deal of difficulty in Hongshan Village. His work team members had to crawl over a few house walls to gain entry to the houses. Yes, the rumors had been true. Sometimes they found pregnant women hiding inside. For those who fled, the work team took their valuables or house doors. He jokingly told me that if I went to the township warehouse now, I would find a lot of television sets and front doors. It took six full days to complete this campaign in Hongshan Village.

"But," Deputy Mayor Ho said confidently, "I don't think I will have any problem here in this village. P.S. Ye is an effective cadre, and villagers follow his lead."

It was half past one after lunch, and there were already many villagers gathered around the office, mostly women. Ye asked Hou Lingli to check through the list and found that all twenty-seven women who had already had one child but who had not been sterilized were there. Deputy Mayor Ho winked at me as if to remind me of his prediction.

The work team divided the women into two groups, and took them by van to the township hospital in Jiangtou for checkups. When the second group of women departed, I saw Tiger's mother come out of the crowd and walk straight to Ye. She pointed her finger at him and cried, "You said that you would do your best to protect my daughter-in-law. But how come now she is taken to the township hospital? You son of a whore! You should die an accidental death!"

Ye's face turned green but he didn't respond. He then turned to me and told me that he would go to the hospital with the work team to be able to continue their discussion as the van returned. Realizing that I was not invited to join them, I excused myself and went back to my apartment.

That evening I heard fragmented reports from villagers that a few women who were taken to the hospital were forced to have abortions. But other than that, everything else seemed to work out fine. The work team accomplished its task late that night and went back to Jiangtou Town.

Ye's Analysis

The next morning I went to Ye's house to find out how he had handled the work team and why this campaign was so successfully carried out. He seemed to be anticipating my visit and readily apologized to me. "Sorry I couldn't let you attend our meeting yesterday. You probably know that, recently, the U.S. government has been making a big issue in the United Nations out of our country's family planning practices. Since you are from the United States, the township government has specific instructions not to involve you in this campaign."

"I don't want to get involved in this campaign," I lied, realizing I had no choice. "As long as you can tell me how it is carried out, I am satisfied."

"That sounds fine with me," Ye assured. "Tell me what you want to know." "What kind of arrangements did you work out with the work team during the meetings?" I asked. "And how did you decide which women should have an abortion?"

"This is a complex issue," Ye replied slowly. "When the new policy was announced last week, there were several women in this village who were already pregnant and who, under the former two-child family policy, were entitled to have their second child. They have waited for four years after their first delivery and are legal under the old regulations. These cases have to be honored, otherwise

I will lose my reputation. There were also several women who were pregnant for the second time but have not waited long enough. The interval between the first and second pregnancy is less than four years. These are unauthorized pregnancies under the old rule, and have to be treated differently.

"The first thing we did in the closed-door meeting with the work team yesterday was to clarify our situation with the township office. We found out that for 1985, the township has a target population growth rate of eleven per thousand. Our village has slightly over 1,000 people, so that means we can have a net growth of eleven people. Now, we also have an average death rate of ten per thousand per annum in our village. This means that our village is entitled to have twenty-one births in 1985. Thus, twenty-one births is the quota for 1985. We drafted a contract with the work team, stating that the number of births in our brigade in this year will not exceed this quota. Failure to observe this contract will subject this village to a fine of RMB\$5,000.

"Once this was determined, we began to discuss specific cases. There were ten marriages in the village in early 1985, which means that we have to reserve ten births to these ten couples. There were another five pregnant women who, under the former two-child family policy, were entitled to have their second child. We thus had to subtract five births from the remaining eleven for them. This left only six births this village could have for the remainder of 1985. We noticed that there were at least eleven women who were not supposed to become pregnant but were. We had to select for abortion five out of these eleven unauthorized conceptions to meet this quota.

"Besides these eleven unauthorized pregnant women, there were another sixteen who had IUDs, and hence not supposed to be pregnant. I told the work team that I would turn all twenty-seven women over to the commune hospital for checkups. We wanted to use our six-births quota for all those more than six months pregnant. I argued that it is too dangerous for women more than six months pregnant to have abortion. If there were more women in this category than our quota, the village would pay this RMB\$5,000 fine to the township. The village would in turn fine those women whose pregnancies were illegal. For all women whose pregnancy were below five months, they would undergo induced abortion at the commune hospital immediately."

"How did Tiger's wife fit in this scheme?" I asked.

