

Everyday Life during the Cultural Revolution Period in
Sichuan Province

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Abstract

This thesis examines the everyday life of Chinese people at the grassroots during the period of the Cultural Revolution (from 1966 to 1976). This research focusses on the areas of Sichuan Province and Chongqing Municipality, mainly based on original materials from Hechuan County (currently a suburban district of Chongqing Municipality, but previously a county that belonged to Sichuan Province). Utilising a bottom-up perspective and an everyday life angle, my project aims to present people's life experiences in the local society of Sichuan during the unprecedentedly politicised era of the Cultural Revolution.

This study of everyday life shows that our understanding of the Cultural Revolution needs more nuance and a recognition of the limits of the reach of the party-state in the lives of ordinary people. In many respects, life in Hechuan did not change very much after 1966. Habits of work, recreation, consuming and eating, for example, in the Cultural Revolution decade were built on earlier patterns and in some respects were further enhanced. This grassroots angle reveals new perspectives on these years.

The case study of Sichuan, shows a direct relationship between residents' experiences during the Cultural Revolution and the drastic economic transformation in China since the 1980s—a striking and unexpected continuity at the local level. My research about people's everyday life during those years helps us rethink about the legacy of the Cultural Revolution, which remains an influential and controversial event in the modern history of China.

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List of Abbreviations

- CQLS-Hechuan *Zhongguo gongchandang Chongqing lishi (Hechuanqu juan)*
ed. Zhonggong Hechuan quwei dangshi difangzhi
bangongshi
- CQQGZ *Chongqingshi qingongye zhi (1840-1985)*
ed. Chongqingshi qingongye zhi bianji weiyuanhui
- CQWJ *Chongqing wujia zhi*
ed. Chongqing wujia zhi bianzhan weiyuanhui
- DDSC (*shang, xia*) *Dangdai Zhongguo de Sichuan (shang, xia)*
ed. *Dangdai Zhongguo congshu bianweiyuan*
- HCGS *Hechuanxian gongshang xingzheng guanli zhi*
ed. Hechuanxian gongshang xingzheng guanliju
- HCGX *Hechuanxian gongxiao hezuo zhi (1937-1985)*
ed. Hechuanxian gongxiao hezuo lianshe
- HCLR *Hechuanxian laodong renshi zhi*
ed. Hechuanxian laodong renshiju
- HCNJ *Hechuan nongcun jinrong zhi 1937-1988*
ed. Zhongguo nongye yinhang Hechuanxian zhihang
- HCSY *Hechuanxian shangye zhi 1911-1985*
ed. Hechuanxian shangye weiyuanhui
- HCWY *Hechuanxian wenhua yishu zhi*

- ed. Hechuanxian wenhua yishu zhi bianji weiyuanhui
- HCXZ *Hechuan xianzhi*
- ed. Hechuan xianzhi bianzhuang weiyuanhui
- HYZZ *Heyang zhenzhi*
- ed. Heyang zhenzhi bianzhuang weiyuanhui
- SCLY *Sichuansheng shizhen liangyou gongying*
- ed. Sichuansheng liangshiju
- SCNYHZ *Sichuansheng nongye hezuo jingji shiliao*
- ed. Sichuansheng nongye hezuo jingji shiliao bianjizu
- WSZL *Hechuan wenshi ziliao*
- ed. Zhengxie Sichuansheng Hechuanxian wenshi ziliao
weiyuanhui (vol. 9, 12, 13)
- Zhengxie Chongqingshi Hechuanqu wenshi ziliao
weiyuanhui (vol. 16, 21, 22)

Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

My thesis explores the everyday life of urban and rural people in Hechuan County, Sichuan Province, throughout the decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966 –1976). During those years, besides the unprecedentedly politicised environment, continuous economic shortages and hardship still circumscribed the lives of most ordinary residents in China. Could people in Sichuan, where dwellers since ancient times had a reputation for enjoying life, keep their traditions and preferences in every day? It was also the period when communist ideals drove the Chinese people. In such an ordinary county of Sichuan Province, was there any gap or inequity in the lives of different groups of residents? Through this county-level case study of Sichuan people's everyday experiences, these are the key questions I intend to answer. My first argument is that in many cases and to a certain degree Sichuan residents went on with their lives according to Sichuan traditions regardless of material limitations or political interference. Secondly, due to the privileges and inequity between different groups of people, even in Hechuan County, significant differences also persisted in residents' daily experiences during the Cultural Revolution.

An Overview of the Cultural Revolution in China

Before starting my exploration, it is necessary to have an overview of the Cultural Revolution in China. It was a profoundly influential event and period in the contemporary history of China, usually defined as “ten years of chaos” (十年浩劫 *shi nian haojie*) from 1966 to 1976. But in reality, the situation during the whole

decade was not stationary or monotonous, and this method of periodisation has been criticised by historians. From Fairbank's viewpoint, starting from 1966 "the Cultural Revolution lasted three and a half years".¹ Many other historians prefer to divide the ten years into several phases and sub-phases. In *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 15*, the first three and half years were highlighted as the most chaotic and disastrous period of the Cultural Revolution.² To be more specific, the first tide of the Cultural Revolution came soon after the movement was launched in the summer of 1966, when the Red Guards (红卫兵 *Hongweibing*) played an important role. Their "revolutionary" and rebellious activities, in the name of the "fight for Chairman Mao" soon led to national chaos. In the following three years between 1967 and 1969, the Cultural Revolution was prolonged through a series of swift transformations including the rebellious groups' seizure of power, the factional fight among the rebellious groups, the restoration of social order, and the formal reconstruction of the political system. Comparatively speaking, situations after 1969 became more stable and easier for retelling. As MacFarquhar concluded, who was to succeed Mao Zedong (1893-1976) was the elementary question especially from the Ninth Congress of the CCP.³ During this period, the rise and fall of Lin Biao and the Gang of Four successively dominated the trends of the Cultural Revolution. Although the struggle that happened at the central level of the CCP caused the social atmosphere to change back and forth,

1 John King Fairbank, *The Great Chinese Revolution, 1800-1985* (London: Pan Books 1988), 317.

2 Harry Harding, "The Chinese State in Crisis," in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 15: 111.

3 Roderick MacFarquhar, "The Succession to Mao and the End of Maoism," in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. MacFarquhar and Fairbank, 15: 303-401.

in general, it remained a politicised era. In October 1976, one month after Chairman Mao's death, this long-lasting movement came to its final end as the arrest of the Gang of Four, including Jiang Qing, Mao's wife.

In addition to all those momentous events and fluctuations over the ten years, several more national movements, which had been initiated before 1966, were conducted continuously under the special background of the Cultural Revolution. Such movements included but were not limited to the Sent-down Youth Movement, the Third-Front (三线 *Sanxian*) Project, the Movement of Learning from Dazhai in Agriculture. Besides the Cultural Revolution itself, all of these movements exerted significant influences on the life of Chinese people, although the actual effect often went against what was expected officially.

The Rationale for My Thesis

As “one of the most extraordinary events of this century”,⁴ as well as the most politicised period during the Maoist era in China, the importance of studying the Cultural Revolution is self-evident in discussion of the history of the People's Republic of China (PRC for short). Viewing it from a longer timeline, understanding what happened to China and Chinese people's experiences during the ten-year era can probably provide hints to comprehend the drastic transformations that took place in the same country from the late 1970s onward.

4 Harding, “The Chinese State in Crisis,” 107.

Located outside of the Central Plain of China, surrounded by mountains, the Sichuan Basin is always a unique geographical unit in the map of the country. “Possessing properties of geographical isolation, economic self-sufficiency, and political separatism,”⁵ the basin was usually viewed as a marginal region, but it would be significant for the whole country when there was turbulence in the central area. This fact has been proved from ancient to modern times. In World War Two, Sichuan again became the shelter for elites and people at the grassroots in a time of national crisis.

Being favoured by natural conditions, the Sichuan Basin is quite suitable for agricultural production, known as *tianfu zhi guo* 天府之国 (land of abundance). The Yangtze River and its tributaries flowing through the basin provided not only plentiful water resource for agriculture, but also a convenient waterway for goods transportation. On these bases, there had been prosperous commerce and a developed commercial network in Sichuan’s history when the environment was allowed.

In my research, the majority of my materials will be from Hechuan County and its nearby regions. Although it is currently a suburban district belonging to Chongqing Municipality, which was newly founded and separated from Sichuan Province since 1997. From a general perspective, all the areas of Chongqing Municipality are still parts of the cultural realm of Sichuan. Hechuan County is located in the centre of the Sichuan Basin, at the conjoint point of three tributaries of the Yangtze River. Since

5 Chen Shisong 陈世松, “蜀文化:一脉相承的四川文化传统” *Shu wenhua: yimaixiangcheng de Sichuan wenhua chuantong* (Shu Culture: the Continuous Tradition of Sichuan Culture),” *中华文化论坛 (Zhonghua wenhua luntan)*, no. 3 (1999): 8.

ancient times it has not just been an agricultural base in Sichuan but also an important commercial centre. In this sense, to explore the local culture and history of Sichuan Province, Hechuan is still one of the counties that is full of typical Sichuan colours.

Even after the foundation of the PRC in 1949, under the overwhelming top-down supervision of the central level of the Chinese Communist Party [hereafter CCP for short], from the regional angle, some local features still remained and worked in certain forms. Especially during the Cultural Revolution, under the national chaos, scholars have recognised that variations across provinces are worth-noting.⁶ As a large, populous, and characterised province far from the political centre of China, the Cultural Revolution in Sichuan and Sichuan people's experiences during that era provide us with an interesting chance to conduct a case study to reexplore the history of the politicised decade from a local perspective.

In the field of history studies, compared with discussion focusing on elites and heroes, recently more and more attention has been paid to explorations from the perspective of individuals at the grassroots level, based on people's life experiences every day. As Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby indicated, although the history of private life is a counterpart to the history on the public stage, behind the private realm, there is the nation.⁷ Historians in China have also noticed the significance of rethinking the history of such an old country through the angle of private and

6 Guoqiang Dong and Andrew G. Walder, "Local Politics in the Chinese Cultural Revolution: Nanjing Under Military Control," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70, no. 2 (2011): 425–447.

7 Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, *A History of Private Life, Volume 1* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 6.

grassroots experiences. While the relationship between the state and individuals in Chinese history is not totally the same as that in the Western world. As some scholars indicate “compared with the West, China has the typical feature that the family and the state exist in the same structure, as a result, political (public) space and private space blend together”.⁸ In the Maoist era of China, especially during the Cultural Revolution, situations became more distinct when the society was unprecedentedly politicised, a large part of the used-to-be private spaces was intruded or even taken over by the state, under the flag of revolution and collectivism.

Furthermore, as Highmore summarised on theories of the everyday, “the everyday is the accumulation of ‘small things’ that constitute a more expansive but hard to register ‘big thing’”.⁹ Even de Certeau’s interest “was rather in the impersonal, the non-individual,” to “spoke through the individual subject” was still his major way.¹⁰ During the Cultural Revolution decade when even the everyday life of Chinese people was driven by the extremely politicised environment, it is surely an interesting question to see what were individuals’ responses toward the political instruction on how they should live their daily life. Through the microchannel of people’s experiences in every day, it could also be a valid approach to access the macro picture of the Cultural Revolution, one of most special periods in the history of China.

8 Jin Guangyao and Dai Jianbing 金光耀, 戴建兵 ed., 个人生活史(1949-1978) *Gerenshenghuoshi: 1949-1978 (The History of Individual Life: 1949-1978)* (Shanghai: Shanghai Daxue Chubanshe, 2016), 3.

9 Ben Highmore, *Ordinary Lives: Studies in the Everyday* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 1.

10 Ian Buchanan, *Michel de Certeau: Cultural Theorist* (London: SAGE Publications, 2000), 97.

The significance of everyday practice in history, as stated by de Certeau, is “a part of a continuing investigation of the ways in which users – commonly assumed to be passive and guided by established rules – operate”. As the rationale of my thesis, you may find it adds to the re-examination of the Maoist era, through exploring the local history of Sichuan during the Cultural Revolution from the grassroots and everyday angle.

The Theoretical Framework of My Thesis

As for the theoretical framework of my thesis and the methods used in my study, I get inspirations from a range of theories and notions relevant to the academic discussions on everyday topics.

One of the most notably inspiring resources is from Michel de Certeau. The theories he presents in *The Practice of Everyday Life* helps me compose the basic framework of my thesis. A series of notions he uses to investigate individuals' everyday practices are valuable references for my research on Sichuan residents' daily experiences during the Cultural Revolution. According to de Certeau's theories, strategies and tactics are common methods that people use to defend their preferred ways of life. A strategy is based on an autonomous place, where “a subject of will and power can be isolated from an ‘environment’”.¹¹ On the contrary, if there is no such a suitable place, once the supervising power is absent, through certain tactics, people can still “insinuate themselves into the others' place” and achieve their personal

11 John Storey ed., *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2009), 551.

goals.¹² To be more specific about the differences between strategies and tactics, as de Certeau indicates, in strategies “a place offers the erosion of time”¹³ yet tactics make “clever utilisation of time”.¹⁴ In my study, I will analyse Sichuan people’s life based on both the theories of de Certeau and the specific realities in China during the Cultural Revolution. Under the collectivised and politicised environment at that time, in most cases Chinese individuals involved in collective life or work could not isolate themselves from the environment that was controlled by the state, resulting in a lack of personal space and the invalidity of most strategies defined by de Certeau. Instead, through using their time smartly and seizing the loopholes in policies, people could insinuate themselves into the state-controlled space and defend their preferred ways of life. This is both consistent with the tactics indicated by de Certeau and characteristic of the traditions rooted in China. Especially for Chinese peasants at that time, although strictly driven by collective farming, they could always find useful ways either to ease their workload or make extra income for their families. Based on the case study of rural Hechuan, I will explore more about Chinese peasants’ characterised tactics that were practiced during the Cultural Revolution.

Besides de Certeau’s framework for the research of people’s daily life, when focusing my attention on people at the grassroots, James C. Scott is another scholar that inspires me quite a lot. According to him, the everyday forms of peasants’

12 Storey, 551.

13 Michel de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1984), 38.

14 de Certeau, 39.

resistance are “the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups”.¹⁵ In his study on Southeast Asian peasants, the specific resisting actions include foot-dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, and feigned ignorance.¹⁶ Comprehending these kinds of resistance is to understand what the peasants can do “to defend its interests as best it can”,¹⁷ although normally under the “safety-first” principle.¹⁸ Beneath the weak people’s rebellion, as implied by Scott, there are the hidden transcripts which “represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant,”¹⁹ normally “beyond direct observation by power holders”.²⁰ In addition, Scott emphasises the effect of the subordinate group’s resistance on formal politics, which is “pressing, testing, probing the boundaries of the permissible”.²¹ As a result, the significance might be more than only a defence of the powerless,²² but could even promote the structural transformation of power relations through a gradual way and on a micro-level.²³

Although Scott is discussing the situations in Southeast Asia, the weak in China, including those driven by communist ideals during the Maoist era, also always had their *weapons* to keep some private profits under collectivism. On the one hand, many of the behaviours conducted by Chinese people at the grassroots, especially peasants,

15 James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), xvi.

16 Scott, *Weapons*, xvi.

17 Scott, *Weapons*, 29.

18 James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 5.

19 James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), x.

20 Scott, *Domination*, 4.

21 Scott, *Domination*, 200.

22 Scott, *Domination*, 201.

23 Scott, *Domination*, 197.

were highly similar to those discussed by Scott, such as foot-dragging, desertion and even pilfering. No matter how severe the official crackdown was, such behaviours remained popular in rural China under collective farming, as I will explore in the following chapters. These were undoubtedly what Chinese peasants could do “to defend their interests as best as they can” under the “safety-first” principle as mentioned by Scott. Moreover, their continuous and bottom-up infringement on the lawful boundaries at that time, the “pressing, testing, probing” as Scott described, gradually and finally contributed to the top-down and national abandonment of collective farming. The drastic transformations in China after the Cultural Revolution attest to the changes that had started before 1976. All these situations imply the comparability between the realities in China and the research of Scott.

But at the same time, when making a local-context examination of Chinese people’s experiences, Western theories may lead to some overinterpretation or inaccuracy. It may be questionable if these illegal activities practiced by Chinese peasants can exactly be understood as resistance that “represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant”. As I will show in my case study of rural Hechuan, in protecting their private interests, what Hechuan peasants managed to do usually exceeded the argument of Scott. These Chinese actions mostly accorded with local traditions, such as planting in private plots (自留地 *ziliudi*), raising several pigs in a household sty, or trading in illegal markets. Was it peasants’ intentional rebellion and criticism of the politicised environment that drove them, or was it a natural continuity of certain customs of making a better living that had been rooted in local

areas? Based on the traditional background and actual situations in Hechuan, my thesis will make an in-depth exploration of the reasons behind Hechuan people's various forms of daily behaviours that went beyond the lawful boundaries during the Cultural Revolution.

In brief, for building the theoretical framework of my research on picturing Sichuan people's everyday life during the Cultural Revolution, both de Certeau's notions on the practices of everyday life and Scott's analysis of peasants' resistance are referential and informative resources.

A Review of the Literature

Regarding studies on the Cultural Revolution, which has been a hot topic in the Western academia since its commencement (in China as soon as its ending, although still under political limitation), the literature is very abundant so far. For a concise and clear summary, the achievements in Western academia (including that in Hong Kong) will be combed prior to the publications in China Mainland, and the changing trend in the researching topics is noteworthy.

1. Studies in Western Academia

Since just a few months after the initiation of the Cultural Revolution, Western scholars have been interested in it. Yet in the beginning, they usually failed to be well-informed about what took place in China, or exactly interpret the aforementioned swift transformations during the first phase of the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1968. Later, especially after the start of the 1970s, partly benefiting from the

refugees from the mainland (mainly Guangdong Province) to Hong Kong, many of whom were former Red Guards who had been actively involved in the movement, Western historians began to establish deeper and wider studies on a systematic scale. One of the notable achievements during this period was Harding's writing on the political trends of that time.²⁴ But since the Cultural Revolution was still occurring, researchers could not capture the whole picture of this repetitively prolonged movement. Substantial changes happened after the early 1980s when scholars from the West could obtain more first-hand materials, and significant fount of research sprung up especially from the 1990s onward. A remarkable instance was MacFarquhar's *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution* (three volumes) finished in 1997,²⁵ which aims to seek the historical root and background of the Cultural Revolution. His other book, cowritten with Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, chronicles and discusses the influential events and variations of the Cultural Revolution in detail.²⁶ In addition to the first two parts of *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 15*, including chapters contributed by both Harding and MacFarquhar,²⁷ when reviewing the literature on the Cultural Revolution from the perspective of the general picture with a focus on the central and elite level, these are all among the integral publications.

24 Harry Harding, "Political Trends in China Since the Cultural Revolution," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 402 (1972): 67-82.

25 Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution* (London & New York: Oxford University Press and Columbia University Press, 1997).

26 Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals. *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

27 Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank ed., "PART I: The Cultural Revolution: China in Turmoil, 1966–1969," & "PART II: The Cultural Revolution: The Struggle for the Succession, 1969–1982," in *The Cambridge History of China*, 15:105-302 & 303-472.