"She was in the unauthorized pregnancy category, for her daughter is only two years old. But she is definitely more than six months pregnant. I figured that this was the only way I could save her. The work team agreed with my suggestion and took all women to the hospital. Of the original eleven unauthorized pregnancies, including Tiger's wife, ten of them were already above six months. Only one, whose surname is Ma, was five months pregnant and was ordered to have an abortion. Among the remaining sixteen women who didn't appear to be pregnant, the hospital found out that six of them were also pregnant. They were also ordered to have abortions immediately. Another five who had had the

IUDs removed had them reinserted at the hospital. In the end we had exceeded our quota by four births this year. Our village will pay the RMB\$5,000 fine to the township government, but we saved four babies. I consider that a great accomplishment."

"Did all the women ordered to have abortions accepted it willingly?" I asked. "More or less," Ye replied. "The only trouble I had yesterday was with the Ma woman, who was five months pregnant and was asked to have an abortion. She refused to go to the abortion room. She insisted that I had a personal vendetta against her and singled her out for punishment. Why would she be the only one out of the original eleven that was required to have an abortion, she demanded? It was because she was not originally from this village. Brigade officials dared only to pick on outsiders, she claimed.

"I was furious about her accusations. I instructed Lin Qifa, the brigade security head, to tell Ma, 'If you don't like the abortion procedure in the hospital, secretary Ye will have a better treatment for you when we return to the village. He will send the brigade militia to drag you to the brigade office. He knows which spot on your stomach to kick to make you abort!' My warning apparently worked. I heard this Ma woman went sheepishly to the abortion room. After her operation I asked Hou Lingli to send her RMB\$60 from the brigade treasury as nutrition money, plus half an ounce of jinseng root to restore her health. But do you know what? That whore didn't appreciate what I did for her! She sent her husband to the township office last night to charge me with intimidation. She said that I wanted to kick the baby out of her stomach. Knowing that I was only pretending to be mean, the township officials just ignored her."

As we were talking, Tiger's mother appeared in Ye's courtyard. She had a broad smile on her face, but approached the door step in a sly manner. She said apologetically to Ye, "Please forgive me for what I said yesterday afternoon. I didn't mean it. I knew that you would do everything you could for Tiger. I will burn incense and pray for you in our temple."

"Never mind what you'd said!" Ye impatiently waved her away. "As long as you stop cursing me either to my face or behind my back, I am satisfied."

"I will never do that again," the old lady murmured and left in the same swift manner that she came.

Ye as Mediator

I was amused by this entire episode and half-jokingly asked Ye, "Do you receive this sort of treatment from villagers all the time? I thought you were the village boss. Tiger's mother seemed to have no reservations when she passed on you in public!"

"What can I do in a situation like that?" Ye shrugged and smiled reluctantly. "Peasants are never appreciative. They always expect you to do everything for them, but never consider what they can do for the public good. Actually Tiger's

mother is better than most villagers. She at least realized that she had mistreated me and came to apologize. Most other villagers would just piss on you and forget about the whole event after you meet their demands."

"So, what is the reward for being a local-level official in this village?" I solicited his opinion.

"Well, that is a question I have been asking myself constantly," Ye replied. "Serving as a leading Party cadre in a Chinese village is not an easy job. One has to cope constantly with conflicting interests and pressures. On the one hand, we have to follow directives issued from higher authorities to accomplish this or that. We have to comply with these demands because the Party always takes it as a serious challenge to its authority if a local cadre disobeys such orders. The Party has all sorts of stern measures to discipline disloyal cadres. On the other hand, when executing Party orders, especially unpopular ones such as birth control policies, we inevitably offend disgruntled villagers, and then we have to spend the rest of our lives with them. Resistance from the villagers makes our tasks doubly difficult.

"I find myself in a no-win position between the national government and the rural populace. The government views us, the rural cadres, through doubting eyes. We are first seen as an extension of the bureaucracy. We, the village cadres, are ultimately responsible for carrying out government policies. But, in the meantime, the government has also been suspicious about rural cadres having been co-opted by their kinsmen and community, and hence think we are corrupt. Similarly, villagers look at us ambivalently. On the one hand they feel we should represent them in dialogue with the government, especially when the government wants to enforce unpopular policies. We should channel the peasants' views and feelings to the government. When the government imposes unpopular practices, villagers feel the rural cadres should resist those policies on their behalf. But then villagers also believe that we are ready to betray their interests and side with the government since it is from the government that we have authority. No matter what we do, we are criticized. My principle of administration, based on past experiences, is to be protective of the villagers' interests as much as possible. When carrying out actual government directives, I try not to go to extremes. Moderation is always the safest conduct, as my father always told me. In our day-to-day activities rural cadres have to be very careful to take a middle of the road approach in everything we must deal with.

"Take farming as an example. In May 1984 when we partitioned the brigade collective, there were slightly more than 1,000 people in this village. The total farmland we have is 700 *mou*. In the breakup process each person received approximately 0.7 *mou*. In my family, with my wife Baozhu, myself, and three children, we received 3.5 *mou* of land as our private contract land. Even though I don't care much about farming in the first place, I have no choice but to farm this contract land as part of my duty. When I started to farm my own land I realized the dilemma I would face. If my land appeared to be poorly farmed

with below average yields, the villagers would definitely point their fingers at me and say, 'Look at the poor field that son of a whore has! Of course he really can't farm! The Party secretary has been living off the sweat and blood of us, the poor peasants, for the past few years. Of course he doesn't know how to farm!' If I work hard and have a good harvest, the villagers criticize me from another angle: 'Of course the Party secretary can do a good job! He has all the proper external connections to obtain additional chemical fertilizer and pesticide for his farm.' You are damned if you do, and damned if you don't! That's the basic dilemma village cadres face. Thus, when I farm my land, I carefully keep a middle-ground approach for staying close to the average in the brigade."

"Surely some villagers will be very critical of you as a public official. Every political system or political figure faces the same problem," I assured him. "But you still have all the power to affect the villagers' lives. Do they feel compelled to promote good relations with you because of that?"

"Of course some do. But you have to be very careful in drawing the line between their support of you in executing a policy and their currying favor with you through illegal means. As a top Party cadre in this village I have been very careful to maintain my integrity. One common mistake many Party cadres commit is to take things that don't belong to them. For example, during the last Chinese New Year in February 1985, Hopping Toad Wu's son Wu Hongen came to visit me. He sent me a can of biscuits. When I opened the can I found a red envelope containing RMB\$1,000 in it. I immediately called him over and returned the money to him. Not that I don't like money. I could have definitely used the money to buy a color television that my children have always wanted to have. But what would happen if I took that money? The next time Wu Hongen made a mistake, I would be unable to stand up and criticize him. Why should he give me that money if not for buying my favor? You receive something that is not rightfully yours, you will have to reciprocate with something more valuable in return.

"Many villagers brought me gifts, especially cartons of imported cigarettes, Good Companions. When they did, I would pay them the current market price. I would tell them that I enjoyed Good Companions myself. I thanked them for taking the trouble to buy the cigarettes for me. I would also tell them that since I didn't know how much they actually paid, I would just reimburse them the current market price.

"A month ago the foreman of the brigade construction company brought me a portable stereo system. He said that he would lend it to me. If I liked it, he said, he would sell it to me for RMB\$300. You know how much it costs in Xiamen's friendship stores? At least RMB\$1,000! This fellow was smart. He knows that I don't take bribes. What he was doing was not bribing, but selling something to me at a discount price. I told him that I don't listen to music, and therefore have no use for this stereo. He then made another offer: 'What about a motorcycle? A three-year-old, second-hand Yamaha 100 cc for RMB\$1,000?'

Frankly, I was quite tempted. I had been thinking about buying a Yamaha motorcycle for some time. I also thought about the popular saying among Party cadres: '[If one] has authority but does not use it, it expires and is invalidated' (*yoquan buyong, yuqi zhuofei*). But I remembered that my father had always told me not to take things that were not my proper share. Besides, I hate people who are greedy. How could I allow myself to be something that I dislike?

"With all political power concentrated in the hands of the brigade Party secretary, his opportunity for corruption is tremendous. This can be easily concealed too. For instance, in 1983, after my family division, I decided to move out of the two-story building that I shared with my three brothers. I wanted to build a new house of my own. I purchased stone slabs, cement, bricks, and steel from my friends at reasonable prices. A few workers at the brigade's construction company volunteered to build the house for me. But I declined their offers and hired instead migratory workers from Huian County. In doing so I avoid any potential implications of corruption. The only workers I hired from the brigade construction team were carpenters for the roof and windows. At first they refused to accept payment for their works, but I insisted. Then they suggested a price lower than the regular fee charged by ordinary workers. I paid them according to their suggestion and told them that I considered their favor based on our friendship and because we live in the same village. There would be no future favors that I owed them as brigade Party secretary. I asked each of them to write a receipt for my own record. In doing so I was keeping myself away from future unnecessary obligations because of their work for me. I finished my house in early 1985 at a total cost of about RMB\$15,000, much cheaper than comparable houses in the village."

I pondered over what Ye had said and raised a question: "You mean you don't take graft more because of your conscience than because of an institutional mechanism to prevent you from doing so? What about your superiors? Are the cadres in township offices supposed to be watching over your shoulder?"

"Theoretically, yes," Ye replied neatly. "In reality, however, brigade-level cadres have a lot of autonomy as long as they implement the policy directives issued from the top. Village-level officials are all Party members. If a villager brings charges against a village cadre to the township office, who do the township authorities listen to first? Of course the village cadre. Township officials and village officials are all Party members, so Party loyalty supersedes official obligations. This allows local cadres to abuse their power. In fact, most of this township's eighteen brigade Party secretaries are very corrupt. They use their authority to channel public funds. During the recent breakup of rural collectives, many brigade-level cadres made a fortune. The best-known person in this respect is Huang Jincheng, who is the Party secretary of Hecu brigade. I figure that Huang Jincheng must have over half a million dollars under his name now. Huang Jincheng's case is an interesting one and it illustrates the fundamental problem in our political system."