Thanks to the academic environment in Hong Kong, which was as free as that in the West, in many fields which are sensitive to the CCP, such as topics related to the Cultural Revolution, some scholars from China Mainland once had the chance to write and publish with less political limitation. *The History of People's Republic of China* (totally ten volumes) compiled by the Chinese University of Hong Kong is an outstanding achievement by Chinese historians with the help from institutions and publishers in Hong Kong. Its sixth volume is called "*Smashing the Old World*": *Havoc of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–1968)*,²⁸ and the eighth volume named *When the "Continuous Revolution" Goes Awry: From the Anti-Lin Biao Campaign to the Anti-Deng Xiaoping Campaign (1972–1976)*.²⁹ The seventh volume between them is not finished because of the passing of the author). Covering the first three years and last four years of the Cultural Revolution, authors of these two volumes in detail analyse the commencing and the fading stages of the ten-year era, usually through a different view from the CCP's official narration. Yet in their writing on the Cultural Revolution, the political conflict among big figures at the central level of the CCP is always the key topic

28 Bu Weihua 卜伟华, “砸烂旧世界”——文化大革命的动乱与浩劫(1966-1968), 中华人民共和国史第六卷 “Zalan jiu shijie”——*Wenhua dageming de dongluan yu haojie (1966–1968) Zhonghua renmin gongheguo shi diliujuan* (“*Smashing the Old World*”: *Havoc of the Cultural Revolution: 1966–1968, The History of People's Republic of China, Volume 6*) (Hong Kong: Research Centre of Contemporary Chinese Culture, CUHK, 2008).

29 Shi Yun and Li Danhui 史云, 李丹慧, 难以继续的“继续革命”——从批林到批邓 (1972-1976) 中华人民共和国史第八卷 *Nanyijixu de “jixu geming” ——cong piLin dao piDeng (1972–1976) Zhonghua renmin gongheguo shi dibajuan* (*When the “Continuous Revolution” Goes Awry: From the Anti-Lin Biao Campaign to the Anti-Deng Xiaoping Campaign: 1972–1976, The History of People's Republic of China, Volume 8*) (Hong Kong: Research Centre of Contemporary Chinese Culture, CUHK, 2008).

Meanwhile, just as the next two parts in *The Cambridge History of China* indicate, Western scholars' attention on the Cultural Revolution has expanded from the aspects of political movement and struggle to the economic, educational, and social situations during that decade. Especially the two chapters concentrating on people's lives in the countryside and urban areas (mainly big cities) under socialism provide valuable forerunning references for later researchers interested in ordinary people's experiences during the ten-year period.³⁰ As studies have developed over more than two decades, more and more discussions about the Cultural Revolution are moving from the top to the bottom, from the centre to the margins, from the politics to the society, and from the elites to the grassroots.

Yet when scholars' interest in the Cultural Revolution is decentralised to local areas, usually those issues are directly driven by the political trend that still occupies a significant part of their discussion. Especially the Red Guards, rebellious factions, and the factional fighting during the first couple of years of the Cultural Revolution played a major role in many researchers' discussion about the local events in those years. A pioneer exploration in this direction is by Anita Chan, Stanley Rosen, and Jonathan Unger in 1980, who worked on the Red Guards and factionalism in Guangzhou City during the Cultural Revolution.³¹ Regarding a similar topic, Walder's interest lies in Beijing City, where the national movement of the Red

30 Richard Madsen, "The Countryside under Communism," in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. MacFarquhar and Fairbank, 15: 617–81.

Martin King Whyte, "Urban Life in the People's Republic," in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. MacFarquhar and Fairbank, 15: 682–742.

31 Anita Chan, Stanley Rosen, and Jonathan Unger, "Students and Class Warfare: The Social Roots of the Red Guard Conflict in Guangzhou (Canton)," *The China Quarterly*, vol. 83 (1980): 397-446.

Guards was initiated.³² Wang Shaoguang's monograph in English talks about the Red Guards and other related mass movements in Wuhan City.³³ Actually, the factional issue not only existed in the first few years of the Cultural Revolution but persisted throughout the decade. Related situations in local areas during the last couple of years of the Cultural Revolution can be seen in *Factional Politics in Zhejiang, 1973-1976* by Keith Forster.³⁴ A more recent achievement in Western academia is Wu Yiching's *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis*, also concerning political conflicts and events related to Red Guards in big cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai.³⁵

At the same time, Chinese scholars made remarkable contributions to relevant topics in Hong Kong. A noticeable work is done by Xu Youyu, who explores the formation and variation of Red Guards' thoughts in different factions, which to a large extent accounted for the factional conflicts, although they all declared that they were fighting for Chairman Mao.³⁶ About the fights among rebellious factions in Chongqing City, which was much more severe and longer-lasting than many other

32 Andrew G Walder, *Fractured Rebellion the Beijing Red Guard movement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009).

33 Wang Shaoguang, *Failure of Charisma: The Cultural Revolution in Wuhan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

34 Keith Forster, "Factional Politics in Zhejiang, 1973-1976," in *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution*. ed. William A Joseph, Christine Wong 1950- and David Zweig (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies/Harvard University: Harvard University Press, 1991), 105-132.

35 Wu Yiching, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014).

36 Xu Youyu 徐友渔, 形形色色的造反: 红卫兵精神素质的形成及演变 *Xingxingsese de zaofan: Hongweibing jingshen sushu de xingcheng ji yanbian* (*Different Kinds of Rebellion: The Formation and Variation of Red Guards' Spirit*) (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1999).

regions in China at that time, He Shu, a local researcher in Chongqing, for the first time examined the fighting process and its heavy price in detail.³⁷

Apart from all these academic works focusing on the politics from the centre to the local level, as early as the 1980s, people's life experiences at the grassroots during the Cultural Revolution are not overlooked by Western scholars, although most of their discussions are not limited to the Cultural Revolution period, normally cover the entire Maoist era. From rural to urban areas, from material to cultural aspects, all the literature from the West related to individuals' daily life during the Cultural Revolution decade shed significant light on my thesis writing.

As a country where rural people took up the majority of the population, peasants and the countryside under socialism, including during the era of the Cultural Revolution, are certainly hot topics. One of the earliest achievements was *Chinese Village, Socialist State* by Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz, and Mark Selden, published in 1991.³⁸ It was finished based on their visit and research in a village in Hebei Province, Northern China, where the three authors continued and expanded their research a decade later. In 2005 the authors finished another book named *Revolution, Resistance, and Reform in Village China*,³⁹ through which they explore peasants' transforming experiences from collectivised to reforming era in the same

37 He Shu 何蜀, 為毛主席而戰: 文革重慶大武鬥實錄 *Wei Maozhuxi erzhan: Wen'ge Chongqing dawudou shilu (Fight for Chairman Mao: Recording of Great Fighting in Chongqing during Cultural Revolution)* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Joint Publishing Company, 2010).

38 Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz, and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991).

39 Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz, and Mark Selden, *Revolution, Resistance, and Reform in Village China* (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005).

village. Actually, a monograph with the similar topic, which highlights the changes in rural areas and peasants' life from Maoist times to the period of Deng Xiaoping, had been published in 1992 by Anita Chan, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Unger.⁴⁰ Unger later extended his study of rural China and placed more stress on peasants' experiences during the Cultural Revolution.⁴¹ Jean Oi is also interested in the study of Chinese peasants in the Cultural Revolution period, especially their relationship with the state and the cadres, as what is discussed in her *State and Peasant in Contemporary China*.⁴² Kate Zhou Xiao, in her research of peasants' life and work during the Cultural Revolution era, views the subjectivity of rural grassroots as a major force for the astonishing change later on.⁴³ In addition to so much attention to peasants, Lynn T. White puts more emphasis on local cadres at that time, highlighting their effect on the economic changes after the early 1970s.⁴⁴

Compared with the peasants in China whose life remained tough through the ending of the Cultural Revolution, residents living in the urban areas enjoyed a much more satisfying life. As a typical result benefitted from the planned economy system, urban people's such enviable experiences in everyday life are of great significance for the discussion on the Maoist era, including the Cultural Revolution. In Western

40 Anita Chan, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Unger, *Chen Village under Mao and Deng: expanded and updated edition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

41 Jonathan Unger, *The Transformation of Rural China* (London, England; New York, New York: Routledge, 2015).

42 Jean C. Oi, *State and Peasant in Contemporary China: The Political Economy of Village Government* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1991).

43 Kate Xiao Zhou, *How the Farmers Changed China: Power of the People* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996).

44 Lynn T White III, *Unstately Power: Local Causes of China's Intellectual, Legal and Governmental Reforms* (Armonk, N.Y.: Routledge, 1998).

academia, scholars access the realities of urban people's life through researching the form of work units (单位 *danwei*), which was the basic way of organisation for Chinese urban society driven by the planned economy. Different kinds of work units, either factories, schools, hospitals, or offices in the government, all of which were state- or collective-owned, provided the legal residency and a basically adequate income for most urban families. *Danwei: The Changing Chinese Workplace in Historical and Comparative Perspective* examines the origins and development of the work unit system in China.⁴⁵ Another notable book on this topic is *Social Space and Governance in Urban China: The Danwei System from Origins to Reform*. Written by David Bray, it explores the features of urban China in the Maoist era based on the *danwei* system.⁴⁶ Prioritised by such a mode, normally urban residents were able to purchase as they needed or desired every day. Gerth in his latest book, *Unending Capitalism: How Consumerism Negated China's Communist Revolution*, conducts interesting research about Chinese people, especially urban residents' consumption and consumerism even during the most politicised era of the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁷

Although during the Maoist era individuals' mobility based on their own choice was always strictly limited, population migration was continuous under the official mobilisation, mainly from urban to rural areas and from coastal to hinterland regions. Large numbers of Chinese people's lives during the Cultural Revolution was seriously

45 Xiaobo Lü and Elizabeth J Perry ed., *Danwei: The Changing Chinese Workplace in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1997).

46 David Bray, *Social Space and Governance in Urban China: the Danwei System from Origins to Reform* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005).

47 Karl Gerth, *Unending Capitalism: How Consumerism Negated China's Communist Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

changed as a result of relocation. Such as the groups of Sent-down Youth and Third-Front workers, their experiences as well begin to attract Western scholars' attention.

Regarding studies on the Sent-down Youth, Bonnin's *The Lost Generation: The Rustication of China's Educated Youth (1968-1980)* provides readers with a broad and in-depth account of the rustication movement especially during the phase of the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁸ As for research on migrating workers, Meyskens puts his emphasis on those involved in the construction of the railroads in Sichuan at that time.⁴⁹ Also, Jeremy Brown's book in 2012, *City versus Countryside in Mao's China: Negotiating the Divide*, is also highly remarkable in the discussion on the rural-urban fluidity during the Maoist era.⁵⁰

The part of cultural activities, as indispensable ways of leisure and entertainment in people's everyday life under quite a politicised background, has also been stressed by researchers.

One of the most valuable monographs on people's cultural life during the Cultural Revolution is from Paul Clark. His *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* actually focuses on people's cultural life between 1966 and 1976, covering varieties of cultural forms (including film, opera, dance, music, literature, and even architecture).⁵¹ In Clark's another book, *Youth Culture in China*, he makes a

48 Michel Bonnin, *The Lost Generation: The Rustication of China's Educated Youth (1968-1980)* trans. Krystyna Horko (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2013).

49 Covell Meyskens, "Third Front Railroads and Industrial Modernity in Late Maoist China," *Twentieth-Century China* 40, no. 3 (2015): 238-260.

50 Jeremy Brown, *City versus Countryside in Mao's China: Negotiating the Divide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

51 Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

comparison between the cultural forms among young people during the Cultural Revolution and those popular among Chinese youth later on.⁵² One more noticeable book is co-edited by Clark and two other researchers, *Listening to China's Cultural Revolution: Music, Politics, and Cultural Continuities*. This book concentrates on the specific soundscape of the Cultural Revolution, especially the music related to Model Performances (样板戏 *yangbanxi*).⁵³ Analysing different kinds of cultural forms during the Cultural Revolution, Barbara Mittler attempts to seek the linkages with Chinese traditional art forms.⁵⁴

On the basis of all the achievements mentioned above, in recent years many historians have broadened and deepened their research about Chinese people's private experiences in more diverse and more individual situations under Maoism. On account of their explorations, even during the highly collectivised and politicised era of the Cultural Revolution, individuals' lives were not a picture of conformity, and it was probably people's private effort, in spite of the official expectation in collectivism, to have a better life for their own families that foreshadowed the drastic transformation that happened to China after the Cultural Revolution. Inspiring works can be found in the *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China's Era of High Socialism* edited by Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson.⁵⁵ A fresher monograph

52 Paul Clark, *Youth Culture in China: From Red Guards to Netizens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

53 Paul Clark, Laikwan Pang, and Tsan-Huang Tsai ed. *Listening to China's Cultural Revolution: Music, Politics, and Cultural Continuities* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

54 Barbara Mittler, *A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012).

55 Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson ed., *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China's Era of High Socialism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

in this direction is *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962—1976* by Frank Dikötter.⁵⁶

2. Studies Published in Mainland China

Almost simultaneously from the 1980s onward, in spite of the political pressure from the CCP, valuable studies about the Cultural Revolution by researchers in China's Mainland also began to emerge. Those major publications included but were not limited to *Ten Years' History of the Cultural Revolution* by Gao Gao and Yan Jiaqi in 1986,⁵⁷ *Draft History of the Cultural Revolution* by Jin Chunming in 1995,⁵⁸ and his *Brief History of the Cultural Revolution* co-authored with Xi Xuan.⁵⁹ Wang Nianyi's *The Age of Great Turmoil: 1949-1976* (published in 1988) also includes a detailed discussion on the turmoil in China between 1966 and 1976.⁶⁰ In China's Mainland, *The History of the People's Republic of China: 1966—1976*, co-authored by Zheng Qian and Zhang Hua in 2010, is one of the most recent achievements exploring the Cultural Revolution as a whole.⁶¹ To the degree allowed by the CCP, all these publications carry out in-depth introspections on the origins, process, and aftermaths

56 Frank Dikötter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962—1976* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2017).

57 Gao Gao and Yan Jiaqi 高皋, 严家其, 文化大革命十年史: 1966-1976 *Wenhua dageming shinian shi: 1966-1976 (Ten Years' History of the Cultural Revolution: 1966-1976)* (Tianjin: Tianjin Renmin Chubanshe, 1986).

58 Jin Chunming 金春明, 文化大革命史稿 *Wenhua dageming shigao (Draft History of the Cultural Revolution)* (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 1995).

59 Xi Xuan and Jin Chunming 席宣, 金春明, 文化大革命简史 *Wenhua dageming jianshi (Brief History of the Cultural Revolution)* (Beijing: Zhonggong Dangshi Chubanshe, 1996).

60 Wang Nianyi 王年一, 大动乱的年代: 1949-1976 *Dadongluan de niandai: 1949-1976 (The Age of the Great Turmoil: 1949-1976)* (Zhengzhou: Henan Renmin Chubanshe, 1988).

61 Zheng Qian and Zhang Hua 郑谦, 张化, 中华人民共和国史 1966-1976 *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo shi 1966-1976 (The History of the People's Republic of China: 1966-1976)* (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2010).

of this movement. However, when reviewing the ten-year era from a general angle, the most popular topics in these discussions are still focused on the central level and elite politics, while explorations from the grassroots level are not the emphasis yet.

The researching trend from the centre to the margin and from the elite to the grassroots also occurred in Chinese academia. For researchers in China's Mainland, the mass movements in local areas, especially including the Red Guards and their factional fighting, are surely interesting and meaningful topics. Although the discussion is far from free, the results available are still of referential significance. For example, Yin Hongbiao studied the major factions among the Red Guards⁶² in addition to his writing about the social conflicts during that time.⁶³ From a more general perspective, a researcher probed into the social roots of mass behaviours during the early years of the Cultural Revolution⁶⁴ which perhaps touches the boundary of academic discussion that the CCP allows on this topic.

From the 1990s onward, scholars in China's Mainland also extended their interest from the political movement itself to the economic, social, and cultural situations during the same period, although many of the scholars in their writing do not regard

62 Yin Hongbiao 印红标, “红卫兵运动的主要流派” *Hongweibing yundong de zhuyao liupai* (The Major Factions in the Red Guards Movement), *青年研究* (*Qingnian yanjiu*), 1997 (4): 29-36.

63 Yin Hongbiao 印红标, “‘文化大革命’中的社会性矛盾” *‘Wenhua dageming’ Zhong de shehuixing maodun* (Social Conflicts in the Cultural Revolution, *中共党史研究* (*Zhonggong dangshi yanjiu*), no. 2, (1997), 77-82.

64 Xiang Qian 向前, “政治身份体系下的社会冲突:文革初期群众行为的社会根源” *Zhengzhi shenfen tixi xia de shehui chongtu: Wen'ge chuqi qunzhong xingwei de shehui genyuan* (Social Conflicts under a Political Identity System: The Social Origin of Mass Behaviours in the Early Period of Cultural Revolution), PhD diss., (Fudan University, 2010).

the Cultural Revolution as an independent period, but usually view it as an extension of the collectivised era since the 1950s.

Regarding the discussions concentrating on the countryside driven by the collective mode, we should not overlook a holistic achievement on the picture of rural society and economy from the founding of the PRC to the late 1980s, with the title *The Changes in Chinese Rural Society and Economy (1949-1989)*.⁶⁵ When taking a further look at the political system in the countryside, Zhang Letian's research about the people's communes (人民公社 *Renmin gongshe*), which lasted as the primary way of organisation in rural China from the 1950s to '70s, is valuable.⁶⁶ Other scholars pay attention to a series of more specific topics in the rural context, which is closely related to peasants' everyday life under collectivism. Based on Zhang Zhaoshu's study in a village in Zhejiang Province,⁶⁷ peasants' private trading (whether legal or not), were one of the major loopholes in the picture of high politicisation and strict collectivisation during the Cultural Revolution.

As for the exploration of urban China during the Cultural Revolution, Jin Dalu is the forerunner and foremost figure in Chinese academia. His extensive and detailed retrospection in Shanghai residents' daily life during that decade, as shown in the two

65 Chen Jiyan, Chen Jiaji, and Yang Xun 陈吉元, 陈家骥, 杨勋, 中国农村社会经济变迁(1949-1989) *Zhongguo nongcun shehui jingji bianqian: 1949-1989* (*Changes in Chinese Rural Society and Economy: 1949-1989*) (Taiyuan: Shanxi Jingji Chubanshe, 1993).

66 Zhang Letian 张乐天, 告别理想: 人民公社制度研究 *Gaobie lixiang: Renmin gongshe zhidu yanjiu* (*Farewell to Ideals: Study on the System of the People's Commune*) (Shanghai: Dongfang Chuban Zhongxin, 1998).

67 Zhang Zhaoshu 张兆曙, “乡村五十年: 日常经济实践中的国家与农民” *Xiangcun wushinian: richang jingji shijian zhong de guojia yu nongmin* (Fifty Years in Rural Areas: The State and Peasants in Everyday Economic Practice), *Kaifang shidai* (2004 (04): 71-83).

volumes of *Abnormal and Normal: Social Life in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution*, is a prototype for later researchers.⁶⁸ Jin's groundbreaking research probably inspired other scholars to pay more attention to the social life during the Cultural Revolution. Man Yong's *Revolution in the Depth of Life: First Exploration on Social Life in Urban and Rural Areas during the Cultural Revolution*⁶⁹ is a relevant article published later. About residents' material life in big cities during the Cultural Revolution, Tu Yongfeng's study on the workers in Wuhan City is comparable to that by Jin Dalu, although Tu's research is at a much smaller scale.⁷⁰

Besides residents in urban and rural areas, those relocating groups of people who migrated during the Cultural Revolution have also been explored by Chinese historians, especially regarding the Sent-down Youth Movement.

The Encyclopedia on Sent-down Youth in China published in 1995 is undoubtedly one of the big works in this field.⁷¹ Later *The History of Chinese Sent-down Youth* by Liu Xiaomeng helps people recollect more information about that long-lasting

68 Jin Dalu 金大陆, 非常与正常: 上海“文革”时期的社会生活 *Feichang yu zhengchang: Shanghai “Wen’ge” shiqi de shehui shenghuo (Abnormal and Normal: Social Life in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution)* (Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Chubanshe, 2011).

69 Man Yong 满永, “生活深处的革命: ‘文革’时期城乡社会生活初探” *Shenghuo shenchi de geming: ‘Wen’ge’ shiqi chengxiang shehui shenghuo chutan (Revolution in the Depth of Life: First Exploration on Social Life in Urban and Rural Areas during the Cultural Revolution)*, 当代世界社会主义问题 (*Dangdai shijie shehuizhuyi wenti*), 2015 (03): 20-32.