"Huang Jincheng came to power in his brigade during the Cultural Revolution. Hecu Village directly faces the offshore island, the Little Quemoy, occupied by Nationalist bandits. Because of its frontline location, Hecu is directly under the jurisdiction of the army division commander. Huang has been very good in cultivating a relationship with the military. He was recommended by the former division commander to become Hecu's brigade head in 1968, then promoted to brigade Party secretary in the late 1970s. Because he has the support of the military, nobody at the township level dares confront him for his wrongdoings. If you saw that little bastard in person, you would never believe he could be vicious. He is basically a short, stupid, illiterate country idiot, but he pretends to be someone of power and broad knowledge. He carries a pistol all the time, seemingly to show his self-importance. Whenever he has an argument with people, either in his brigade or at the commune office, he pulls out his pistol, lays it in front of his opponent and says, 'What are you going to do with me? You think you are better than I am? Show me what you have!' This is a very effective way to intimidate people."

"Let me give you a few examples to show how corrupt Huang is. Hecu brigade has a fishing fleet that fishes along the coast. Whenever the fleet returns, Huang sends his subordinates to check the catch and pick out the best items, such as oysters and crabs, for his family use. This is minor compared with his abuses of brigade funds. A few years ago, Huang had the brigade purchase three Liberation brand trucks with public funds, and then leased two of them to his two sons for minimal rental fees. As a result, each of his two sons is making more than RMB\$10,000 per year. When his two sons reached marriageable age, Huang Jincheng sent out his subordinates to scout for the prettiest girls in his brigade. When a girl was identified, Huang sent a subordinate over to the girl's house to propose. The messenger would tell the girl's parents, 'Huang Jincheng wants your daughter to marry his son. If your daughter marries Huang's son, she will be transferred to a light, clerical job away from the farm.' And that he did. After the marriage, Huang's first daughter-in-law was assigned to the brigade textile factory as its treasurer. His second daughter-in-law got a job in the brigade administrative office."

"Probably Huang's most outrageous act was when the government appropriated a piece of reclaimed land along the Hecu coast. The RMB\$200,000 compensation the government paid to this brigade was quietly stashed away by Huang. This particular incident involves my brigade, too. When Hecu brigade built this reclaimed land in the early 1970s, our brigade sent a work team to help in its construction, without compensation. We should therefore now receive a share of this government compensation."

"After Hecu brigade dismantled its collective in 1983, Huang Jincheng invested in the construction of a textile mill in his village. You know how he got construction workers for his textile mill? He ordered the teachers in his brigade's primary school to engage in 'voluntary labor work' (*yiwu laodong*) on a rotating basis."

The teachers grumbled, but nobody dared to challenge Huang's order. When the former district deputy Party secretary, a man named Pan, heard about Huang's abuses in Hecu, he was furious and swore that he would remove Huang from that position. Pan declared that either he would fire Huang as Hecu brigade Party secretary, or Pan himself would resign from his post as district deputy Party secretary. Since the district administration is two steps above the brigade, so you might think that Pan would succeed in removing Huang Jincheng from his brigade Party secretary post. But that turned out not to be the case. When Pan brought the charges against Huang Jincheng to his superiors, Pan was immediately transferred to a factory in Quanzhou City.

"To some extent I think Huang Jincheng's behavior is even worse than the warlords or landlords before the Liberation. How does Huang Jincheng maintain his power? Apparently, military support has been crucial. Even Xiamen City's Party secretary wouldn't dare offend the army division commander. Besides that, Huang Jincheng knows how to protect himself. For instance, when the Fujian Provincial People's Congress held its annual meeting in Fuzhou City in April 1985, Huang collected the best oysters he could find from his brigade fishing fleet and delivered them to Fuzhou by special car and fed the representatives. Of course he would not say that he sent these oysters. He claimed that he was sending the oysters on behalf of the people of Hecu to congratulate the successful opening of the provincial congress. There is a Chinese saying: 'Once you eat from someone, you will have a soft mouth toward that person; once you take from someone, you will have tender hands toward that person.' How could the provincial representatives and officials act against Huang Jincheng after feasting on the nice oysters he sent them? Whenever government officials or newspaper reporters visit Hecu brigade, Huang prepares the best food and wine to entertain them. Even though he spends brigade funds, Huang Jincheng is the one who will be remembered for all the niceties. That is how a corrupt local official like Huang maintains power for so long."