70 Tu Yongfeng 涂永峰, “武汉原国营企业职工在‘文革’时期生活状况的初步调查” *Wuhan yuan guoying qiye zhigong zai ‘Wen’ge’ shiqi shenghuo zhuangkuang de chubu diaocha (Initial Survey of the Living Conditions of Staff in State-owned Factories in Wuhan during the Cultural Revolution)*, 人文论谭 (*Renwen luntan*), 2011 (00): 324-30.

71 Liu Xiaomeng et al. 刘小萌等, 中国知青事典 *Zhongguo zhiqing shidian (Encyclopedia of Sent-down Youth in China)* (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 1995).

movement.⁷² In addition, there are also monographs from the provincial dimension, such as the *History of Sichuan Sent-down Youth* by Sun Chengmin (in total three volumes published in 2015).⁷³

In comparison, the discussions about the workers who migrated for the Third-Front Construction have not been so plentiful in China, but a couple of works are still worth noting. Chen Donglin's two monographs published in 2003 and 2014 provide large numbers of historical and official materials for exploring that movement.⁷⁴ For accessing more vivid recollections of those immigrant workers' experiences, Zhang Yong's new book in 2019 is very helpful.⁷⁵

When talking about people's cultural activities, undoubtedly the model performances, as a cultural label of the Cultural Revolution, took the major part in most discussions. Yang Jian's article has combed the developing process throughout that ten-year era.⁷⁶ However, at that time there were certain kinds of other cultural activities which people could enjoy, although still being politicised in most cases.

72 Liu Xiaomeng 刘小萌, 中国知青史·大潮 (一九六六—一九八零年) *Zhongguo zhiqing shi dachao (1966-1980) (The History of Sent-down Youth in China: 1966-1980)* (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1998).

73 Sun Chengmin 孙成民, 四川知青史(三卷本) *Sichuan zhiqing shi, sanjuanben (History of Sichuan Sent-down Youth, three volumes)* (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 2015).

74 Chen Donglin 陈东林, 三线建设: 备战时期的西部开发 *Sanxian jianshe: beizhan shiqi de xibu kaifa (Third-Front Construction: The exploitation of the West during the period preparing for war)* (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 2003).

Chen Donglin 陈东林 ed., 中国共产党与三线建设 *Zhongguo gongchandang yu Sanxian jianshe (The Chinese Communist Party and the Third-Front Construction)* (Beijing: Zhonggong Dangshi Chubanshe, 2014).

75 Zhang Yong 张勇 ed., 多维视野中的三线建设亲历者 *Duowei shiye Zhong de Sanxian jianshe qinlizhe (The Third-Front Participants from Multiple Perspectives)* (Shanghai: Shanghai Daxue Chubanshe, 2019).

76 Yang Jian 杨健, “革命样板戏的历史发展” *Geming yangbanxi de lishi fazhan (Historical Development of the Model Performances)*, 戏剧 (*Xiju*), 1996 (04): 90-104.

Noticeable publications related include Wang Xiaoxia's probing on the piano music composition,⁷⁷ Li Daoxin's exploration about the projection of open-air movies,⁷⁸ as well as a monograph by Yang Jian specifically focused on underground literature (地下文学 *Dixia wenxue*) popular in that era.⁷⁹

Last but not least, as more and more people who experienced the Cultural Revolution began to enjoy their life after retirement, it is now becoming more and more popular to recall their youthful life, including that during the Cultural Revolution. This tendency provides Chinese scholars who investigate the Cultural Revolution era with a more individual and more private angle, admittedly the nostalgic emotion needs to be noticed. In this field, at least two achievements of scholarship should not be ignored. The first is *One Hundred People's Ten Years*⁸⁰ in addition to *The History of Individual Life (1949-1978)*⁸¹ both intending to rediscover individuals' distinct experiences under the conformity of the Maoist era, including the Cultural Revolution period.

What My Thesis Can Add to the Discussion

77 Wang Xiaoxia 王小侠, “文革时期文化语境中的钢琴音乐创作” *Wen'ge shiqi wenhua yujing zhong de gangqin yinyue chuanguo* (Piano Music Composition in the Cultural Context during the Cultural Revolution), *音乐创作 (Yinyue chuanguo)*, 2014 (07): 128-129.

78 Li Daoxin 李道新, “露天电影的政治经济学” *Lutian dianying de zhengzhi jingjixue* (The Political Economy of Open-air Movies), *当代电影 (Dangdai dianying)*, 2006 (03): 97-101.

79 Yang Jian 杨健, *文化大革命中的地下文学 Wenhua dageming zhong de dixia wenxue (Underground Literature during the Cultural Revolution)* (Beijing: Chaohua Chubanshe, 1993).

80 Feng Jicai 冯骥才, *一百个人的十年 Yibai ge ren de shinian (One Hundred People's Ten Years)* (Changchun: Shidai Wenyi Chubanshe, 2004).

81 Jin Guangyao and Dai Jianbing.

All the literature mentioned here, both from the West and China, sheds valuable light on the writing of my thesis. The changing trends in research especially inspires me to rethink the Cultural Revolution from a bottom-up angle, although certain imbalances and some gaps still exist and need to be noted.

Comparatively speaking, in the academic achievements so far, studies focusing on the politics of the Cultural Revolution are nevertheless more common than those related to non-political (such as social, economic, and cultural) topics. Discussions at the central level still take a much larger part than those viewing from a marginal perspective. Furthermore, the experiences of people in leadership or privileged positions during the Cultural Revolution are usually more attractive to scholars than the life of people at the grassroots. Even in the publications focusing on grassroots experiences during those years, much more attention is paid to the people either in big cities or villages not far away from the political or economic centres.⁸² The situation in the massive hinterland especially those smaller places (including counties, towns, and villages) which in fact accommodated the majority of Chinese population at the grassroots in those years, has not been explored sufficiently by scholars.

In this sense, my thesis can add to the rediscovery and rethinking of the Cultural Revolution from the bottom-up angle, through probing into people's everyday life in an ordinary and typical county of Sichuan, a backward and marginal province located in the Southwest China, far away from Beijing and Shanghai.

⁸² For instance, Jin Dalu's research is specifically about people in Shanghai City. Jeremy Brown in his 2012 book mainly focuses Tianjin City and the countryside nearby. As for Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden, the village they discuss in two monographs is in Hebei Province, not far away from Beijing.

An Outline of the Chapters of the Thesis

To present a rough picture of Sichuan residents' daily life during the Cultural Revolution the body of my thesis is divided into five chapters as follows.

In Chapter Two, the topic is about the history of the Sichuan areas. Although the Cultural Revolution took place between 1966 and 1976, it is still necessary to have a brief retrospection on what happened to the local areas earlier. As a basin locating in the southwest hinterland of China, Sichuan has had a relatively distinctive history. Especially during the transition from the premodern to modern times, several significant events and periods should not be overlooked in the history of Sichuan. Even during the unprecedented Maoist era, their influences in shaping the demography, society, economy, and culture of Sichuan remain effective to a certain degree in residents' daily life.

In Chapter Three, I will concentrate my discussion on Sichuan County-seat residents everyday material life during the Cultural Revolution, based on materials from Hechuan County and nearby regions. Favoured by the planned economy and the urban-rural dual structure, most urban families enjoyed an enviable status in the economy, even including those county-seat and township residents. On this basis, it is not surprising to learn that many urban people in Hechuan did have a basically satisfying experience in dining and purchasing as they needed or even desired, compared with what the peasant experienced during the same period. Parts of the discoveries may go beyond scholars' and popular imagining about that period.

Chapter Four intends to investigate the daily experiences of Sichuan peasants, on account of materials from the countryside of Hechuan County. Being restricted by the urban-rural dual structure and driven by the mode of collective farming, most rural people had no other choice but to join the farm as members of the production team (生产队 *shengchanduì*) they belonged to (normally a village was divided into several production teams), which always took up the majority of their time and energy but never generated enough yield to meet their daily needs. Fortunately, peasants could still do something by themselves, including working on family side-lines and trading in free markets, all of which influentially improved many peasants' living standard, although always under suppression from authorities. In the Sichuan Basin where family side-lines and rural markets have been flourishing benefitted from the solid foundation of agriculture, it seemed that peasants could always make some extra money privately through those traditional ways, no matter whether it was legal or not.

The topic of Chapter Five is Sichuan people's cultural activities during the Cultural Revolution, on the basis of materials from both urban and rural Hechuan. As the other part of individuals' daily life at that time, admittedly what residents in Sichuan experienced shared a lot in common with those in the rest of the country. As an expected result of the top-down promotion by the central of the CCP, besides the projection of movies, all the staged performances should be standardised in accordance with the revolutionary model operas. However, in practice at local sites, due to the distinctions of folk culture in different places, it was not totally conformed

either. In Sichuan, the rich and long-lasting traditions of folk art contributed to the popularity of many revolutionised works among local residents.

The last chapter of my thesis is reserved for the migrating groups in Sichuan during the Cultural Revolution. Under the planned economy and the household registration system (户口登记制度 *hukou dengji zhidu*), at that time people at the grassroots could hardly migrate from rural to urban areas or from the hinterland to advanced regions. On the contrary, to relocate conversely is always allowed and encouraged. The Sent-down Youth and Third-Front workers, two officially organised groups of migrators in Sichuan during those years, both experienced quite a different life after relocation. Through exploring their daily experiences and comparing with other groups of residents as discussed previously, this chapter will again cast doubt on the viewpoint that people's lives were a picture of conformity during the Cultural Revolution.

The Materials Used in My Research

A large quantity of primary materials is used in writing my thesis, all of which, from the bottom-up perspective, provide me access to the realities of grassroots everyday life in Sichuan during the Cultural Revolution. The majority of my resources come from Hechuan County, in addition to relevant materials from some neighbouring regions, either belonging to Sichuan Province or Chongqing Municipality nowadays. To be specific, one kind of local resource I frequently cite in my thesis is gazetteers, including not only the county gazetteer (县志 *xianzhi*) as a general record of the

county's history but also the gazetteers of different fields, such as *The Gazetteer of Commerce in Hechuan* and *The Gazetteer of Culture and Art in Hechuan*. Among all historical documents in China, from ancient times gazetteers have been one of the most common types. Those from the more than 2,000 county-level regions take a big part in the collections. Such plentiful resources provide historians valuable pathways to access Chinese history from the ancient to modern period. After the politicised years under Mao, compiling gazetteers again became popular in China at both the central and regional levels. In 20 years from then on, more than 4,000 provincial, prefecture- and county-level gazetteers had been newly published across the country.⁸³ This number does not include those compiled and printed as internal materials, such as the gazetteers of different fields at the county-level and the gazetteers of specific factories or companies. These compilations from the 1980s onward form the majority of the gazetteers that provides references for my research. A main purpose of the officially backed compilation during this period was to show and highlight the developments achieved in China under the CCP, which resulted in a general lack of breadth, completeness and details when presenting data about developments during the Maoist era, including the Cultural Revolution period. However, the politicised environment, especially an overwhelming emphasis on class struggle (阶级斗争 *jiejí dòuzhēng*), on the contrary made the information recorded

83 Ni Daichuan and Kang Xiaodan 倪代川, 康晓丹, “档案与地方志编修的历史考察” (1949-2000) *Dang'an yu difangzhi bianxiu de lishi kaocha* (A historical exploration about the compilation of archives and local gazetteers 1949-2000), 上海高校图书情报工作研究 (*Shanghai gaoxiao tushu qingbao gongzuo yanjiu*), vol. 77, 2010 (01): 48-51.

between 1966 and 1976 to a certain degree reliable. At that time, exaggeration in statistics was hardly encouraged, as economic achievements did not play a key role in cadres' promotion. From the 1980s onward, since the development of the economy became crucial both in the CCP's legitimacy and the assessment of a cadre's work, exaggerated statistics turn out to be a much more noteworthy issue for researchers. In comparison, to re-access the realities of the Chinese people's life during the Cultural Revolution, information recorded in the gazetteers, including the statistics, has certain significance for reference.

Apart from gazetteers, the compilations of official policies and documents all of which shaped people's everyday lives under the planned economy, such as those related to residents' rations of daily goods, add significantly to my research. The archives locating in the Sichuan and Chongqing areas and open to the public provide supplementary information for my search of the official records. Especially concerning the migrating groups during those years, such as the sent-down youth and workers of Third-Front factories most of whom temporarily lived in Hechuan between the 1960s and 1970s, county-level gazetteers usually pay less attention to them. Fortunately, archives available in Hechuan helped me access large amounts of valuable information about their experiences during and after relocation.

Various forms of private materials comprise another large part of my resources. From the old-book markets in Hechuan and nearby counties or cities, what I have collected includes but are not limited to individuals' diaries, personal notes of work, reading and lyrics, family account books, as well as record books of both factories

and production teams. These first-hand materials present us with a more vivid picture of people's work and life in every day which in many cases were not exactly in line with those narrated officially.

Besides all these primary sources in written form, it was also helpful to have informal discussions with old people who experienced the Cultural Revolution in Hechuan County and neighbouring regions, in a manner that obviates the need for research ethics approval. During my field work in Hechuan and nearby areas, I frequently visited the nursing homes which have become a popular industry in China as the aging population is quickly expanding. Feeling lonely, in most cases the elders living there are happy to talk to and share their past with people younger than them. Because of the more and more politicised atmosphere in today's China, people are warned to be very careful when communicating with anyone with foreign backgrounds. In order to avoid bringing unnecessary trouble to my informants, I choose not to mention my student status at an institution overseas in my chat with them. Although some of their recollections may be coloured with nostalgia, in which their youthful years between the 1960s and 1970s are usually regarded as a good and impassioned time, if cross-validated with materials from other resources, many things recalled by them are still very useful in this research.

Benefitting from so many primary materials found at local sites, the research results presented here can contribute to the re-examination of Chinese people's life during the Cultural Revolution from the bottom-up and everyday life angles.

Chapter Two: SICHUAN IN HISTORY

Section One: Sichuan in Ancient Times

1. An overview of the ancient Sichuan from the everyday angle



Prior to a detailed discussion on Sichuan through history, several terms in geography need to be clarified, including the Sichuan areas, Sichuan Province, and Sichuan Basin. The map above shows a rough outline of Sichuan based on the current provincial division. In fact, it is wrong to believe that all the regions in the Sichuan areas share the same geographical and cultural traits. The mountainous or plateau regions of Sichuan Province, especially the western part adjoining Gansu, Qinghai, Tibet, and Yunnan provinces, are populated by various ethnic minorities with distinct kinds of culture. In fact, most of those areas have not belonged to Sichuan Province until modern times. The Sichuan Basin, located in the central and eastern part of the Sichuan areas, is the core region characterised with the typical Sichuan culture. Nowadays, the eastern part of the basin mainly belongs to Chongqing Municipality. Although Chongqing has been administratively separated from Sichuan Province since 1997, in local culture it has quite a lot in common with that of Sichuan. In most

cases, the Sichuan Basin is what I refer to when just mentioning Sichuan in my thesis. The total area of the basin is about 0.26 million square kilometres. Based on the administrative division nowadays, it only takes up 33 per cent of the total area of Sichuan Province.

In a nutshell, taking great advantage of solid agriculture and flourishing commerce, Sichuan people since ancient times have had strong enthusiasm to have enjoyment in their daily experiences. Either through visiting the market like attending a festival or having palatable dishes as they preferred, only if the social condition allowed, they would like to spend time and money in enjoying their life, rather than living in an ascetic way.

Located in Southwest China, the Sichuan Basin is between 28- and 30- degrees north latitude. But unlike many other regions around the same latitude in the world, it enjoys a number of exceptional conditions benefitted from the nature. With fertile purple soil quite common in the basin, in addition to a mild and humid climate, plus abundant water resources from the Yangtze River system, the Sichuan Basin has a very good basis for agricultural production. In history, the solid agriculture is always the dependable foundation for the development of the local society in Sichuan.

Benefitted from the agricultural achievements, from the ancient period there had been a series of special products in the basin, such as fabrics, tea, sugar, and wine. The rich yield of these products, large amounts of which turned to be commodities, facilitated the commerce and markets in Sichuan. During the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), which is deemed as a peak period of Chinese ancient times, the Sichuan Basin,

especially the central areas, had become one of the most prosperous commercial regions nationwide. Besides the advantageous conditions of agriculture, the convenience of transportation, favoured by the Yangtze River and its tributaries, contributed not only to the commerce in the Sichuan Basin but also to the export to outside areas.

The business activities at the same time boosted the development of cities in the basin, which included but were not limited to Chengdu City, the capital of Sichuan in most of the time. A number of more cities, county seats, and towns formed and developed as centres of commodity transition or distribution, such as Chongqing City on the Yangtze River and Hechuan at the confluence of three tributaries of the Yangtze River. In consequence, as explored by some historians, in Song Dynasty (960-1276 AD) a market network had covered the whole basin of Sichuan with multiple levels from urban to rural areas.¹

Admittedly, throughout the ancient history, warfare and chaos, especially those happened at the end of a dynasty, repeatedly impaired the local society of Sichuan heavily. Notwithstanding, it seemed that the tradition of commodity economy in Sichuan was never rooted out. Instead, it would be revived and reactivated once the social environment is recovered. Probably resulting from this enduring continuity, a similar network of markets in a more developed form still worked in Sichuan from the

1 Wu Qinghua 吴擎华, “试论宋代四川市场” *Shilun Songdai Sichuan shichang* (A Discussion on the Markets in Sichuan during the Song Dynasty), *中华文化论坛* (*Zhonghua wenhua luntan*), 2005 (04): 97-102.

mid-Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 AD) to Republican era (1912-1949 AD), as the situation analysed by G. W. Skinner.²

This long-lasting tradition in economy unavoidably exerted significant influences on many aspects of Sichuan people's daily life, which seemed not very typical in an agricultural society. As described in the *Official History of the Song Dynasty*, Sichuan people at that time liked music, adored luxuries, and had less distress in their life; what people earned was mainly spent on playing and amusement.³ In addition to the highly general and too brief summary, a historian provided more specific and vivid pictures in Chengdu City during the same period. Monthly markets were held in different places of the city, which had already become a folk festival popular among local residents. Similar to attending temple fairs, visiting these markets regularly became a significant part of their everyday life. For example, the market of herbal medicine would be held at least four times a year in Chengdu during the Song Dynasty. It was not only a good chance for medicine trading, at the same time delicious food and snacks, in addition to wonderful performances of singing and dancing would also be provided in the markets.⁴

Besides, Sichuan residents since the Song Dynasty had become renowned for the typical dishes they enjoyed, as another representative element in Sichuan people's

2 G. W. Skinner, "Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China: Part I," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 24, no. 1 (1964): 3-43.

3 Tuotuo et al. [The Yuan Dynasty] [元] 脱脱 等, 宋史 (卷八十九 · 志第四十二) · 地理五 · 川陕四路 *Songshi (juan bashijiu, zhi disishier) dili wu, Chuanshan silu (The Official History of the Song Dynasty. Vol 89, Gazetteers 42, Geography 5, Chuanshan silu)*, <http://www.guoxue123.com/shibu/0101/00songs/088.htm> (accessed January 3, 2021)

4 Liu Shu 刘术, "宋代成都药市考" *Songdai Chengdu yaoshi kao (An Exploration on the Medicine Market in Chengdu during the Song Dynasty)*, *农业考古 (Nongye kaogu)*, 2015 (06): 66-70.

everyday life. Signboards of Sichuan dish restaurants even appeared in Hangzhou, the capital of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1276 AD), more than one thousand kilometres away from Sichuan.⁵ As recorded by an author at that time, spice had already become a key word in the menus of those restaurants. Although chilli pepper had not been introduced in Sichuan until at least four hundred years later, it seemed that Sichuan residents had managed to make food spicy using local ingredients instead, such as fresh ginger. Not only spice, based on the information in some old cookbooks found in Sichuan, the use of Sichuan pepper (川椒 *chuanjiao* or 花椒 *huajiao*), a special kind of pepper planted in some parts of the Sichuan Basin which could make people's mouth numbing, can also be dated back to the Song Dynasty.⁶

When recollecting the ancient history of Sichuan, there was one more character which was of crucial significance in shaping the demography, tradition and culture of Sichuan. Due to the basin topography that provided a sound shelter for refugees from outside, usually when there was serious warfare and chaos in the country, large numbers of immigrants flooded into Sichuan. In the meantime, wars and disorder took place in the basin periodically too, which heavily decreased the local population. It made room for later migrators, many of whom were not refugees, but grassroots people seeking a better life. Before the Qing Dynasty, it is generally acknowledged that such tide of immigration in a large scale happened to Sichuan at least seven

5 Wu Zimu [The Southern Song Dynasty] [南宋] 吴自牧, 梦粱录 卷一六 (*Menglianglu*, Vol. 16) 面食店 Mianshidian (Restaurants of wheaten food) Quited from. Yuan Tingdong 袁庭栋, 巴蜀文化志 *Bashu wenhuazhi (A Cultural Gazetteer of the Bashu Area)* (Chengdu: Bashu Shushe, 2009), 280.

6 Jiang Yuxiang 江玉祥, “蜀椒考—川味杂考之三” *Shujiao kao—chuanwei zakao zhisan* (Research on the Sichuan Pepper: Studies on the Sichuan Flavour, 3), 中华文化论坛 (*Zhonghua wenhua luntan*). 2001 (03): 22-26.

times. No matter what the newcomers' intentions were, each time their continuous arrival brought in fresh elements to the Sichuan Basin, which seemed as an obturated area decided by the geographical feature. On the one hand, as a scholar indicates, the traits of inclusiveness and openness stemming from different groups of immigrants have been one of the base colours of Sichuan.⁷ On the other hand, it was proved that after settling down, most of the outsiders and their descendants gradually adapted to the everyday life and local culture of Sichuan style, as summarised above, which were never erased by the demographical reconstruction occurred repeatedly.

2. Huguang people filled Sichuan, reshaping the basin in the early modern times

Many of the characterised content in Sichuan survived the vicissitudes in history and was reinforced again and again from an immigration movement to another. In this process, the arrival of immigrants in the largest scale and the longest term took place in the late 17th century. It lasted over one hundred years, covering the end of ancient times and the start of Sichuan's modern era. It is worthwhile to be introduced more specifically, as it led to the final formation of the lifestyle with Sichuan flavours (川味生活 *Chuanwei shenghuo*), the most typical part of residents' everyday life in Sichuan that keeps working from ancient to modern centuries.

This movement is called Huguang People Filling Sichuan (湖广填四川 *Huguang tian Sichuan*), when massive outsiders continuously settled in the Sichuan Basin from Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong and Fujian provinces between the early and

⁷ Yuan Tingdong 袁庭栋, 巴蜀文化志 *Bashu wenhuazhi* (*Cultural Gazetteer of the Bashu Area*) (Chengdu: Bashu Shushe, 2009), 359.

mid-Qing Dynasty. Resulting from the long-time warfare, chaos, and plague from the late Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 AD) to the early years of Qing Dynasty (1644–1911 AD), the population in Sichuan dropped to 0.5 million, as estimated by a scholar.⁸ Taking the total size of the Sichuan Basin into consideration, as mentioned above, at that time Sichuan indeed became sparsely populated. After this disastrous period, to repopulate the fertile land in the basin was a priority for the new regime. Policies encouraging immigrants from adjacent provinces were issued from the late 17th century. Apart from the official encouragement, the sparsely populated Sichuan itself was quite attractive to many outsiders, especially those living in populous areas and having a difficult life.

As a consequence of the combination of promotion from the state and grassroots spontaneous choices for a better life, by the end of the 18th century, the total population of Sichuan increased almost 15 times compared with that one hundred years before.⁹ Obviously, the arrival of immigrants and their reproduction contributed the major part to this astonishing expansion. In addition, this population growth was not only a demographical reshaping of the basin, but significantly influenced the local society of Sichuan and people's everyday life.

This time, the majority of migrants were peasants, craftsmen, and unemployed people, for whom Sichuan was a very hopeful world. Once settling down, they needed

8 Wang Di 王笛, “清代四川人口、耕地及粮食问题(上)” *Qingdai Sichuan renkou, gengdi ji liangshi wenti (shang)* (Issues of population, farmland, and grain in Sichuan during the Qing Dynasty, First Half),” *四川大学学报 (哲学社会科学版)* (*Journal of Sichuan University, Philosophy and Social Science Edition*), 1989 (03): 90-99.

9 Cao Shuji 曹树基, *中国移民史第六卷 Zhongguo yimin shi, diliujuan* (*A History of Migration in China*) (Fuzhou: Fujian Renmin Chubanshe, 1997), 95.

to earn a living, normally through the way they got used to. Hence their arrival first of all exerted general effect on the economic structure of the basin.

Besides the recovery of farming, numbers of sidelines turned to be a more important part in the rural families of Sichuan. “By raising pigs and spinning cotton, you can earn money effortlessly” was a very popular saying in the countryside of northern Sichuan during the Qing Dynasty.¹⁰ In the same period, sweet potatoes and maize were introduced by immigrants and promoted in the basin. As a result, “planting sweet potatoes or maize — to feed pigs — making profits by selling pigs” became a prevalent mode of Sichuan peasants’ side-line work.¹¹ These various products facilitated a number of handicraft industries, many of which had been developed in the basin previously, such as sugar refining and wine making. From the mid-Qing Dynasty, such workshops not just reappeared, but became more specialised and larger-scale.

All these developments in agriculture and handicraft industry stimulated the growth of trading activities, as well as the number of businessmen in the Sichuan Basin, in which those migrating merchants probably accounted for a big part. During the Qianlong Emperor period (1736–1796 AD), among a total of 300 households in one district of Chongqing City, 208 of them made a living on handicraft and

10 “By raising pigs and spinning cotton, you can earn money effortlessly 喂猪纺棉, 坐地赚钱 weizhu fangmian, zuodi zhuanqian” see in 乾隆屏山县志 (嘉庆增刻本) 卷一, 风俗 *Qianlong Pingshan xianzhi (Jiaqing zengkeben) juanyi, fengsu (Gazetteer of Pingshan County, the edition during the Jiaqing period, vol. 1, Customs)*, <http://www.guoxuemi.com/gjzx/613479utum/58049/> (accessed on 3 January 2021).

11 Chen Shisong 陈世松, 大迁徙—“湖广填四川”历史解读 *Daqianxi—“Huguang tian Sichuan” lishi jiedu (The Great Migration: A Historical Study on Huguang People Filling Sichuan)* (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 2010), 147.

businesses.¹² Especially those regions along the Yangtze River and its tributaries continued to benefit from the convenience of water transportation. In terms of Skinner's study, during the Qing Dynasty there were 29 regional cities in Sichuan, and 27 of them were reachable by water.¹³ A noticeable instance among them was Hechuan, at that time named Hezhou, as a regional centre, where the number of its markets amounted to 73.¹⁴ Trading activities not only expanded in urban areas. During the period between 1796 and 1820, there were totally over 2,300 rural markets in the basin.¹⁵

In addition to the variations in economic and social aspects, through a process of cultural interaction during the Huguang People Fill Sichuan Movement, a distinctive Sichuan-style culture was finally moulded and since then became one of the most enjoyable parts of Sichuan residents' daily experiences. Although the immigrants came from different provinces, and those from the same place preferred to settle down together, kinds of interaction inevitably took place among immigrant groups. After several generations, the regional culture previously in distinct forms had gradually melted together. An embodiment of the melting process was the Guild of Eight Provinces (八省会馆 *Basheng huiguan*) in Chongqing. It was co-founded during as the union of immigrants from eight provinces.

12 Chen Shisong, *Daqianxi*, 177.

13 G. W. Skinner, "Cities and Hierarchy of Local Systems," in *The City in Late Imperial China*, ed. G. W. Skinner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), 288-98.

14 Wang Di 王笛, *跨出封闭的世界—长江上游区域社会研究 1644—1911* *Kuachu fengbi de shijie—Changjiang shangyou quyū shehui yanjiu 1644-1911* (*Breaking up a Closed World: The Social Transformation of the Upper Yangtze Region*), (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1993), 237.

15 Wang Gang 王纲, *清代四川史* *Qingdai Sichuan shi* (*History of Sichuan during the Qing Dynasty*) (Chengdu: Chengdu Keji Daxue Chubanshe, 1991), 784-85.

At the same time, due to the fact that it was an economically motivated movement, most of the immigrants were people at the grassroots with serious difficulties of making a living in their hometowns. Hence in the first several decades after Sichuan was repopulated, it was actually a society of grassroots. Most people, not only immigrants but also those local ones survived the warfare had to build up from nothing. This feature significantly influenced the consequence of culture melting and reshaping in the basin. One result was the formation and popularity of the culture with folk and daily forms, which were simpler, plainer, and more accessible for people at the grassroots. Yet the simplicity and plainness did not mean less enjoyment. Conversely, since then many characterised cultural activities have been popular in Sichuan until now, including the Sichuan cuisine (川菜 *Chuancai*) and the Sichuan Opera (川剧 *Chuanju*). Resulting from the melting of culture from different provinces, it was during this period that both of them developed to the shape highly similar as what Sichuan people are enjoying nowadays.

As Fu Chongju, a Chengdu literatus in the late Qing Dynasty, listed one by one in his book, just in Chengdu City the kinds of Sichuan-style dishes and snacks that were well received in first-class restaurants, snack bars, or at people's homes numbered more than one thousand.¹⁶ The combination of the seasoning in local Sichuan and those brought in by the new settlers usually led to an amazing flavour, although the food materials they used were just ordinary and down-to-earth. Such as spicy chicken (辣子鸡 *Lazi ji*), boiled fish (水煮鱼 *Shuizhu yu*), when mixing the aforementioned

16 Fu Chongju 傅崇矩, 成都通览 *Chengdu tonglan (An Overview of Chengdu)* (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1987), 262-80.

Sichuan pepper with chilli pepper newly introduced by the migrators, the most representative flavour of Sichuan cuisine, numbing and spicy, makes these dishes extremely tasty. Such seasoning also applies to cooking noodles and rice noodles. As quite easy ways to have enjoyment in everyday life, these dishes have been popular among Sichuan people until now.

The formal formation of the Sichuan Opera was also a result of the cultural combination by immigrants during the Qing Dynasty. One of its major sources was Kunqu opera (昆曲 *Kunqu*). In Chinese traditional art, *Kunqu* was deemed an elegant art form and normally enjoyed by literati. However, in Sichuan, those elegant elements were replaced by more colloquial ones. Combining with other kinds of operas in the basin, it became a folk art localised that rooted in Sichuan, being widely accepted and welcomed. Due to the relative simplicity in its performance and the use of Sichuan dialect in its singing tune, many Sichuan residents at the grassroots including peasants became amateurs of the Sichuan Opera. To mimic some parts of their favourite operas was a common way of self-entertainment for them.

This can also be viewed as the continuity of the previous traditions in Sichuan which encouraged people to have enjoyment in their everyday life. Besides, Sichuan people in the Qing Dynasty continued the enthusiasm in going to markets and shopping as they liked. This time, the trend was probably further strengthened by the open climate and consuming culture introduced by immigrants from Guangdong and Fujian, the coastal provinces. During the Qianlong period, “the tendency (of daily life in Chongqing) was equivalent to that in Suzhou City, Hangzhou City, and Guangdong

Province.”¹⁷ By the late Qing, as a Japanese visitor wrote in his diary, “ladies in Chengdu City normally put their hair up and cover it with a hairnet. It is the popular style. As for girls between 12 and 13 years old, there are usually beautiful silk ribbons and accessories on their heads”.¹⁸

The migration movement of Huguang People Fill Sichuan finally came to an end on the eve of the 19th century. What this movement brought to the basin, either reshaping or reinforcing the local traditions of Sichuan, facilitated residents to enjoy their everyday life both in material and cultural forms. These influences remain effective regardless of the stunning transformations took place in the basin in the next two centuries.

Section Two: Sichuan Transforming in Modern Times

1. The opening of the basin to the world

From the mid-19th century, when large groups of immigrants had stopped settling in and Sichuan was transforming from an immigrant society to a local one, another momentous transformation was about to happen in the basin. This was the arrival of industrial and modern civilization from the West. During a gradual and prolonged process, a number of unprecedented elements began to appear and work in Sichuan

17 风与苏杭粤东相伯仲 Feng yu Suhang Yuedong xiang bozhong, 乾隆巴县志卷十 *Qianlong Baxian zhi juanshi* (*Gazetteer of Baxian County, edited during the Qianlong period, vol. 10*), <http://www.guoxuedashi.com/guji/zx6725614dtga/> (accessed on 3 January 2021).

18 Nakano Kozan 中野孤山, 横跨中国大陆—游蜀杂俎 *Hengkua Zhongguo dalu—youshu zazu* (*Across the Continent of China: Miscellaneous Notes of Travelling in Sichuan*), trans. Guo Jukun 郭举昆 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2007), 148.

people's everyday experiences. In this section, I will cover the period from the late 19th century to the 1940s, whose influences in Sichuan remained explicit until now.

As an important port on the Yangtze River, the significance of Chongqing was first noticed by Westerners between 1860s and 70s, although Chongqing Port was not formally opened by the Qing Dynasty until 1891, based on a treaty with British. Undoubtedly, it was through the Yangtze River and the Chongqing Port that industrial commodities and Western culture flooded in the Sichuan Basin.

The influences of port opening were first of all reflected in the drastic growth of import and export trade. Two decades after 1891, the total amount of import and export goods taxed by Chongqing Customs had an almost five-fold rise.¹⁹ Besides the export of local products, such as bristles and wool, which were transported to as far as Europe and America from Sichuan, more and more industrial products became available in the basin. Between 1891 and 1901, foreign-made commodities took up 80 per cent of the total goods imported through the Chongqing Port.²⁰

In Sichuan people's daily experiences, benefitting from the tradition of commodity economy and the market networks existing in the basin, the imported products from the West quickly gained popularity. As recorded in a report from Chongqing in 1892, not merely different types of woven fabrics, but also Western kinds of clocks and watches, cameras, even musical instruments had increased in

19 Zhou Yong 周勇, 重庆·一个内陆城市的崛起 *Chongqing: yige neilu chengshi de jueqi* (*Chongqing: The Rise of an Inland City*) (Chongqing: Chongqing Chubanshe, 1989), 113.

20 Zhou Yong, 113.

sales.²¹ This phenomenon may not be surprising when we think of Sichuan people's traditional enthusiasm in purchasing what they liked, only if the conditions allowed. From then on, what Sichuan residents could enjoy in every day included these industrial products and modern culture from the West.

Not only big cities like Chongqing and Chengdu, other regions in the basin, even some remote and marginal ones also involved in the trade with foreign countries. For instance, businessmen from Wanxian County near the eastern margin of the basin made large profits through the export of tung oil, a kind of important material for industry. In the meantime, the market network in the whole basin became much denser from urban to rural areas. Based on Skinner's statistics about this period, the density of markets in the counties and towns of Sichuan exceeded many other areas in China.²²

Behind the expansion of trade with the outside world, there was a great change in transportation on the Yangtze River and its tributaries. In 1909, the Yangtze River for the first time witnessed a merchant steamship from Chongqing to the downstream. By 1922, the total tonnage through the Chongqing Port by steamship reached 279009 tons, more than 50 times compared with that ten years before.²³ Steamships were also perfect for the business of passenger transportation. A notable instance was the Minsheng Ship Company (民生轮船公司 *Minsheng lunchuan gongsi*), founded in

21 Report from British Consul in Chongqing, 1892. 1892 年英国驻重庆领事的报告. Quoted from: Fu Xiaolan 扶小兰, “重庆开埠与城市近代化” *Chongqing kaibu yu chengshi jindaihua* (The Opening of Chongqing Port and Urban Modernization), 北京大学学报 (社会科学版) (*Journal of Beihua University, Social Science Edition*), 2013 (02): 61-66.

22 Skinner, “Cities and the Hierarchies of Local System,” 298.

23 Zhou Yong, 136.

1925 and starting its business from the line between Chongqing and Hechuan. After ten years, this company became the largest shipping line in China.

Fresh things did not only emerge in the process of trading and transportation. At the same time, manufacturing industry appeared and began to develop in the basin. Light industry was especially favoured by local private capital at that time. Between 1900 and 1905, the number of weaving factories that opened in Chongqing surprisingly made up more than one-third of the total number founded nationwide during the same period.²⁴

The economic transformation naturally stimulated the change of local society, as embodied in the expansion of urban areas and the growth of urban population. Chongqing City's downtown district for business extended along the Yangtze River. By the early 20th century, the population lived in Chongqing City had doubled compared with that half a century before.²⁵ The expansion meanwhile raised requirement for the construction of public utilities which were necessary in urban residents' life. In the first two to three decades of the 20th century, a series of novelties started to work in the daily life of residents in Chongqing City, including but were not limited to electric light, tap water, street lamps, highways, city buses, and commercial flights.

24 Deng Xiaolin 邓小林, “略论清末四川总商会的建立及其意义—兼与上海总商会比较” *Lüelun Qingmo Sichuan zongshanghui de jianli jiqi yiyi—jianyu Shanghai zongshanghui bijiao* (Discussion on the establishment and significance of the General Chamber of Commerce in Sichuan during the Late Qing, and a Comparison with Shanghai), *涪陵师范学院学报 (Journal of Fulin Normal College)*, 2004 (01). vol.20. No. 1: 85-89.

25 Wei Yingtao 魏瀛涛, *近代重庆城市史 Jindai Chongqing chengshishi (The Modern History of Chongqing City)* (Chengdu: Sichuan Daxue Chubanshe, 1991), 397.

The process of modernisation also took place in smaller cities or county seats in the Sichuan basin. In the county seat of Hechuan, 80 kilometres northwest of Chongqing City, large-scale municipal projects commenced almost at the same time, between 1926 and 1927. Achievements included the extension of the urban lay-out which remained basically unchanged after 1949, the renovation and broadening of main roads, as well as the lighting of street lamps. Five years later, many residents in the county were able to use tap water too.

The transformations also had novel and significant influences on Sichuan people's everyday cultural experiences, including the ways they received education, got news, and enjoyed entertainment. The year 1894 witnessed the foundation of three modern schools in Chongqing by U.S. Christian churches, in which English for the first time became a required course. In 1897, successively in Chongqing and Chengdu, for the first time a local reformer established Sichuan's two modern newspapers, whose distribution once covered 26 cities and counties in the basin.²⁶ In 1912, the first movie was projected in Chongqing, soon followed by the opening of the city's first cinema. Almost from the same period, in Chongqing, there were performances of modern drama in the Western style, together with the founding of a modern drama club by local young people. As another new form of mass media in modern times, Chongqing's radio broadcasting station was established and began operation in 1934.

²⁶ Wang Lüping 王绿萍, *四川近代新闻史 Sichuan jindai xinwenshi (The History of Journalism in Modern Sichuan)* (Chengdu: Sichuan Daxue Chubanshe, 2007), 48.

For the majority of Sichuan people, especially those living in rural areas, admittedly all these novel facilities had not yet been a familiar part of their daily life. By the 1930s, these transformations were just like distant thunders from the sky, foretelling even more drastic shifts which would happen to Sichuan in a few decades.

2. Sichuan during the War against Japan

Despite the growth of modernisation between the 1910s and 1930s, due to the wars among Sichuan warlords happening off and on after the fall of the Qing Dynasty, power from the central level of the Republic of China did not really work in the basin. The civil warfare roughly ceased by the mid-1930s. In the meantime, the force of Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist Party seized the chance (when the Red Army entered Sichuan) to put the basin under their control. If viewed from the national perspective. It implied Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist Party's emphasis on Sichuan facing the threat of Japan's invasion.