"What you are saying is that a village Party secretary generally has unchecked power within his reign," I commented. "If this official does not have conscience or personal integrity, he can easily abuse his power and then cover it up, like this Huang Jincheng. But I have the feeling that Huang is an exceptional case among all village Party secretaries in this township. Do you agree?"

Ye nodded his head in agreement. I continued, "If Huang is indeed a special case, what factors prevent a village cadre from becoming another Huang Jincheng?" Ye thought for a moment and replied, "There are two considerations that have more or less prevented rural cadres from becoming completely corrupt. One is the central government's political campaigns. Some previous campaigns were aimed at rural cadres. You don't know when the next campaign will come. To avoid being the object of struggle sessions, you should not mistreat the local people."

"The second factor that serves to minimize abuses by rural cadres is that not all rural cadres will be promoted out of the countryside. If you are to stay in the village for the rest of your life, you should be more careful in dealing with your villagers while you have power. Even if the villagers do not retaliate now, they may do something against your children in the future."

"When you consider these two factors, you can understand why sometimes the local cadres are willing to modify or even tacitly resist unpopular government policies to suit local conditions. One method is stonewalling a specific policy. When the government directive arrives, you set up a committee to 'study' it. Then you claim to have selected a couple of experimental model cases to evaluate the actual effects of this policy. In the meantime you look at other brigades to see how and what are they doing. If this policy is indeed unpopular, you take it back to the committee for further 'study.' So you can drag your feet for at least several months. When you are required to actually implement this policy, you can also water it down by creating a few loopholes."

"One such example in our brigade is fishing in the reservoir. This man-made lake belongs to the commune, and the commune administration has an office, headed by Dark Skin Lin now, to supervise the stocking of and fishing in this lake. Many people in the vicinity steal fish from this reservoir. My estimate is that at least two-thirds of the fish in the reservoir are stolen each year. Only one-third of it is being caught by the commune office. So the commune office ordered all villages surrounding the lake to step up night patrols to prevent theft and to arrest those who steal fish from this lake. When I received this order, I set up a committee to investigate the most effective way to implement this policy. Then I reported to Dark Skin Lin that our brigade would increase patrols around our lake shore at night. This, of course, is all on paper; I actually did nothing. Why should I? People in other brigades steal fish from the reservoir, too. If I carried out this order seriously, I could definitely stop some of the stealing in our brigade. But that would only increase opportunities for other brigades. Why should I cut back on a source of nutrition for my villagers for the benefit of other brigades?"

Ye's Programs

I had known all along that P.S. Ye had misgivings about the situation in rural China. He disagreed with many of the heavy-handed policies the national government established in the countryside. He regarded the Party and many of its beliefs as contradictions of peasant cultural traditions. But in the meantime Ye appeared to be a dedicated Communist, upholding the ideal of working for the common good. His unwavering commitment to justice and to the disadvantaged, such as the aged and infirm in Lin Village, made him an outstanding example of the dedicated Chinese Communist necessary to remake human nature. How could a person like Ye reconcile the conflicting roles he played as a social critic

and as a Party loyalist? I wondered. Under the current policy of decentralization, his position as a Party functionary had been significantly undermined and his power substantially trimmed. What kind of future prospects did he have? What type of personal adjustments must he make to cope with this new situation? I put these questions to Ye a few days before my departure from the village. He gave me some very straightforward answers.

"After the breakup of our brigade in May 1984, I began to work on an investment plan. I predicted that the profit margin of sand brick manufacturing in our brigade would decline. Other brigades in the vicinity had seen our success and had established similar production facilities. There are more than fifty sand brick factories across the island now. With this increased competition, sand brick prices will soon bottom out. Another problem with sand bricks is the need for coal dust in the mixture. Since more buildings in Xiamen City will be skyscrapers, the sand bricks, containing incompletely burned coal dust, will become a fire hazard. I speculated there would eventually be a ban on using sand bricks in tall buildings. Under this circumstance, I supposed, the traditional kiln-fired red bricks would be in great demand.

"I began to discuss with the manager of a ceramic floor tile factory in Xiamen City about building a new, mechanized red brick kiln in our village. This kiln is far more efficient than traditional kilns. It takes the traditional brick kiln at least four weeks to produce one kilnful of bricks: one week for the earth brick molds to be stacked inside the kiln, the second week for them to be fired with slow but constant fire, the third week for the fired bricks to cool off, and the fourth week for the fired bricks to be brought out. The new mechanized red brick kiln uses a different procedure. Coal dust is mixed with clay when the earth brick molds are made. Then, the earth molds are driven through the kiln and fired by electrically generated heat. When the heat is high enough, it induces the coal dust in the mold to burn. At the other end of the kiln appear finished red bricks. The entire process takes only twenty-four hours.