In November 1937, while large parts of the country had been conquered by Japanese army, Chongqing City was claimed as the Temporary Capital of the Republic of China. The Sichuan Basin thus was the base area for the whole country during World War Two, and again became the shelter for refugees from war zones, many of whom came from big cities in Northern and Eastern China. In 1937, the population of Chongqing City was 470,000. This number soared to one million in 1944 and reached 1,250,000 when the war ended.²⁷ Along with the population

²⁷ “Peidu shinian jianshe jihua cao'an” 陪都十年建设计划草案(Draft Plan of the Temporary Capital in Ten Years), 1945, Chongqing Municipal Archives, archive no:

growth, it was the expansion of urban areas. One year after becoming the Temporary Capital, the built-up areas in Chongqing City had doubled.²⁸ Due to the more and more serious housing deficiency in the city central, also for the need of evacuation under Japanese bombing, people started to reside farther away, resulting in the development of suburban regions, including the county seat of Hechuan as a satellite town of Chongqing. The expansion of urban areas raised greater need to improve public facilities in the meantime, which from the official angle, should meet the standard of a capital city. Although this goal had yet been completed by 1945 when the war was ended and Chongqing City finished its mission as the capital, the basic utility in Chongqing and nearby regions, such as the supply of tap water and electricity, did progress more quickly during this period.

Among the groups of immigrants, businessmen took up a big part. Between November 1938 and September 1939, about 26,000 refugees passed through Wanxian County on the Yangtze River on their way to Sichuan, and urban merchants made up 50 per cent of them.²⁹ Coming from many cities in Eastern and Northern China, these businessmen brought fresh content to Sichuan people's daily life, especially including the choice of dining and the style of clothing. Among the 260 restaurants in Chongqing City at that time, those providing dishes in Sichuan style took up 40 per

市府（补全宗）112号（Shifu, bu quanzong, no. 112）.

28 Tao Weiquan 陶维全 ed., 重庆大事记 *Chongqing dashiji (Chronicle of Events in Chongqing)* (Chongqing: Kexue Jishu Wenxian Chubanshe Chongqing Fenshe, 1989), 163.

29 Tan Gang 谭刚, “抗战时期人口内迁背景的西南大后方现代化” *Kangzhan shiqi renkou neiqian Beijing de xinan dahoufang xiandaihua (The Modernisation of Southwest Rear Area against the Background of Population during the Anti-Japanese War)*, 重庆社会科学 (*Chongqing shehui kexue*), 2012 (07): 111-16.

cent. In the meantime, restaurants serving other stylish dishes from Beijing, Zhejiang and Shanghai had an equivalent share. There were also 30 restaurants providing Western food.³⁰ Moreover, many native residents in the basin were attracted by the dress and hair style of immigrants. “In a few years, it becomes more common to see ladies with fashionable clothes, permed hair, and high-heeled shoes in Chongqing”.³¹ Besides, new types of businesses appeared in Chongqing included photo studios and dessert shops, most of which opened by businessmen from coastal cities like Shanghai.

Fresh elements did not only exist in material form, many new types of cultural activities enriched Sichuan people’s enjoyment in daily life at the same time, despite the danger and toughness during the wartime. As a researcher’s analysis of the film market in Chongqing City in the early 1940s, behind the prosperity in cinemas, it was a fierce competition among imported Western movies, domestic commercial films, and movies about Anti-Japanese War.³² In other words, audiences in Chongqing City could usually make a choice as they preferred when going to the cinema. During the same period, mobile projection teams were regularly sent to rural areas in Sichuan, serving peasants with the chance to enjoy a movie, which was a totally novel thing in the countryside. Not only films, performances of traditional operas and modern

30 Chongqing kangzhan congshu bianzuan weiyuanhui 重庆抗战丛书编纂委员会 [Editorial Committee of the Series of the Anti-Japanese War in Chongqing] ed., 抗战时期重庆的经济 *Kangzhan shiqi Chongqing de jingji (The Economy of Chongqing during the Anti-Japanese Period)* (Chongqing: Chongqing Chubanshe, 1995), 153.

31 Mao Dun 茅盾, “如是我见闻” *Rushi wo jianwen (These are what I saw)* in 四川的凸显 *Sichuan de tuxian (The Emergence of Sichuan)* ed. 施康强 Shi Kangqiang (Beijing: Zhongyang Bianyi Chubanshe, 2001), 162.

32 Yu Ji and He Xiaoyan 虞吉, 何晓燕, “大后方电影市场文化透析” *Dahoufang dianying shichang wenhua touxi (A Cultural Exploration of the Film Market in the Great Rear Area)*, 当代电影 (*Dangdai dianying*), 2007 (05): 42-45.

dramas were welcomed by people in the basin. The well-known *Wuji gongyan* (雾季公演 Public Performance in Fog Season) was conducted from 1941 in Chongqing when the heavy fog protected the city from Japanese bombing. In addition, the bombing stimulated a tide of donation for the Chinese Air Force. 1941 witnessed several sell-out performances of operas in Hechuan whose entire profit was used to buy planes for fighting Japan.

Together with the immigrants, it was the industrial relocation into Sichuan. Between 1938 and 1940, the government organised groups of factories moving from coastal areas to the hinterland, and a big part of them chose Sichuan as the destination. Many of those factories and workers stayed in Sichuan after the war, composing the industrial foundation and working-class in local areas. A cotton mill moved in Hechuan during this period. After 1949 it became one of the county's largest and most profitable enterprises until the 1980s. The workers there enjoyed an enviable position politically and economically for more than four decades.

At the end of the World War Two, Chongqing finished its mission as the Temporary Capital. Soon as the recovery of the land in Northern and Eastern China, large amounts of state organs, factories, and immigrants moved back from Sichuan. Whereas their influences that left in the Sichuan Basin did not disappear but remained significant in local people's everyday experiences.

In about half a century from the 1890s onward, the opening of the Chongqing Port signified the commencement of the modernisation in Sichuan, which was markedly accelerated during the War against Japan. Although the modernisation

process had yet finished by the 1940s, some substantial transformations had begun to influence Sichuan people's daily life since then. On the one hand, it was the convenience provided by public facilities resulting from industrialisation, gradually becoming necessary parts in people's everyday experiences. On the other hand, it was the consuming culture with Western style, as embodied in all these material and cultural products. Its imprints in reshaping Sichuan residents' habits and preferences in daily life persisted later on, even during the unprecedented era of socialism.

Section Three: Sichuan Entering the Era of Socialism

1. Adapting to the socialist life

Shortly after the final victory of the War against Japan, Chinese people again fell into a civil war from 1946 to 1949. Although Sichuan was not a major battlefield during this period, Sichuan residents suffered a lot from the economic crisis caused by the national chaos, which became worse and worse in 1949. In the first two months of that year, prices of food and other basic goods in Chongqing City soared fourfold.

One more month later, people witnessed another increase of seven times.³³ In

Hechuan County, paper currency with a face value of one billion appeared in markets.

Severe inflation made people's everyday life extremely difficult, also prompted

popular sentiments for regime change. Although the basin was still controlled by the

33 Tang Runming 唐润明, “解放前夕重庆各界实施‘经济自救’史料一组” Jiefang qianxi Chongqing gejie shishi ‘jingji ziji’ shiliao yizu (A Series of Historical Materials about ‘Saving the Economy by ourselves’ Conducted by Different Fields in Chongqing before the Take-over by the CCP), 档案史料与研究 (*Dang'an shiliao yu yanjiu*), 2002 (02): 32-39.

Nationalist Party and Chiang Kai-shek did not leave Sichuan until December 1949, once taken over by the CCP, it was soon involved in the national transformation to the socialist era. This section covers the obvious changes happened to Sichuan residents after 1949 when the PRC was founded and before 1966 when the Cultural Revolution started.

In the following decade, a series of thorough and far-reaching changes took place during the process of socialist transformation, greatly influencing every aspect of Sichuan people's lives. What happened during the 1950s decided the mode of their everyday experiences until the 1970s.

The most immediate change occurred in the CCP's re-establishing of authorities at local levels. In villages peasants' associations under the leadership of the CCP were soon founded from 1950. In rural Hechuan, by October 1950 all the old officials had been replaced by new cadres from the CCP. As a result, the influence of the new regime was greatly enhanced in the countryside. It changed Chinese long-lasting tradition that state power could hardly reach to the village level where clan forces played a dominant role. This shift paved the way for implementation of all the top-down policies in rural areas during the following years.

Another significant event took place at the same time was the Korean War. Although Sichuan is very far away from the battlefield, from the perspective of the new regime, the war was a good chance to strengthen Sichuan people's patriotism. In 1951, more than 27 million people in the whole province attended the officially organised demonstrations to support the war against the U.S., which was regarded as

Chinese people's best friend just five years ago.³⁴ In Hechuan, large-scale demonstrations on this theme were held at least twice between 1950 and 1951. Meanwhile, different ways of political education, propaganda, and mobilisation aiming to motivate people's sentiment in anti-Americanism were practised among residents, which can be seen as a rehearsal for all the political movements later on.

In the meantime, profound social changes happened both in rural and urban areas in the basin. From the end of 1950 to mid-1952, the theme in the countryside of Sichuan Province (except those regions populated by minorities) was land reform, in which a total of 54 million people involved.³⁵ In this process, Hechuan was a representative county which was observed by a team sent officially from Beijing. Its members included famous democrats and intellectuals such as Zhang Naiqi and Liang Shuming.³⁶ The reform completely changed not only the productive relations in the countryside, but also innumerable people's fate. In terms of the property each family owned by the early 1950s (especially the amount of farmland), everyone was classified into different classes, such as landlord, rich peasant, and poor peasant.

34 Pang Jialing 庞家陵, “强烈的爱国主义 巨大的精神奉献—记四川抗美援朝运动” *Qianglie de aiguo zhuyi juda de fengxian jingshen—ji Sichuan kangmei yuanchao yundong* (Strong Patriotism and Spiritual Contribution: Recording the Movement of Oppose America and Aid North Korea), *四川档案 (Sichuan Dang'an)*, 2013 (03): 33-35.

35 Hong Jian and Xu Xuechu 洪鉴, 徐学初, “建国初期四川的土地改革与乡村社会变动——当代四川农村现代化变革之个案分析” *Jianguo chuqi Sichuan de tudi gaige yu xiangcun shehui biandong—dangdai Sichuan nongcun xiandaihua biange zhi ge'an fenxi* (Land Reform and Social Transformation in Rural Areas during the Early Period of the People's Republic of China: A Case Study of the Modernisation in Rural Sichuan), *西南民族大学学报 (人文社科版) (Journal of Southwest Minzu University, Humanities and Social Science Edition)*, 2010 (12): 239-45.

36 Liang Shuming recorded his observations in rural Hechuan in his diaries between June to August 1951, which provided a view from intellectuals outside the CCP of land reform, see in Liang Shumin 梁漱溟, *梁漱溟日记 (上) Liangshumin riji (shang) (The Diaries of Liang Shuming, the First Part)* (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2014), 96-101.

Although the differences in private wealth were almost erased from then on, these labels remained and mattered as the crucial factor in the life of each individual and their descendants as the crucial standard for their engagement in social life t by the late 1970s.

In Sichuan, after the reform, more than 36 million poor peasants fulfilled their dream to have their own land.³⁷ But that was only the beginning, not the end of the drastic change in rural people's everyday life. The next momentous policy promoted in rural China, including Sichuan, was the state monopoly on the purchase of major agricultural products. From the autumn harvest time in 1953, the monopoly was first applied to grain. Oil and cotton products were included in this policy the next year. This process was put into practice together with the implementation of the planned distribution system, which indicated that people could no longer buy most daily goods freely. By 1955, in the whole province of Sichuan, specific tickets or coupons in most cases had become required for daily purchasing. Both the monopoly on purchase and distribution indicated the start of Chinese planned economy era. As for the production process in agriculture, organisation were officially strengthened among Sichuan peasants during the same period, which foreshadowed the collective farming that dominated rural China in the nearly three decades that followed. From the end of 1953, the Agricultural Cooperative Movement (农业合作化运动 *Nongye hezuohua*

37 Sichuansheng nongye hezuo jingji shiliao bianjizu 四川省农业合作经济史料编辑组 [Editorial Committee of the Historical Materials about the Agricultural Collective Economy in Sichuan Province] ed., 四川省农业合作经济史料 *Sichuansheng nongye hezuo jingji shiliao (Historical Materials about the Agricultural Collective Economy in Sichuan Province)* [SCNYHZ] (Chengdu: Sichuan Kexue Jishu Chubanshe, 1989), 39.

yundong) started in Sichuan. In the countryside of Hechuan, this movement was launched in September 1954. Three years later, 94.6 per cent of the rural households in Hechuan County had joined agricultural cooperatives.³⁸ These transformations in rural Sichuan reached a peak in August 1958 when the central of the CCP decided to establish people's communes nationally. Only one month later, this goal was quickly finished in Hechuan, as all the peasants became members of the 67 newly founded people's communes. Since then, peasants were no longer individual and free labourers, but were required to participate in the collective farming. On 1 October 1958, *Sichuan Daily* proudly declared the completion of peasants' communisation in the whole province.³⁹ Driven by the concept that the larger the commune is, the nearer communism is, the scale of a commune was usually over-sized. At the same time, 13,025 canteens in these communes began operation, aiming to provide free meals for peasants every day.⁴⁰ As a result, people were required to eat in the canteens, instead of cooking at home. Through the collectivisation of daily farming and dining, even including the trial of collective accommodation in some regions, similar to many other parts of rural China during the same period, from 1958 Sichuan peasants' work and life had been totally re-organised in the collective mode. However, it seemed that most of these attempts to change the productive relations in rural areas failed to lift the productivity as expected.

38 Yang Chengshu 杨成术 ed., 合川百年 *Hechuan bainian (One Hundred Years in Hechuan)* (Chongqing: Chongqing Chuban Jituan, 2013), 55.

39 Dangdai Zhongguo congshu bianweiyuan 当代中国编委会 [Editorial Committee of *Contemporary China*] ed. 当代中国的四川 (下) *Dangdai Zhongguo de Sichuan (xia) (Sichuan in Contemporary China, Second Half)*(Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1990), [DDSC] (*xia*), 707.

40 DDSC (*xia*), 61.

Significant changes also happened in urban areas at the same time. The main target to be transformed was the private industry and business. This movement all over the country occurred between 1953 and 1957, but Lu Zuofu's Minsheng Company signed the contract for a public-private partnership (公私合营 *gongsihaying*) as early as in August 1950, which might be the first model in Sichuan and even Southwest China. But Lu committed suicide in 1952 under the criticism from the CCP. The authority of Hechuan County in 1956 completed the transformation in batches of 354 industrial and commercial enterprises as well as 29 factories.⁴¹ From then on, the state-owned (全民所有 *quanmin suoyou*) or collective-owned (集体所有 *jiti suoyou*) units provided the only form of livelihood for most urban residents. In other words, at least one member of the family had to belong to such a unit to guarantee the legal residency of his or her family in urban areas. This was the so-called *danwei* system. Dominated by the planned economy, it was the basic organised way in the social structure of urban China, through which the state was much more capable to control and mobilise each individual.

These changes were consistent with the state's objective of industrialisation. According to official blueprints, Chengdu should not be a consuming city as it was. Instead, it needed to become an industrial city surrounded by factories in the early 1960s. The transformation even included people's private interest in how they spend their leisure time. In Chengdu City, the number of teahouses and their profits declined remarkably, since the traditional habit of spending time in a teahouse, quite opposite

41 Yang Chengshu, *Hechuan bainian*, 58.

from a mobilised life in revolutionary style, was no longer suitable. By the late 1950s, in Chengdu there were only some older residents still enjoying their peaceful leisure time in a limited number of small or remote teahouses that remained.⁴²

While the residents both in rural and urban areas were more and more tightly organised and mobilised, the freedom of relocating from rural to urban areas survived until 1957. As the recovery of the urban economy and the development of industry, many peasants left the countryside for a better life. Based on household statistics, between 1954 and 1957, in the whole country about 77 million people relocated.⁴³ In Sichuan, a poor harvest in the spring of 1953 further stimulated rural migration to urban areas. But those new-comers were usually regarded as an extra burden by city officials and residents.⁴⁴ Against this background, policies were announced aiming to limit free migration. Among them, the most influential one was the *Household Registration Ordinance* published in January 1958. This marked the starting point when the Household Registration System was formally applied to Chinese people. From then on, legally moving to urban areas, including cities and county seats, became very difficult for most peasants. In contrast, encouraging urban residents to move to the countryside repeatedly took place in those years.

42 Wang Di 王笛, “成都茶馆业的衰落—1950年代初期小商业和公共生活的变迁” Chengdu chaguanye de shuailuo—1950 niandai chuqi xiaoshangye he gonggong shenghuo de bianqian (The Decline of the Teahouses in Chengdu: The Transformations of Small Businesses and Public Life in the Early 1950s), 史学月刊 (*Shixue yuekan*), 2014 (04):85-94.

43 Zhongguo guojia tongjiju 中国国家统计局 [National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China (PRC)] ed., 中国人口统计年鉴 *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian* (*China Population Statistics Year Book*) (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 1986), 409.

44 “Duzhe laixin” 读者来信 (A Reader's Letter), 四川日报 *Sichuan ribao* (*Sichuan Daily*), April 5, 1953.

By 1958, all the achievements of transformation both in rural and urban areas seemed to meet the CCP's expectations. But an over-optimistic judgement of the situation and an over-anxious attitude to complete socialist construction soon resulted in an ambitious but unsuccessful experiment, the Great Leap Forward. Improving the output of grain and the production of steel were deemed the main ways to reach the goal of socialist construction. National policies and guidelines on this theme were released in May 1958, while the leaders of Sichuan Province appeared to be even more zealous. In January 1958, the proposed target for the growth of grain production in Sichuan was increased from 7 to 25 per cent.⁴⁵ In Hechuan County, from 1958 to 1959 the annual plan for grain production was enlarged again and again, eventually reaching six times of the original goal.⁴⁶ It was a similar story in steelmaking when tens of steel plants were newly founded in Hechuan County, no matter whether they suited the local condition or not. In this process, male and female adults were militarily organised as agricultural and steelmaking teams. Even children and teenagers involved in assistance work. Unfortunately, the expected goal either in grain production or steelmaking was never realised. On the contrary, the losses and damages caused by the Great Leap Forward were incalculable. In the economy alone,

45 Zhonggong Hechuan quwei dangshi difangzhi bangongshi 中共合川区委党史地方志办公室 [Office of Party History and Local Gazetteer of Hechuan District Committee of the CCP] ed., 中国共产党重庆历史 (合川区卷) *Zhongguo gongchandang Chongqing lishi (Hechuanqu juan) (The History of CCP in Chongqing, Hechuan District Volume)* [CQLS-Hechuan] (Chongqing: Chongqing Chuban Jituan, 2011), 131.

46 CQLS-Hechuan, 132.

the financial loss for Hechuan County was more than 30 million RMB,⁴⁷ not to mention the damages to forests, resources and the ecosystem.