"Nobody knows where this new mechanized red brick manufacturing technology has come from. Some say that it was invented in Yugoslavia and brought back to China by one of the students sent there in the early 1980s. Others believe it was developed in Malaysia recently and brought back by an overseas Chinese. Anyhow, the manager of Xiamen City's ceramic floor tile company knew about it and discussed with me the possibility of setting up a factory in our village. I thought it was a good idea and began to discuss this venture with other villagers in early 1984.

"Around June of 1984 I called the first meeting of all potential investors in our village. My plan was to have eight shares costing RMB\$10,000 each. I invited most brigade-level Party cadres to join me. At that point the government was still ambivalent about how large a private enterprise could be. If we included most of the village's leading Party cadres in this enterprise, we could call it a collective enterprise and hence circumvent government regulations. The two former

Party secretaries, Opium Hong and Dark Skin Lin, decided to join, as well as Lin Chengrui, the brigade clerk who later was appointed brigade head, and Hou Lingli, head of the Women's League. Ding Yong, Thunderbolt Lin's stepbrother, who worked closely with me during the breakup of the brigade, also participated. There were two people I had to invite, but didn't really want to, Li Dehai, the brigade head, nicknamed Double-Headed Snake, and Lin Qifa, brigade security head. I still can't forgive them for their plot to take over all brigade enterprises during the breakup.

"I first approached Double-Headed Snake and asked if he would be interested in putting RMB\$10,000 into my new enterprise. Even though, at that point, Double-Headed Snake must have had at least RMB\$20,000 in the bank, he didn't dare to invest. Even though he is the richest person in this brigade, he is still a typical nearsighted, illiterate peasant: He holds tight to the small gold pot under his pillow and knows nothing about investment. I was delighted when Double-Headed Snake told me that since he was involved in a sand brick factory he had no spare money for this new venture.

"My next task was to make a gesture to invite Lin Qifa to join this venture, while letting him know that I really didn't want him to. I went to his house the day before our first meeting, knowing in advance that he wasn't home. Only Lin Qifa's wife Jiang Jinhua, Thunderbolt Lin's stepister, was there. I casually told her that I was planning to organize a new enterprise and would have our first meeting the next day. I told her that if Lin Qifa was interested in joining us, he could come to our meeting. Apparently Lin Qifa understood when he realized I had conveyed the offer through his wife, a woman. He didn't join us.

"The investment in this mechanized red brick kiln has been a great success. Among the eight investors, one is the manager of the ceramic floor tile company in Xiamen City. Another one, surnamed Huang, is a skilled worker from Fuzing County in northern Fujian who will be serving as the manager of the new plant. Huang hired about fifty workers from his home village to work here. People in northern Fujian are poor and are willing to work for a minimum wage. The remaining six shares are owned by our villagers. We began to produce red bricks in November 1984. Sales have been brisk. We could hardly keep production up with market demands. In 1984, even though the production period was only about one month, we generated close to RMB\$20,000 net profit. When Double-Headed Snake heard about our huge profit, he came to beg me to let him buy one or even half a share in this enterprise. I told him that when we needed cash for constructing the plant and the manpower to start the enterprise, he refused to join us. Now that we had everything set and began to enjoy the profit, he wanted to have a cut in it. Sorry, I told him, but no deal.

"The year 1984 was the best of my life. From my share in the brigade enterprises contracted under my name, I received RMB\$2,500 as my year-end dividend. In addition, the mechanized red brick kiln paid RMB\$2,000 profit for my share. With that money, I paid off all my debts. And I was not the only

one making good money that year. Almost all other villagers were successful during 1984. A village man who operates a hand tractor to transport bricks can easily make RMB\$400-500 per month, twice the amount a university professor is making. Even the widow who came with her daughter to plead for my protection before the breakup told me that she was making a lot of money by growing vegetables on her contract land and selling them in Xiamen's free market. Every evening this woman carries the vegetables from her field and washes them for next morning's market. The daughter hauls the two basketsful of vegetables on her bicycle and rides down to Xiamen. The widow told me that she is making about RMB\$200 to \$300 per month, much better than before the division.

"As you can see, general economic conditions in our village have improved significantly since the division in May 1984. I can't think of a single family who has become poorer now after the breakup than they were under the collective system. There is one thing, however, that worries me: Even though general living conditions among all villagers seem to have improved since the division, the gap between rich and poor families has also increased. I estimate there are about one dozen village families in our brigade making more than RMB\$10,000 per year. But on the other hand, the bottom-level families are making only about RMB\$1,000. This increased disparity within the village may create problems in the future, and I am concerned about it."

"Why can some people benefit from this new policy and become prosperous, while others do not?" I asked. "Can you characterize those who have been successful?"