Soon people had to face serious punishment resulting from disobeying natural and economic laws. From 1959 a very severe famine happened to the whole country, during which rural residents suffered the most. Sichuan was one of the provinces attacked by the most difficult situation. According to a provincial report, by April 1960 in the whole province there were 140 counties where unnatural deaths became much more frequent than the usual level.⁴⁸ Obviously the so-called unnatural death was a political euphemism covering up the tragic reality that starvation was the major factor. During the following two years, there seemed to be no melioration. In Hechuan County, officials recorded 4,417 unnatural deaths just in December 1961 and even more cases in the following month.⁴⁹ Actually, peasants in Sichuan probably had much more disastrous experiences compared with what was recorded officially.⁵⁰ No solid proof shows that there had been a natural disaster for agriculture lasting over three years, although it always exists in the official description. As a big province in Chinese agriculture, the terrible result in Sichuan related to a series of specific reasons. Besides the reduction of grain yield, in addition to the waste in collective dining, politics should not have played a significant role in the tragedy. Driven by the radical politics, many inappropriate policies in rural Sichuan were not revised in time,

47 CQLS-Hechuan, 134.

48 DDSC (*xia*), 710.

49 Yang Chengshu, *Hechuan bainian*, 65.

50 More details about the famine in Sichuan see in Yang Jisheng 杨继绳, 墓碑—中国六十年代大饥荒纪实 (上册) *Mubei—Zhongguo liushiniandai dajihuang jishi (shangce)* (*Tombstone: Records of Actual Events in the Great Famine in China during the 1960s, First Half*) (Hong Kong: Xianggang Tiandi Tushu, 2008), 84-115.

such as the strict prohibition on private plots. Due to political reasons as well, although being starved, Sichuan peasants still had to finish the state monopoly with a high standard, and large amounts of grain was transported to big cities like Beijing and Shanghai.⁵¹

It was not until early 1962 when the notable Seven-thousand Cadres Conference (七千人大会 *Qiqianren dahui*) finally set the tone for policy reconsideration and modification from the central of the CCP. In September 1962, the result of several months' investigation and discussion was an amended version of the *Sixty Regulations on Agriculture* (农业六十条 *Nongye liushitiao*). It indicated a stepping back from the Great Leap policies, as well as a recovery of agricultural productivity and local economy.

Based on the modified policies, the size and number of the people's communes were adjusted according to realistic conditions. There had been 5,887 communes in Sichuan Province by the late 1950s. But the number became 7,122 after 1961.⁵² Along with the adjustment, in each commune, production teams were regarded as an independent and basic accounting unit. Operating a large canteen in the countryside was no longer a requirement. All these modifications in fact aimed to avoid an extremely egalitarianism in the distribution process, so as to stimulate peasants' enthusiasm in production. In addition to collective farming, some looseness became available in peasants' private activities for profit making. The famine made people

51 Yang Jisheng, *Mubei*, 95.

52 SCNYHZ, 82.

recognise the significance of private plots, which were almost swept out during the communisation process. The *Sixty Regulations on Agriculture* clearly re-allowed peasants to keep some private plots (normally no more than five per cent of the total arable land in the village). What were rethought at the same time included the role of family side-lines, which were reconsidered as a necessary supplementary to the rural economy in socialist era. Not just raising poultry and pigs, but sericulture and handicraft industry by rural families were also permitted, in principle.⁵³ The restriction on rural markets was loosened as well. Although what could be traded was still limited (major agricultural products like grain and cotton were always excluded for state monopoly), the development of family side-lines further helped the recovery of free markets in the countryside. More policies for encouraging individuals' productivity were released successively. In 1965 the amount of the state monopoly on grain was fixed at a relatively low level. In the same year, the tax on pig raising and sales was largely decreased.⁵⁴ As a result of all these modifications, by 1965, the per capita net income in rural Sichuan improved by 25 per cent compared with the level before the Great Leap Forward.⁵⁵

53 Zhongguo guojia nongye weiyuanhui bangongting 中国国家农业委员会办公厅 [Office of the National Committee of Agriculture of the PRC] ed., 农业集体化重要文件汇编 (1958-1981) *Nongye jitihua zhongyao wenjian huibian (1958-1981)* (*Compilation of Important Documents for Agricultural Collectivisation: 1958-1981*) (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 1981), 463-64.

54 Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan, Zhongyang dang'an guan 中国社会科学院, 中央档案馆 [Chinese Academy of Social Science and the Central Archive] ed., 1958-1965 中华人民共和国经济档案资料选编 (农业卷) *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jingjidang'an ziliao xuanbian (nongyejuan)* (*Selected Collection of Economic Archives and Materials between 1958 and 1965*) (Beijing: Zhongguo Caizheng Jingji Chubanshe, 2011), 10.

55 DDSC (*xia*), 715.

One more notable modification during the early and mid-1960s in rural China including the countryside of Sichuan was the trial to fix farm output quotas for each household (包产到户 *baochan daohu*), which obviously opposed to the requirement of collective farming. It was in the beginning promoted by a number of provincial and county-level cadres, then for a period was supported by the Centre of the CCP. By estimation, between 1961 and 1964 about one-fifth of the production teams nationally fixed output quotas for each household.⁵⁶ Yet the percentage in some villages was perhaps much higher, such as those in Anhui Province where this trial was carried out earlier. In rural Sichuan, the situation in some counties was also noticeable, like Jiangbei County where the production teams conducting this trial made up 70 per cent.⁵⁷ In Hechuan County, just in the first three months of 1962, there were 1,024 production teams fixing output quotas for each household.⁵⁸

But this valuable and effective attempt was soon stopped due to the shift of central leaders' especially Mao Zedong's attitude. This shift actually indicated a struggle between two lines within the CCP about the way of China's development. In consequence, the better non-collective economy developed, the more concern and criticism came from the party cadres, especially at the central level. For fear of continuous development of private economy in rural areas, from 1963 the Four Clean-up Movement (四清运动 *Siqing yundong*) was launched in rural China, signifying

56 Bo Yibo 薄一波, 若干重大决策与事件的回顾 (下卷) *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu (xiajuan)* (Recalling Many Important Decisions and Events, Second Half) (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 1993), 1078.

57 Bo Yibo, 1078.

58 CQLS-Hechuan, 140.

that the atmosphere was politicised again. In Hechuan County, by 1964 nearly three-fifths of the communes and production teams had carried out the Four Clean-up Movement.⁵⁹ As a result, local cadres and peasants were criticised and punished because of their attempts aiming for a better life but impairing the collective farming to some degree.

Along with the changes in rural areas, a series of economic modifications, especially downsizing measures, were taken in cities and county seats. It was mainly due to the excessive recruitment of new workers for achieving the steelmaking goal in the Great Leap Forward. By 1960, the total number of workers in the whole country had doubled over three years before.⁶⁰ In order to reduce the burden of grain consumption in urban areas, from 1961 groups of people were mobilised to move (back) to the countryside. In two and a half years, more than 18 million workers were reduced nationally.⁶¹ In Hechuan, about 10 thousand workers who just settled in the county seat were mobilised to return agricultural production.⁶² Yet driven by the planned economy when job opportunities were also planned, the rustication of workers was not the whole picture of the migration from urban to rural areas at that time. From 1963, the Sent-down Youth Movement formally initiated nationwide. In the first three months of 1964, over 6,000 young adults from Chongqing City were organised to settle down in rural areas.⁶³ In this process, two communes in Hechuan

59 CQLS-Hechuan, 144.

60 Luo Pinghan 罗平汉, 大迁徙—1961-1963 年城镇人口精简 *Daqianxi—1961-1963 nian chengzhen renkou jingjian (The Great Migration: Urban Population Reduction, 1961-1963)* (Nanning: Guangxi Renmin Chubanshe, 2003), 3-4.

61 Luo Pinghan, 256.

62 CQLS-Hechuan, 140.

63 Sun Chengmin 孙成民, “四川知青上山下乡始末 (上篇)” *Sichuan zhiqing*

accepted 889 of them.⁶⁴ In the meantime, more than 2,000 young people in the county seat and major towns of Hechuan were also listed in the rustication plan.⁶⁵ By 1966, the total amount of sent-down youth in Sichuan Province was nearly 80,000.⁶⁶ All over the country, the number almost reached one million at the same time.⁶⁷ During that period, middle school graduates who could not continue further study or get a job composed the major part of those sent-down youth. During the Cultural Revolution, this movement was not ended, but continued on a much larger scale.

In the economic and social aspects, the last but not the least noteworthy event that occurred in Sichuan prior to the Cultural Revolution was the initiation of the Third-Front Construction. Due to anxiety about the international situation, in 1964 the Third-Front Project was proposed for the fear of possible invasion. Large numbers of factories were required to move from coastal areas to the hinterland, mainly Southwest and Northwest China, which were regarded as the third-frontier regions of the country. Sichuan Province was an important destination for the industrial relocation, where migrating factories settled in from 1965. By the next year, the total investment in Sichuan alone was 6.67 billion RMB, taking up almost one-seventh of the national budget on capital construction at the same time.⁶⁸ Although many of

shangshanxiaxiang shimo (shangpian) (The History of the Sent-down Youth in Sichuan, First Part), 四川党的建设 (城市版) (*Sichuan dangde jianshe*) (*chengshiban*), 2016 (06): 72-73.

64 Lu Zhiqian 陆支全 ed. 合川知青 *Hechuan zhiqing* (*Hechuan Sent-Down Youth*) (internal materials, 2015), 15.

65 Lu Zhiqian, 24.

66 Sun Chengmin, "Zhiqing shimo," 72-73.

67 Liu Xiaomeng, *Zhiqing shidian*, 14.

68 Ning Zhiyi and Liu Xiaolan 宁志一, 刘晓兰, "论三线建设与四川现代化进程" *Lun Sanxian jianshe yu Sichuan xiandaihua Jincheng* (Discussion on the Third-Front Construction and the Process of Sichuan Modernisation), *党史研究与教学* (*Dangshi jiaoxue yu yanjiu*), vol.150, 1999 (06): 30-37.

these factories relocated to mountainous regions, due to the overemphasis on the purpose of national defence, the large-scale construction still benefitted the local areas obviously. The city of Panzhihua on the southwest margin of the Sichuan Basin was an outstanding case, since it was totally constructed on wasteland by *Sanxian* workers. For most other cases, relocated in the countryside next to villages and towns, the arrival of the Third-Front factories exerted fresh and positive influences on local peasants, many of whom knew little about the outside world before. During this process, two factories moved to the countryside of Hechuan, and the first one settled down in 1965.

2. Embracing the new socialist culture

In addition to the dramatic transformations in people's political, economic, and social experiences, during the 17 years after 1949 there were also significant changes in Chinese people's cultural life. On the one hand, a series of cultural products were used and transformed by the CCP as effective tools for propaganda. On the other hand, traditional culture with local colour were still preferred by people at the grassroots.

As indicates by Paul Clark, from the foundation of the PRC, films, as a kind of 20th century entertainment, were regarded as a useful and significant medium to distribute a new type of mass culture, as well as the proletarian class values.⁶⁹ As early as in 1951, according to the official plan for all the cinemas in urban China,

⁶⁹ Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press 1987), 57.

more than 76 per cent of the films watched in that year should present themes consistent with the political ideals of the new regime.⁷⁰ By 1953, film production, management, and marketing were all owned and operated by the state. At the same time, there was unprecedented growth in film screening, particularly as a consequence of the Great Leap Forward in the film industry. Film attendance all over the country reached 4.15 billion by 1959, nearly 90 times that of ten years before. This level was probably maintained until the mid-1960s.⁷¹ Behind the astounding situation, it was the expansion of facilities for movie projection during the same period. By 1956, there were 952 cinemas in cities or county seats across China, one-third of which were newly built in the 1950s.⁷² In Chongqing City, the Shancheng Cinema was completed in 1960. Besides its grand appearance as a landmark, it was the only cinema which could display wide-screen films in Southwest China, leaving deep impressions in many Chongqing residents' memories throughout the following three decades. In Hechuan, there was only one cinema in the county seat until the 1970s, which was also responsible for mobile projection in schools and factories in the urban areas and countryside around. At the same time, full-time mobile projection teams started to provide films for rural residents. By 1959, as a big achievement of the Great Leap

70 Chen Bo 陈播 ed., 中国电影编年纪事 (发行放映卷·上) *Zhongguo dianying biannian jishi (faxing fangying juan · shang) (The Chronicle Events of Chinese Film: Distribution and Projection, First Part)*, (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2005), 10.

71 Clark, *Chinese Cinema*, 57.

72 Liu Siyu 刘思羽, “电影院与国家政治动员—‘十七年’中国电影院建设述论” *Dianyingyuan yu guojia zhengzhi dongyuan—‘shiqinian’ Zhongguo dianyingyuan jianshe shulun (Cinema and the State’s Political Mobilisation: A Discussion on the Construction of Chinese Cinemas in the 17 years)*, 当代电影 (*Dangdai dianying*), 2013 (11): 52-57.

Forward, there had been over 12,500 projection units in China.⁷³ Given the fact that three years earlier the number of cinemas across the country was less than 1,000, undoubtedly the majority of the expansion took place through the form of mobile teams in the countryside. Admittedly, many of them could not survive the famine closely followed. The first mobile projection team arrived in rural Hechuan in November 1953. By 1965, there were totally ten teams which kept travelling around the rural areas of the county.⁷⁴

During the process of film screening, people both in urban and rural areas were educated and trained to be new audiences. Especially since many Chinese peasants had not accessed any movie before, it was officially viewed as an effective tool to disseminate the socialist culture, as well as to change outmoded customs in rural China.⁷⁵ In addition, it was a way of political mobilisation. Due to the low literacy rate among peasants, members in projection teams were also responsible for explaining the content of the movies. Either in oral form or by slides, usually they

73 *Guangming ribao pinglunyan* 光明日报评论员 [Commentator of *Guangming Daily*], “全国电影放映事业发展壮大” *Quanguo dianying fangying shiye fazhan zhuangda* (The National Industry of Movie Projection is Becoming Stronger), 光明日报 *Guangming ribao* (*Guangming Daily*), December 23, 1959.

74 *Hechuanxian wenhua yishu zhi bianji weiyuanhui* 合川县文化艺术志编辑委员会 [Editorial Committee of *Gazetteer of Culture and Art of Hechuan County*] ed. 合川县文化艺术志 *Hechuanxian wenhua yishu zhi* (*Gazetteer of Culture and Art of Hechuan County*) [HCWY] (internal materials, 1988), 324.

75 Sun Jia 孙加, “深入农村普及放映 做社会主义新文化的尖兵” *Shenru nongcun puji fangying zuo shehuizhuyi xinwenhua de jianbing* (Deeply Generalise Movie Projection, Promote the New Socialist Culture), *Dazhong dianying* (*Dazhong dianying*), 1964 (01), quoted from: Zhang Qizhong 张启忠, “‘露天电影’与农村的文化启蒙—十七年农村电影放映网的历史分析” *‘Lutian dianying’ yu nongcun de wenhua qimeng* (Open-air Movies and Cultural Enlightenment in Rural Areas: Historical Analysis of the Network of Rural Movie Projection in the 17 Years), *Yishu pinglun* (*Yishu pinglun*), 2010 (08): 49-54.

would connect the films with the national movements and policies at that time, so as to achieve the educational or mobilising effect.

But the actual situation might not have matched official expectations. In many cases the genres and subjects of the films were not interesting to rural viewers, especially some documentaries of current affairs and agricultural science. Yet as summarised by some researchers, those kinds of movies made up the major proportion of the copies distributed to rural areas during that period.⁷⁶ Other barriers included comparatively high price for tickets (given peasants' income level) and inadequate screenings in the countryside. Meanwhile, projection teams commonly preferred to arrange more sessions in big or centre towns with relatively convenient transportation, rather than remote regions. In one county of Xuzhou Prefecture, in the northern Jiangsu Province, the sessions of mobile projection in the county seat and some towns were over two times of those in the distant countryside, though peasants made up 98 per cent of the population there.⁷⁷ It was almost the same situation in Sichuan by the early 1960s, as indicated in the work plan of a projection team in Jiangjin County, about 100 kilometres south of Hechuan.⁷⁸

76 Liu Dishan 柳迪善, “十七年时期电影在农村的考察” *Shiqinian shiqi dianying zai nongcun de kaocha* (An Exploration of Movies in Rural Areas in the 17 years), 电影艺术 (*Dianying yishu*), vol.350, 2013 (03): 112-19.

77 Jin Cao 金草, “再深入, 再普及! 江苏省 1958 年农村电影工作的一项重要任务” *Zai shenru, zai puji! Jiangsusheng 1958 nian nongcun dianying gongzuo de yixiang zhongyao renwu* (Further Deepen, and Further Generalise! An Important Task in Rural Cinema in Jiangsu Province in 1958), 电影放映 (*Dianying fangying*), 1958 (02), quote from: Liu Dishan, 112-19.

78 Liu Guangyu 刘广宇, “1949-1976: 江津农村电影放映队的历史沿革及运作机制” 1949-1976: *Jiangjin nongcun dianying fangyingdui de lishi yange ji yunzuo jizhi* (1949-1976: The Historical Development and Operation Mechanism of Rural Movie Teams in Jiangjin), 当代电影 (*Dangdai dianying*), 2008 (10): 61-65.

In the meantime, urban residents might have similar feelings of dissatisfaction, although film copies were much more accessible to them. The expansion of screenings did not bring with it the diversification of subjects or genres. This situation was actually related to the popular but simplified view of movie-making, in which “servicing the workers, peasants, and soldiers was considered to be done by just filming the real lives”.⁷⁹ Later as the political atmosphere turned much more intense from the late 1950s onward, the types and themes in Chinese cinema became even more monotonous. While people’s personal tastes or preferences were always ignored and kept hidden.

Related to modern technology, one more cultural product which was successfully applied by the CCP as a useful tool of propaganda and deeply involved in people’s daily life after 1949 was radio broadcasting. In 1955, Mao Zedong raised the proposal that, through the construction of a wired broadcasting network, in seven years Chinese peasants in every commune could listen to broadcasts. Besides broadcasts in rural areas, there were 135 radio stations nationwide by 1961 providing service to urban residents.⁸⁰ In Sichuan Province, at least six radio stations had been established in several major cities by 1952, followed by the construction of a (both wired and wireless) network throughout the whole province.⁸¹ From then on, listening to the

79 Zhong Dianfei 钟惦斐, 钟惦斐文集 *Zhong Dianfei wenji (Collected Works of Zhong Dianfei)* (Beijing: Huaxia Chubanshe, 1994), 297 and 348.

80 Zhang Junde 张骏德, “试论新中国广播事业 60 年的历史经验” *Shilun xinzhongguo guangbo shiye de lishi jingyan (Discussion on the Historical Experiences of Broadcasting in China over 60 Years)*, *新闻记者 (Xinwen jizhe)*, 2009 (10): 51-54.

81 Lu Yuan 陆原, “四川广播电视发展简况” *Sichuan guangbo dianshi fazhan jiankuang (A Brief Summary of the Development of Broadcasting and Television in Sichuan)*, *新闻传播与研究 (Xinwen chuanbo yu yanjiu)*, 1987 (04): 102-08.

radio was an important way of knowing about national affairs and policies for many Sichuan residents. It also became a part of people's cultural life in every day. In the countryside, every day the loudspeakers that kept working in time played a significant role in the organisation and mobilisation of vast rural population.

Apart from these cultural activities with modern techniques, a series of traditional and folk culture, due to the vitality rooted in local areas, still played an alive part in people's life, although under the guidance of the CCP too. Notable instances were different kinds of traditional operas, which were required to be reformed based on an official guideline issued in May 1951. In the reform, the targets especially included old subjects inconsistent with the values and culture that were advocated by the CCP.⁸² Since then, no matter the political environment for cultural activities turned to tighter or looser, integrating local and traditional culture into the national ideology and the discourse system was always the major thrust. As for the audiences in local areas, considerable gaps persisted between their private interest in cultural enjoyment and what was promoted by the state.

In Sichuan Province, there were in total 154 professional opera troupes by the end of 1952, most of which focused their performances on Sichuan Opera, which, as mentioned previously, had been popular in the basin since the Qing Dynasty.⁸³ On the

82 Zhonghua renmin gongheguo zhengwuyuan 中华人民共和国中央人民政府政务院 [State Council of the PRC], “政务院关于戏曲改革工作的指示 (五·五指示)” Zhengwuyuan guanyu xiqu gaige gongzuo de zhishi (wu · wu zhishi) (State Council's Instructions on Opera Reform, May 5 Instructions). Beijing, 5 May 1951.