"Yes," Ye replied succinctly. "Based on my observations, several types of people in our village are now doing far better than the others. The first group includes high-level cadres who have good external connections to develop new enterprises. These cadres are also doing well because they know more about current policy trends. They can take advantage of this new situation because they have better business timing. In our village this includes me; Double-Headed Snake, the former brigade head; Lin Qifa, the brigade security head; and Lin Chengrui, the current brigade head. The second type of people who benefit most from current reforms are army veterans who learned special skills during their service. Most of the truck drivers in Lin Village learned their trade while serving in the military. A diligent truck driver in our village makes about RMB\$1,000 per month now. People in this category include Lin Qishan and Hou Tong. The third type of people who make a lot of money under the current private ownership system are those with higher education and professional skills, such as medical doctors, accountants, and salesmen. People who don't fit into any of these categories are making some progress, but not as dramatic as those with specific skills.

"One ridiculous thing happened when our brigade became known as a successful unit. Suddenly, every government office in Xiamen Rural District discovered we owed it money. Two weeks ago, a man from the Rural District's

tax office came to our village. I wasn't around that day. This tax man talked to Lin Chengrui, the new brigade head, and told him that our brigade owed RMB\$8,000 to his office in back taxes. He told Lin to get a check ready for that amount so he could collect it the following week. When I returned that evening Lin reported this incident to me. Lin was preparing to draft this check. I yelled at him, 'You stupid son-of-a-whore! How could you give away our RMB\$8,000 so easily? Why do you think we should pay the money? Just because this tax man said so? Let me handle him when he comes next week!'

"The following week this tax man indeed came. Before he even opened his mouth, I confronted him, 'You wanted to collect back taxes from our brigade, ha! Let me tell you what, before we pay this RMB\$8,000 to the government, I want you to first clear up a debt the government owes us. Here is the bill: First, for the past thirty-six years, the government never paid us a single dime to support the aged, the injured, martyrs' families, and servicemen's families in our brigade. The total costs amount to RMB\$50,000, plus interest. Second, during the past fifteen years, since the government didn't hire enough teachers for our primary school, we had to hire two additional teachers with funds from our own budget. We figure the government owes us RMB\$15,000 for these two teachers' salaries. And for the public health system that we have here . . .' Before I finished reading my list that son-of-a-whore ran away and never dared return again.

"I have gained a reputation in this area as one who speaks his mind directly. I found out that this is the best way to deal with government officials. Let me tell you about a recent experience. I was elected as a representative to the Xiamen City People's Assembly in 1984. At our first meeting, chaired by Deputy City Mayor Zhang Ketong, we discussed the problems of our people watching television programs broadcast by the Nationalists. Television signals are sent from Taiwan to the Quemoy Islands. Since we are so close to Quemoy, people can easily pick up Taiwan's programs. Before 1983, the government was very stern about people watching Taiwan programs. Anyone caught was fined RMB\$100 for the television set and another RMB\$40 for each person in the audience. But most people here love Taiwan's programs because they sometimes have programs in Minnan dialect and because they are interesting programs. After 1984, control over watching Taiwan's programs became relaxed and almost everyone on Xiamen Island tuned in to Taiwan's stations.

"In our City Assembly meeting Deputy Mayor Zhang called this problem an epidemic. He declared that poisonous corruptive elements from the Nationalist bandits had been transmitted to our area through television programs. He urged us to take strong measures to prevent the growth of this epidemic. He even indicated that he had contemplated spending RMB\$600,000 to set up an electronic jamming station in the Xiamen area to interrupt television signals from Quemoy. After his speech I responded. I told him I couldn't believe he was so stupid that he did not see the real problems we were facing here. People turned away from

our own television programs to watch those from Taiwan because our programs were of poor quality. Why waste RMB\$600,000 to build a jamming station? Why not spend the money to improve the quality of our own programs? Deputy Mayor Zhang was stunned by my harsh remarks and didn't know how to respond. He just let the entire issue drop and never raised it again.

'In late 1984, the Xiamen City government asked the township Party secretary if I would like to be deputy chairman of the City Assembly. This would be a full-time job, and I would be able to move my household registration to the city. Had this offer come to me five or ten years earlier, I would probably have jumped at it. What else could I expect in life if not the opportunity to be elevated from the status of a rural cadre to a national cadre? Plus the opportunity to move to the city!

'When the township Party secretary asked me, I turned him down. I told him, 'I am not interested in becoming a government official (*guan*). Here in the village I represent the people (*min*). As long as I stand on the side of the people, I am safe. Tell me, how much do you make per month now as the top Party cadre in the township? RMB\$90 per month! You know how much I spend for my imported Good Companion cigarettes per month? At least RMB\$150. As a national cadre, you are prohibited by the government from investing in private enterprises. If I take the job in Xiamen's City Assembly, I will be as poor as you. Forget it, comrade, I am not interested.'

'Maybe I will one day regret this decision. But with so many ups and downs in my life, I don't know how to decide what is best for me or what my goal in life is anymore. Sometimes I wonder what has happened in the countryside in the past few years to cause such a dramatic turnaround. Before, all country cadres were eager to become national cadres. Furthermore, ordinary villagers felt honored to be invited to join the Party. But now no villager wants to be recruited. For example, in 1978 when I became brigade Party secretary, there were thirty-one Party members in this village. Now there are still thirty-one. The central government urged us to recruit young and capable people as new Party cadres, but I have failed in all my attempts to persuade anyone to join. People like Hou Tong, the very capable head of the fifth team, or Ding Yong, my close associate, have all declined my invitation to become Party members. Hou Tong put it in the most eloquent manner when he said to me, 'Why should I join the Party? To pay my monthly Party dues? To turn myself in for vasectomy or to turn my wife in for tubal ligation when the Party has a birth control campaign? No way. I am not joining this Party.'

'It is understandable that peasants now have a very negative view of the Party. They talk about Communist ideals with cynicism. They even make puns to ridicule the government. For instance, they turned Xiamen City People's Government (*xiamen renmin shizhengfu*) with a minor twist of the tongue in the local dialect into 'Xiamen city people feeding the government' (*xiamen renmin sizhengfu*). Another popular pun is 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' (*wuchan*

jiuji zhuanzheng), which in local dialect sounds like 'proletariat always carry rationing coupons' (*wuchan jiejí quanzheng*). Whenever there is an unpopular policy that the villagers don't like, they come to me and curse the Party in front of me. I tell them, 'Don't curse me! I don't like these new regulations any more than you do. But since the government has the power and we don't, we'd better follow the rules.'

'I can understand peasants' cynicism toward Communism. There is a fundamental flaw in Communist theory that can be seen very clearly in practice. Communism states that all people are the same with equal abilities and similar needs. Accordingly, then, we should give up all our personal ambitions and interests and strive for the public good. But every peasant knows that these assumptions are wrong. Some people can learn fast while others are slow. There are some farmers who can cut rice straw much faster than others. There are also people who take every opportunity to sneak away from work, and who like nothing more than the fruits of other people's labor. The bottom line is, Why should more capable or dedicated people work hard for those who are less capable or just plain lazy? After a few years of experimenting the peasants realized the whole idea was unrealistic and turned away from it. That is why we have problems recruiting Party members in the countryside.

'Maybe in the long run it is beneficial to have less government presence in the countryside. It seems the peasants are doing quite well under the more relaxed policy of Deng Xiaoping. If you just make a quick comparison between the countryside and the city, you will see the difference in the speed of change. City reform started in October 1984. But have you seen any tangible changes in Xiamen? Probably very few. On the contrary, even before the national government held its Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress in 1978, the countryside was agitating for change. When the new agrarian policy was announced, peasants urged local cadres to change. Peasants in a sense were ready to change as soon as the new policy was announced.

'There are two ways to look at the different ways the city and countryside are changing. On the one hand, peasants in China today are still at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Peasants are only one notch higher than the common criminals in labor reform camps. Why? Just look at actual conditions. If a person in the city or a high-level government official commits a real crime, this person is sent to a labor reform camp as punishment. If a city resident or a government official commits a lesser crime, he is sent down (*xiafang*) to the countryside to live with us. Living in the countryside with peasants is a punishment, from the government's viewpoint! So we peasants are condemned. We have nothing to lose and are therefore ready to accept changes.

'Now, if we look at city people on the other hand, we see that they have too much at stake to risk new ideas and changes. They enjoy government subsidies for food, housing, and retirement pensions. They have job guarantees. When inflation flared up in early 1985, the government immediately gave RMB\$2 per

person each month to city residents as a subsidy to counteract pork price increases. But have we peasants ever received any such subsidies? Never. It is therefore understandable why city residents are reluctant to accept change.

"My real hope now is for the current policy to continue for a few more years. By 1986, most of our villagers will be able to retire the loans they took out in 1984 during the breakup. By then we can definitely make even more dramatic improvements, since our investments will not be restricted by our loan obligations. For the villagers to expand their vision and to learn new investment opportunities, I am thinking about organizing a tour group from our brigade to the Shengzheng Special Economic Zone. There the villagers can definitely see what a modern city looks like. A tour to the stores there will make them realize what kind of household goods are used in a modern family. We can channel our investments into production facilities producing goods to meet our future needs. Maybe in a couple of years when travel restrictions are relaxed, I will have the chance to visit Hong Kong. Or even go to the United States to see you. Who knows?"