83 Peng Changdeng 彭长登, “川剧历史上的‘黄金时代’从何而来—五十年代贯彻‘五·五’指示情况纪略” Chuanju lishi shang de ‘huangjin shidai’ congheerlai—wushiniandai guanche wuwu zhishi qingkuang jilue (A Golden Age of Sichuan Opera: A Brief Record about the process of implementing the 5 May Instructions in the 1950s), 四川戏剧 (*Sichuan xiju*), 1992 (03): 11-15.

one hand, the state now had ownership of all these troupes. In Hechuan County, several private troupes were combined into a new one owned and run by the state in 1951. On the other hand, all the old-style Sichuan Operas on the programme were double-checked if to see they fully met the new criteria. By 1957 about three hundred plays survived.⁸⁴ In the meantime, the creation of modern operas (on revolutionary themes) was encouraged. As a result of the reform, in 1958 a series of large-scale joint performances of Sichuan Opera both in modern and traditional styles were enjoyed by residents in Chengdu and Chongqing.

Yet in rural Sichuan, the situation was probably similar to a scholar's discovery in a village of Hebei Province, where, compared with films and broadcasts, amateur performances in the old style still featured more in peasants' cultural life.⁸⁵ In the countryside of Hechuan, in 1956 there were 702 amateur troupes formed by peasants. Their performances attracted more than 200 thousand attendances.⁸⁶ At the same time, lots of amateur singing and dancing troupes were active in rural and urban Hechuan. In comparison, most of the songs people sang had revolutionary themes, but the dances performed and enjoyed by local residents were mainly in the traditional style, such as the lion and dragon dance. Another interesting phenomenon in Hechuan was, as recorded in the gazetteer, the amateur performances in villages or communes

84 Peng Changdeng, 11-15.

85 Zhang Hairong 张海荣, "20 世纪五六十年代乡村文化的'变'与'不变'—基于冀北赤城县苏寺村戏班的个案考察" *Ershi shiji wuliushiniandai xiangcun wenhua de 'bian'yu 'bubian'—jiyu jibei chichengxian susicun xiban de ge'an kaocha* (Changed and Unchanged Things in Rural Culture during the 1950s and 1960s: A Case Study on a Troupe in a Village in Northern Hebei Province), *史学月刊 (Shixue yuekan)*, 2015 (03): 64-69.

86 HCWY, 181.

normally took place during traditional festivals, such as the Chinese New Year, while most formal performances in the county seat or higher level happened during the new holidays established by the PRC, including 1st May (Labour Day), 1st July (Birthday of the CCP), and 1st October (National Day).⁸⁷

During the famine from the late 1950s, in Hechuan County, the record of cultural activities participated by grassroots people suddenly disappeared from the gazetteer until 1964, except the performances officially promoted for the tenth anniversary of the PRC (1st October 1959).⁸⁸ The reappearance was probably not a coincidence with the recovery of the economy in local areas. Until the start of the Cultural Revolution, aforementioned gaps and tensions existed between the private preferences of residents at the grassroots and the official intervention from the state.

Both the recent and longer-term history in Sichuan, as introduced in this chapter, produced and reinforced the characterised habits of life and expectations among its inhabitants that were hard to ignore or eliminate. As we shall see in the following chapters, even an event as politicised as the Cultural Revolution failed to generate overwhelming or long-lasting disruption to the habitual styles and tastes in the world of Sichuan people's everyday life. This continuity contrasts with the aims of the Cultural Revolution and the conventional claims of many historians of the era.

87 HCWY,185-86.

88 HCWY, 190 and 194.

Chapter Three: THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF COUNTY-SEAT RESIDENTS IN SICHUAN DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

During the spring of 1966, most ordinary people in China were experiencing some benefits in their quality of life to varying degrees, as a result of the continuous recovery and gradual improvement in the national economy. As the statistics in Sichuan indicated, by 1966 the gross output value of industry and agriculture in the whole province had increased more than 60 per cent compared with the situation three years before. As a result, Sichuan people's total volume of retail sales had a 50 per cent growth during the same period.¹ Nevertheless, at that time perhaps very few people realised that a thunderstorm was brewing at the central level of the CCP, soon after which the conflicts in the leadership of the party would bring a tremendous and prolonged disaster to the life of every ordinary individual all over the country.² By the summer of that year, a series of conferences held at the central level of the CCP and the documents issued thereafter declared the commencement of the Cultural Revolution.³ In the next few months, this movement was expanded from big cities like Beijing and Shanghai to the whole country, leading a national disorder in Chinese society and disturbing the life of almost all individuals in China. From the next year onward, the fighting between contradictory factions of Red Guards and rebels, in

1 DDSC (*shang*), 152.

2 As for the duration of the Cultural Revolution, in Chinese official statements it lasted ten years to 1976. In academia, most scholars consider 1968 or 1969 as the ending of the actual Cultural Revolution upheaval, though its effects lasted until beyond the death of Mao Zedong in September 1976. In this paper, people's luxury consumption in the ten-year period (between 1966 and 1976) will be discussed.

3 The most crucial conferences included the enlarged meeting of the Political Bureau in May 1966 which released the Notice of May 16th (五一六通知 *Wuyiliu tongzhi*) and the 11th Plenary Session of the 8th CCP Central Committee in August that year which issued the Sixteen Regulations (十六条 *Shiliutiao*).

addition to their attempts to seize the local power from provincial to county or even communal level, made the situation even more chaotic.

During this process, Sichuan Province was one of the areas where the heaviest price was paid including economic loss and human casualties. The factional fighting that took place in Chongqing City was especially well-known and there was even a fierce battle of warships on the Yangtze River. The social unrest lasting for almost three years undoubtedly exerted significant influences in Sichuan residents' life experiences. Although the society was basically reordered after the end of the 1960s, the social environment which had been highly politicised up to then persisted throughout the era of the Cultural Revolution.

For my exploration about people's daily life in Hechuan County during the Cultural Revolution, from the dimension of the political movement, this was the national and provincial background. In this chapter, the focus of my discussion is on residents in the urban areas of Hechuan,⁴ intending to present a picture of urban people's daily experiences in Sichuan county at that time.

Section one: A County-Level Context of People's Material Lives during the Cultural Revolution

Although Hechuan was not as big a city as Chongqing or Chengdu, on behalf of the almost 100 counties in the Sichuan Basin, what the county-seat residents in Hechuan

⁴ In addition to the county seat of Hechuan, the urban areas of the county included a number of towns and several factories and mines which located out of the county seat, since people legally lived in these places as well had the household registration of urban residents and the ration of most goods needed in every day.

experienced during those years probably represented the majority of urban people's lives throughout Sichuan. Given the restrict limitation on people's mobility to big cities, those living in Chengdu or Chongqing, the largest cities of the province, actually enjoyed a more privileged life than most other residents of Sichuan.

For people in the county seat of Hechuan, in the first place, the launch and expansion of the Cultural Revolution brought severe disruption to their everyday life, though lots of them did not involve in the factional conflicts at all. As admitted in the official narration, due to a sudden interruption to transportation and production, the supply of the major basic goods for daily use, including meat, oil, and even salt, was in critical shortage in most cities and counties of Sichuan, excluding Chengdu and Chongqing, the largest cities in the province.⁵ Influenced by the fierce fighting taking place in Chongqing City, the situation in Hechuan County was not stable either. Two opposite factions kept conflicting in the county seat, significantly changing residents' daily experiences. As a person who migrated to Hong Kong from Hechuan in the 1980s recollected in her memoir, "at the time when the fight was most intense, the previously busy streets of the county seat were usually empty. To keep safe, most stores remained closed and few people dared to step out of their homes".⁶

Against such an abnormal background, in addition to the social upheaval, the economic decline was the fundamental factor obstructing people's attempt to continue

5 DDSC (*shang*), 156.

6 Zhang Yisong 張怡松, "文革十年的記憶與失憶" Wen'ge shinian de jiyiyu shiyi (The Memory and Amnesia about the Ten-year Cultural Revoution), 文化研究@嶺南 (电子版) (Cultural Studies @ Lingnan, electronic version), vol. 272012 (02). https://ln.edu.hk/mcs/archive/27th_issue/feature_02.shtml (accessed on June 15, 2019).

their life as normally as possible. From the national perspective, as officially recorded, there was an obvious decrease in the Gross National Income from 1966 to 1968 (between 1966 and 1967 it decreased by 7.2 per cent, in 1968 the annual slump was 6.5 per cent).⁷ The situation in Sichuan Province seemed to be even more serious, where the total output of industry and agriculture declined by 17.4 per cent on average between 1966 and 1968.⁸ We can access the picture more concretely when connecting the data on per capita consumption of basic materials for people's living. The whole country was almost in a stagnated state throughout the ten-year period of the Cultural Revolution. From 1966 to 1976, for grain, consumption per capita increased only 1 kilogram, for meat the improvement was only 0.2 kilogram, and for vegetable oil consumption per capita reduced 0.15 kilogram.⁹ Although the nationwide disorder had been stopped by the end of the 1960s, and the national economic operation returned to a basically normal status from the early 1970s onward, some scholars have argued the population burden from the high birth rate during the same period probably accounted for the prolonged stagnation of Chinese people's consumption levels throughout the decade of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁰ Similar kinds of standstill in the purchase of many basic commodities existed in Sichuan as well. In this process, there

7 Li Chengrui 李成瑞, “十年内乱期间我国经济情况分析—兼论这一期间统计数字的可靠性” *Shinian neiluan qijian woguo jingji qingkuang fenxi—jianlun zheyi qijian tongji shuzi de kekaoxing* (Analysis on the Chinese Economy during the Ten-year Chaos—also Discussion the Reliability of the Statistics in the same Period), *中国统计 (Zhongguo tongji)*, 1984 (7) :19-21.

8 DDSC (*shang*), 158.

9 Li Chengrui, 19-21.

10 Gong Shaoyue 龚绍岳, “我国建国以来的消费状况分析” *Woguo jianguo yilai de xiaofei zhuangkuang fenxi* (Analysis of Chinese Consumption since the Foundation of the PRC), *中国石油大学学报 (社会科学版) (Journal of China University of Petroleum, Social Sciences Edition)*, No. 18, 2002 (6) :16-19.

was undoubtedly another crucial factor: the system of rationed supply and the requirement of specific tickets for most goods needed in people's daily life. As the core system regulating individuals' consuming activities in the era of a planned economy, it did suppress the capability of most residents' daily consumption. Apart from the tickets needed, to have enough cash on hand was another necessary thing for people's ability to purchase as they needed or desired every day. But the results in reality usually turned out to be unsatisfying. As noted by Sun Peidong in her research about people's consumption on clothes during that ten-year era, normally individuals and families could save little money after their most basic needs had been met, making it really difficult for them to get new clothes all the year-round.¹¹

Based on all the information mentioned above, it seems safe to conclude that during the period of the Cultural Revolution, most Chinese people, including those living in urban areas, had quite a simple and plain experience in their material life. This was also one of the people's most popular impressions about the Cultural Revolution. It was certainly true when discussing the general and overall picture. Nonetheless, by taking a deeper and more detailed exploration of that decade in different phases and at different levels, we may access some parts of residents' material experiences which were not always in line with the popular impressions about the Cultural Revolution. To comprehend these phenomena, a re-examination

11 Sun Peidong 孙沛东, 时尚与政治: 广东民众日常着装时尚 *Shishang yu zhengzhi: Guangdong minzhong richang zhuozhuang shishang (Fashion and Politics: Everyday Clothing Fashion of Cantonese People 1966-1976)* (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2013), 83.

and rediscovery of the economy during those years, both from the national perspective and in the local areas, are likely to provide some useful clues.

From the top-down angle, from the early 1970s onward, a series of very noticeable transformations happened to the national economy. Specific embodiments of these changes included the remarkable enlargement in the job opportunities and the resulting considerable growth of people's income. As summarised by Premier Zhou Enlai, in 1971 alone there were three situations exceeding (三个突破 *sange tupo*) the national plan of the economy: the entire number of employees was more than 50 million, the total expenditure of salary exceeded 30 billion RMB, and the total sales of grain exceeded 40 billion kilograms.¹² Driven by the mode of the planned and publicly owned economy, in most cases to be employed meant getting a wage from the state and having the legal residency in urban areas. Normally regarded by Chinese peasants as “*tiao nongmen*” (跳农门 leaving the countryside) and “*chi gongliang*” (吃公粮 eating grain from the state, actually from the grain tax paid by peasants), it was undoubtedly the most desirable thing for rural families. Whereas for the CCP and the government (from the central to basic levels), it became a huge burden of finance.

On the one hand, this trend could be understood as a further extension of the economic recovery from the early 1960s, although once being interrupted between 1966 and 1969. The development in the first half of the 1960s had laid a solid foundation for the continuous improvement of the national economy, once the social

12 Liu Suinian and Wu Qungan. 柳随年, 吴群敢, 文化大革命时期的国民经济: 1966-1976 *Wenhua dageming shiqi de guomin jingji: 1966-1976 (The National Economy during the Cultural Revolution: 1966-1976)* (Harbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1986), 59.

and political conditions allowed. On the other hand, the specific background of the Cultural Revolution unexpectedly made the economy less controlled by the national plan. As an aftermath of the three-year chaos, for local areas, the controlling force from the centre of the CCP was loosened, and so was the relationship between the provincial and more basic authorities. Even after the social order was restored at the end of the 1960s, the plan of economic development had not been fully re-established or strictly complied with, although the so-called Fourth Five-year Plan (四五计划 *Si-wu jihua*) started in 1971. The relative freedom in regional authorities, as a consequence, made it possible to develop the economy as per the local situations and contributed to the aforementioned *sange tupo* in the national economy as planned.

To be more specific, these situations of surpassing the plan mainly resulted from large-scale recruitment for industrial project expansion. At the same time, significant numbers of temporary workers became formally employed, there was also a certain degree of raises in the salary level for workers (especially the older ones). From the perspective of the Centre of the CCP, all these were worrisome things as well as alarming phenomena under the planned economy. Regardless, for each worker and his or her family during that era, to have a formal job, as described above, indicated a dependable guarantee for the rest of their life. The expansion of job opportunities could, in return, stimulate the melioration of the economy in local areas, although it was not an expected result or a planned target in the mode of the planned economy.

Once being heeded by the Centre of the CCP, this active tendency of the national economy was suspended from 1972. At the same time, in the first half of the

1970s, the unstable atmosphere in politics repetitively influenced the economic and social situation. In consequence, as summarised by some researchers, the national economy throughout the Cultural Revolution era experienced ups and downs periodically.¹⁴ This summary provides a general background and an authentic basis for further exploration of people's everyday experiences in their material lives.

In Sichuan, besides the situation consistent with the national trends, more specifically, the economy and job markets in local areas seemed to be more directly benefitted by the conduction of the Third-Front projects which commenced in mid-1965 and lasted throughout the 1970s. As a national movement of industrial relocation for fear of potential invasion, as mentioned before, Sichuan Province in Southwest China was chosen as a major destination. In just two years (1964 and 1965), together with the relocation of almost 100 factories and scientific units, more than 37,000 workers moved into Sichuan Province.¹⁵ Taking the family members that came with many workers, just in the starting phase of the Third-Front construction, there were probably more than 100,000 people migrating into Sichuan from big cities outside. Although the majority of them settled in remote or hilly regions due to the requirement of war preparedness, as a group of privileged people with good jobs and from advanced areas, their arrival still brought significant influence to the society and economy of Sichuan. In the meantime, the Third-Front factories conducted the recruitment of new workers from local residents as soon as they settled down. By the

14 Chen Donglin 陈东林 ed. 1966-1976 中国国民经济概况 1966-1976 *Zhongguo guomin jingji gaikuang (1966-1976 The General Situation of the Chinese National Economy)* (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 2016), 18.

15 DDSC (*shang*), 150.

end of 1965, the workforce in all the state-owned enterprises of Sichuan was 30 per cent more than that three years ago.¹⁶ Obviously, immigrant workers from outside and green hands hired locally in the Third-Front factories composed the majority of the considerable increment. Even during the most chaotic stage of the Cultural Revolution, for the communities mainly formed by newcomers, thanks to their innate gap from local residents and authorities, in most cases the fierce fighting did not generate a very big influence there. By the end of 1976, compared with eleven years before, the gross value of the industrial and agricultural output of Sichuan Province had increased by 76.5 per cent.¹⁷ Although the increasing rate was lower than the average national level, it could not have been achieved without the immigration and contribution of Third-Front factories to Sichuan.

The situation in Hechuan, a typical county in the Sichuan Basin, throughout the Cultural Revolution decade was not an exception either from the national or provincial trends as discussed above.

Using the local gazetteers of Hechuan, a series of statistics and records can probably help us get nearer to the real picture of the economy and society in the rural areas of the county during the ten-year era. As a result of the economic recovery from the early 1960s, plus the settlement of two Third-Front factories, more and more job opportunities outside the countryside, which meant the chance of *tiao nongmen* and *chi gongliang*, became available for residents in Hechuan.

¹⁶ During the era of planned economy in China, the state-owned enterprises played the dominant role in the national economy and provided the most attractive job opportunities for Chinese people.

¹⁷ DDSC (*shang*), 185.

Those especially attractive job opportunities came from the enterprises owned by the state (全民所有制企业 *quanmin suoyouzhi qiye*). In the two years before the Cultural Revolution commenced, 3,189 people in the county seat of Hechuan had been recruited by these kinds of plants and units.¹⁸ During the same period, along with the expanding scale of production, 1,787 people from rural Hechuan took jobs in these factories. According to national policy introduced since that era, they would engage in industrial production and return to agricultural work alternatively.¹⁹ Although this expanding tendency of personnel was suspended between 1967 and 1969, from 1970 to 1972, 3,258 fortunate Hechuan residents began their formal jobs in these enterprises. This number did not include 1,861 youngsters who got the chance to replace their parents' positions in the factories based on the policies during that period.

On the other hand, the so-called collective-owned enterprises (集体所有制企业 *jiti suoyouzhi qiye*) started to develop in Hechuan after the early 1970s, mainly on the basis of local workshops a part of which had existed even before 1949. Although on a much smaller scale than the state-owned enterprises, usually founded and owned by streets or communes, this kind of firm also provided at least a dependable means for individuals to live an urban life. Based on official expectation, their existence was to ease the pressure of employment in urban areas. As mentioned above, while over

18 Hechuanxian laodong renshiju 合川县劳动人事局 [Bureau of Labour and Personnel of Hechuan County] ed., 合川劳动人事志 *Hechuanxian laodong renshi zhi* (*Gazetteer of Labour and Personnel in Hechuan*) [HCLR] (internal materials, 1990), 25.

19 HCLR, 25-27.

3,000 Hechuan people started work in the state-owned factories between 1970 and 1972, almost 7,000 of their peers entered collective-owned factories in the county. Notable instances of this kind of firm included two processing plants for machine parts, a clothing factory, a furniture plant and a garage, which was the first one in the county, all of which were located around the centre of the county seat.²⁰ Comparable opportunities also appeared in the countryside from the beginning of the 1970s. In order to promote the industry focusing on chemical fertilizer, cement, and machinery, known as five small enterprises (五小企业 *wuxiao qiye*), there was a tide when counties and communes were encouraged to found and operate such kind of plants. By 1972, a total of 7,863 peasants in Hechuan had received the chance to work there, including 3,898 of them as temporary staff.²¹

In addition to all the opportunities provided by local factories, the construction of Third-Front projects also brought new chances to Hechuan County. Between 1964 and 1965 alone 4,996 peasants were recruited from rural Hechuan to support the construction of two Third-Front factories settled into the county.²² From then on successively there were groups of Hechuan youth starting work in those two factories.

Undoubtedly, the more jobs available in Hechuan, the larger the amount of total salary paid to workers in the county the majority of whom lived in the county seat.

However, each individual worker had to accept the stagnation of his or her wage for

20 Heyang zhenzhi bianzhuang weiyuanhui 合阳镇志编撰委员会 [Editorial Committee of *Gazetteer of Heyang Town* (the county seat of Hechuan County)] ed., 合阳镇志 *Heyang zhenzhi* (*Gazetteer of Heyang Town*) [HYZZ] (internal materials, 1988), 44-49.

21HYZZ, 44-49.

22 HCLR, 27.

quite a few years. Due to the national policy of “high accumulation and low consumption”,²³ the long-term continuation of the eight-tier wage system for industrial workers,²⁴ and the cancellation of piece-work wages and incentive policies after the initiation of the Cultural Revolution, nothing exciting happened to the income level of workers in Hechuan until the end of 1971. In that year, based on the upper-level instructions, 52.8 per cent of the employees (mostly senior ones) not only in factories but also from bureaus and other work units in the county finally had their salary improved. The average raise was 6.57 RMB monthly.²⁵ In terms of the wage system at that time, normally a worker could get at least 30 RMB per month after finishing his or her apprenticeship and becoming first-grade staff (一级工 *yiji gong*). As for temporary and other kinds of informal workers, according to the provincial policy of Sichuan at that time, for grain ration and salary level, they enjoyed the same treatment as formal staff.²⁶ In the meantime, between 1972 and 1973, 2,306 among those informal workers no longer needed to worry about losing attractive welfare benefits, since they were lucky to become permanent members in their factories, which was a quick application of the policy issued by the State Council.²⁷

23 Wang Guanzhong, Zheng Wentao, and Han Hua 王冠中, 郑文涛, 韩华 ed., 中国当代社会史 (第三卷) (1966-1978) *Zhongguo dangdai shehuishi (disanjuan) (1966-1978) (Social History of Contemporary China) (Volume 3) (1966-1978)* (Changsha: Hunan remin chubanshe, 2011), 252-53.

24 Yang Jianjun 杨建军, “浅议我国工资制度的发展与变革” *Qianyi woguo gongzi zhidu de fazhan yu biange (Discussion of the Development and Reform of the Wage System in China)*, 延安大学学报 (社会科学版) (*Journal of Yan'an University, Social Science Edition*), vol. 26, No. 3, 2004 (06): 85-87.

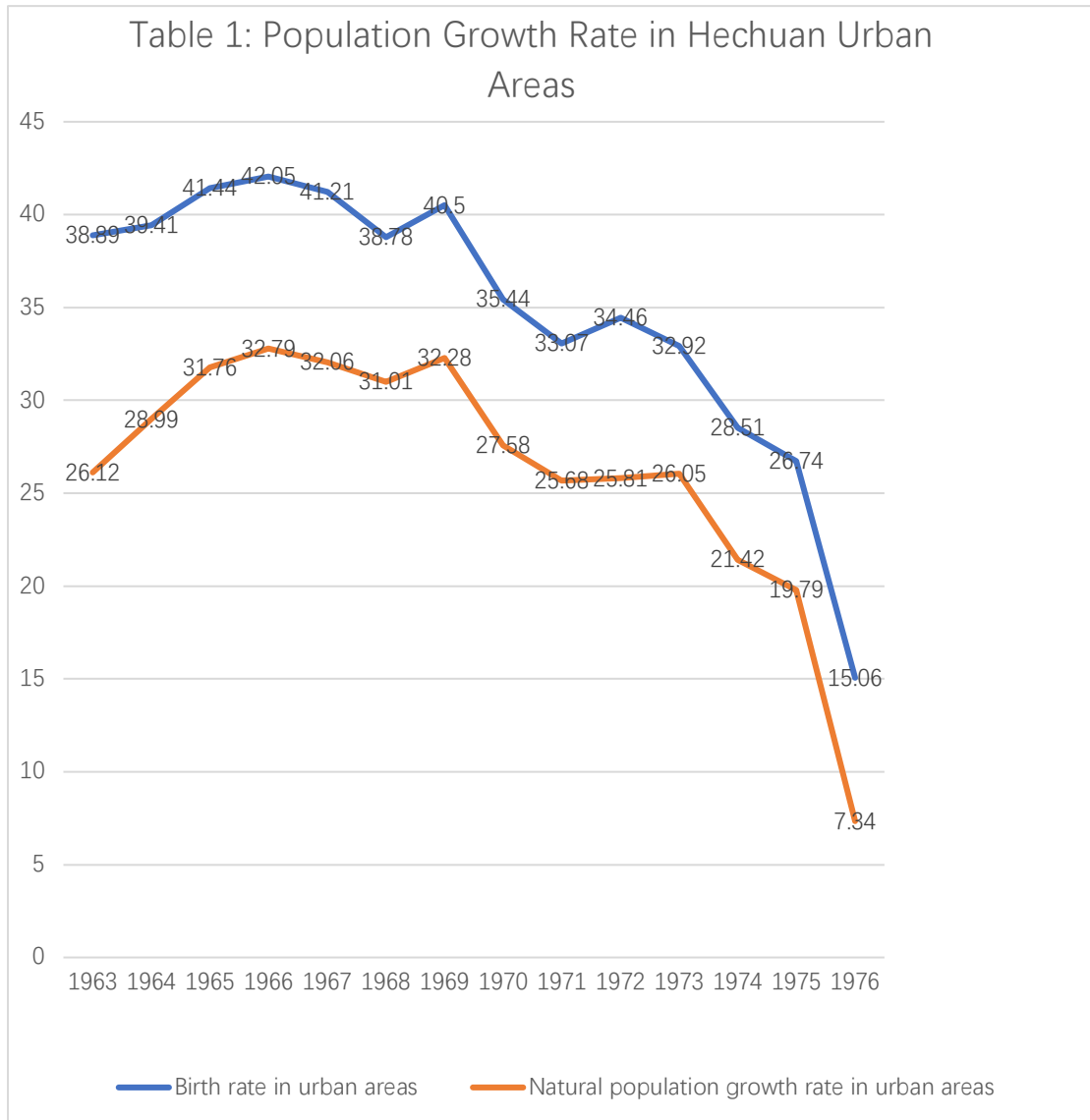
25 HCLR, 55.

26 Sichuansheng liangshiju 四川省粮食局 [Bureau of Grain of Sichuan Province] ed., 四川省市镇粮油供应政策汇编 *Sichuansheng shizhen liangyou gongying zhengce huibian (A Compilation of the Supplies of Grain and Oil in Urban Sichuan)* [SCLY] (internal materials, 1975), 44.

27 HCLR, 28.

Resulting from what happened in urban Hechuan from the beginning of the 1970s onward, as mentioned here, both the job market and salary levels for residents seemed to become better and better compared with the situation several years before, although the magnitude of change was quite slow.

On the basis of all the aforementioned statistics and records, more information can be accessed if taking the data on urban population change into consideration. In terms of the relevant statistics during the Cultural Revolution in urban Hechuan, as Table 1 shows, both the birth rate and population natural growth rate reached a peak in 1966. From then on, although there were several periods of rebound, the overall trends of both groups of data were obviously and continuously declining. The nearer to the end of the Cultural Revolution, the sharper the decline became. The situation of fewer and fewer new babies in urban Hechuan was probably not a coincidence, but a natural result of the combination of a series of factors, including the unstable social context by the late 1960s, the desexualised atmosphere discouraging young people from getting married, and perhaps more influentially, the policy of birth control which was initially promoted in Chinese urban areas from the early 1970s. Meanwhile, the legal influx of peasants into the towns and county seat of Hechuan was controlled at a very limited level. Only a few rural people could be so fortunate, including those entering a factory or getting married to an urban resident.



Statistics from: Hechuan xianzhi bianzhan weiyuanhui 合川县志编撰委员会 [Editorial Committee of *Gazetteer of Hechuan County*] ed. 合川县志 *Hechuan xianzhi (Gazetteer of Hechuan County)* [HCXZ] (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 1996), 80.

On the one hand, there was a gradual improvement in job opportunities and income. On the other hand, there was a slowing down of population growth. When these two things took place simultaneously in the same place, for people in the county seat and major towns of Hechuan it was tantamount to good things coming in pairs.

Especially for a couple having formal jobs and with fewer children to raise, during the Cultural Revolution what they earned monthly probably provided a reliable foundation for having their material life at or even above the middle level.

However, it should be admitted that the improvement of the workers' income and their quality of life was not equal to the economic benefits they created for the society. As a matter of fact, residents (including workers and their families) in urban Hechuan made a living not so much through their hard work as by virtue of peasants' great contribution and sacrifice. Throughout the era of the planned economy in China, to develop industry, especially heavy industry, at the cost of sacrificing peasants' benefit severely, was always one of the major plans nationally. Although most Chinese people took it for granted at that time, this situation further enlarged the imbalance between urban and rural residents. According to statistics on the provincial level, throughout the decade of the Cultural Revolution, the average purchasing power of a resident in urban Sichuan was always six to seven times larger than that of a peasant in the province.²⁸ Thus to leave the countryside and to enjoy their life in an urban way became a stronger and stronger desire for Chinese peasants. For those in the countryside of Hechuan, most of whom seldom took trips outside the county, people's material life just in the county seat, as the content explored in the next two sections of this chapter shows, was already quite attractive.

28 Zhonggong Sichuan shengwei yanjiushi 中共四川省委研究室 [Research Office of the Committee of Sichuan Provincial of the CCP] ed. 四川省情 *Sichuan shengqing* (*Provincial Situation of Sichuan*) (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 1984), 228.

Section Two: How to be a Foodie in a County Seat of Sichuan during the Cultural Revolution

As an old saying in China goes: food is the God of the people (民以食为天 *minyishi weitian*). For the residents in the Sichuan area where, as discussed previously, a special culture of dining and people's enthusiasm for delicacies had existed since ancient times, their experiences at the dining table during the Cultural Revolution is an interesting and noteworthy topic. This section will show you the possible and popular ways to be a foodie in Sichuan during the Cultural Revolution.

Compared with rural residents, Sichuan people residing in the urban areas, with many more job opportunities and much more favourable income as shown above, undoubtedly had many more chances to keep their preferred choices in daily dining. Yet in comparison with those in big cities in Sichuan such as Chongqing where, as recorded, during the first half of the 1970s more than 150 kinds of different dishes were provided and welcomed in restaurants in the city,²⁹ when discussing the dining issues of urban households in Sichuan, county-seat dwellers' experiences were more typical in the province. In this section, I will present a case study mainly based on materials from the county seat of Hechuan, which includes plentiful details about residents' purchases of kitchen materials, daily menus at home and in restaurants, and the cooking styles they enjoyed.

²⁹ *Chongqing mingcaipu* 重庆名菜谱 (*A Cookbook of Famous Dishes in Chongqing*), joint issued by the major restaurants in Chongqing city during the Cultural Revolution, (informal materials, 1974), 2.

In contrast to people's job opportunities and income levels as mentioned previously, as for the issues closely related to urban residents' everyday economic life, there was a long-term freeze in the price of basic materials for living. Chongqing City during the Cultural Revolution did not administratively contain Hechuan County which is about eighty kilometres away. But under the provincial regulations of Sichuan, in many cases policies of the planned economy were applicable both in Chongqing and Hechuan. So detailed records about the prices of most rationed goods in Chongqing are also of referential value for our discussion of the situation in Hechuan. To buy the foodstuffs necessary for daily cooking, besides the tickets which were always required for most goods, people were also sensitive to the price, especially during the time when few people had much cash in hand. Whether there was any change in prices usually played a direct role in determining if the dishes on people's dining tables would become more satisfying or not.

1. Even a clever housewife cannot cook a meal without rice (巧妇难为无米之炊)

Qiaofu nanwei wumizhichui

Undoubtedly rice was always the staple food for most dwellers who grew up in the Sichuan Basin. In Chongqing City, after an increase in 1966, the price of rice (in standard quality) was fixed at 0.284 RMB per kilogram for two decades. It was nearly the same situation for flour. Between 1966 and 1985, the price of standard flour in Chongqing was 0.34 RMB per kilogram.³⁰ As another foodstuff necessary in a

30 Chongqing wujia zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 重庆物价志编撰委员会 [Editorial Committee of *Gazetteer of Commodity Prices in Chongqing*] ed., 重庆物价志 *Chongqing wujia zhi (Gazetteer of Commodity Prices in Chongqing)* [CQWJ] (internal materials, 2000), 88.

kitchen, the price of plant oil had been kept unchanged since 1961, which was 1.56 RMB for one kilogram until 1985.³¹ Apart from the prices of these necessities for cooking, regarding most kinds of meat, the situation was similar too. The retail prices of pork and beef experienced long stagnations from the early 1960s to the late 1970s. For pork, the rate was 1.54 RMB per kilogram. For beef, it was 1.04 RMB (cattle) and 0.96 RMB (buffalo) per kilogram.³² The price of poultry was kept the same from 1965 to 1973. In 1974, the prices of duck and goose were set even 35 per cent lower than they had been before. One other modification happened to the price of eggs, which were sold at 1.64 RMB per kilogram in 1973. It was the highest rate during the Cultural Revolution era.³³

Comparatively speaking, the businesses associated with the supply of vegetables were much less controlled, being more directly influenced by the market supply and demand. Normally those common kinds of vegetable were not rationed, but the actual fluctuation of their prices (on average) was only between 0.1038 and 0.115 RMB per kilogram throughout the whole period of the Cultural Revolution.³⁴

As for the situation of condiments, no remarkable change took place either. The price of salt, the most indispensable seasoning for cooking, although it varied slightly during this era, in Chongqing a kilogram of salt was never worth more than 0.34 RMB.³⁵ The supply-demand relationship for sugar (including white, brown, and

31 CQWJ, 94.

32 CQWJ, 128.

33 CQWJ, 132-33.

34 CQWJ, 142.

35 CQWJ, 151.

crystalised sugar) once had a roller-coaster experience in the early 1960s, becoming a high-price and rationed commodity in Chongqing. But after 1965, the price went back to the level of the late 1950s. In retailing, all those kinds of sugar were under 1.92 RMB per kilogram for seventeen years from 1965.³⁶ Another decline occurred in the price of soy sauce. In 1973, one kilogram of the soy sauce made locally was 0.3 RMB, 60 per cent cheaper than the price in 1964. At the same time, the price of vinegar was only one-third that of soy sauce. One more kind of seasoning which should not be absent from Sichuan people's kitchen is *douban*, a kind of chili paste originating and popular in the basin. Its price was about 0.2 RMB per kilogram throughout the Cultural Revolution decade.³⁷

Admittedly, under the condition of the planned economy, if the rationing policy applied, none of these foodstuffs were purchasable without specific tickets. Grain was surely the most important and sensitive commodity whose ration standard was normally regulated and unified by the provincial-level authority. In Sichuan Province, the grain ration (mainly rice in the basin) for most workers was between 15 and 20 kilograms per month based on their different workloads. The ration for those who carried out extremely physical work under harsh conditions, such as coal miners underground, was five kilograms higher. Other residents in urban areas including cadres had a ration of 13 to 15 kilograms each month. Juveniles' rations were between 4 and 13 kilograms according to their age.³⁸ In comparison to grain, the rations on

36 CQWJ, 157-58.

37 CQWJ, 167-68.

38 SCLY, 258-82.

other food and kitchen goods were not fixed so uniformly. Due to the imbalance in supply, there could be gaps between various regions. In one place, the ration might also change from year to year.

As a local senior in the county seat recalled, in most cases throughout the Cultural Revolution in Hechuan, each month he would get tickets for 0.25 to 0.5 kilogram of pork.³⁹ As a county-seat dweller, this level was actually not inferior to those in many big cities.⁴⁰ The development of the pig farming industry in rural Hechuan was probably a crucial reason for this situation. Unlike pork, the residents in Hechuan hardly needed any ticket when buying mutton or beef (beef was only rationed briefly between the late 1950s and the early 1960s).⁴¹ The market for vegetables in Hechuan was almost free of limitation too. Although many kinds of necessities in people's kitchens were still rationed during the ten-year era, such as plant oil and starch, as the old man mentioned previously added in his talk, people in most cases could cover the shortage through their own efforts somehow. One popular way was to exchange (in cash or ticket-for-ticket) with relatives or friends, otherwise taking a look at some black markets might surprise us.⁴²

39 Discussion with a senior lived in the county seat of Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution, male, Hechuan, 14 July 2019.

40 Xie Hui and Wen Minhua 谢辉, 闻闽华, “油票、肉票、布票的故事” Youpiao, roupiao, bupiao de gushi (Stories of Coupons for Oil, Pork, and Cloth), 同舟共济 (*Tongzhougongji*), 2006 (06): 39-40.

41 Hechuanxian shangye weiyuanhui 合川县商业委员会 [Committee of Commerce of Hechuan County] ed., 合川县商业志 1911-1985 *Hechuanxian shangye zhi 1911-1985* (*Gazetteer of Commerce of Hechuan County 1911-1985*) [HCSY] (internal materials, 1988), 137.

42 Discussion with a senior lived in the county seat of Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution, male, Hechuan, 14 July 2019.

2. Meat was always indispensable for a satisfying meal

When exploring the details of people's daily diet, plenty of aspects are of significance. For urban dwellers in Sichuan during the period of the Cultural Revolution, under the economic and material conditions mentioned above, to a certain degree the style of their cuisine and the food they preferred still appeared to be achievable in many cases. More noticeably, it seemed that the enthusiasm and motives of Sichuan people, especially those who lived in urban areas, in enjoying themselves through a good meal at the dining table never faded, although both the national context and the local realities were far from satisfactory.

Besides the staple foods, during the years when the sense of hunger was still common to ordinary people, dishes of meat on the dining table were most appealing to every family member back home. As many old people in the county seat and some major towns of Hechuan frequently mentioned in their recollections, throughout that ten-year period meat was never too uncommon in local residents' dishes at home, especially for dinner. A Hechuan woman, who spent her childhood in the county seat during the Cultural Revolution, still remembered and cherished the experiences of *dayaji* (打牙祭) at least once every week.⁴³ *Dayaji* is a typical term in Sichuan dialect. It means a chance to enjoy a very good meal which must include meat dishes, usually as a reward for hard work. At that time, the father of this family worked in the collective-owned furniture factory, and the mother was a teacher in a primary school. They raised two children. This economic structure of a household might be

43 Discussion with an old woman who was born and grew up in the county seat of Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution, Hechuan, 8 July 2019.

representative and average in the majority of the urban population in Hechuan during the same period. If one or two members of the family members fortunately obtained a job in the state-owned enterprises, the level of their material life would be further elevated to an enviable level. “Meat normally appeared on our table every two to three days, otherwise the kids would feel unhappy,” it was recalled by an old man who was a worker in a state-owned cotton mill in Hechuan.⁴⁴ If the ration tickets for pork were not enough in a month, he needed to buy extra ones in cash from colleagues. This cotton mill was the one mentioned in Chapter Two, which settled into Hechuan during the War against Japan. From 1965 to 1975, its workforce increased from two thousand to almost four thousand, becoming one of the largest and most significant enterprises in Hechuan County.⁴⁵ Although locating several kilometres away from the county seat, its staff enjoyed probably the most munificent salaries and welfare in the whole county at that time. The community where the workers lived also became a small but thriving town in the suburban region of Hechuan.

Another remarkable but also a little exceptional example came from an ex-miner in Hechuan. Just before the start of the Cultural Revolution, he was recruited from a village near to the coal mine. As an underground worker, he worked there throughout the next ten years. When talking about his experiences during that period, in addition

44 Discussion with an old man who during the Cultural Revolution worked in the cotton mill located in the eastern suburban area of Hechuan, Hechuan, 9 July 2019.

45 Hechuanxian gongye zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 合川县工业志编撰委员会 [Editorial Committee of *Gazetteer of Industry of Hechuan County*] ed., 合川县工业志 *Hechuanxian gongye zhi (Gazetteer of Industry of Hechuan County)* (internal materials, 1985), 112.

to the salary and grain ration of a miner, which were higher than the common level, his most memorable thing is the plentiful food supplied in the canteen of the mine, where all three meals were provided. Choices were especially rich at lunch and dinner, including not just pork and fish in different methods of cooking, but also many kinds of seasonal vegetables. During festivals, beef or mutton would be served, as a way of *dayaji*. In addition, restaurants and peddlers in the market next to the mine provided the workers with more possibilities in food choice, usually as night snacks. Sichuan-featured roasted meat (烧腊 *shaola*) and preserved eggs (皮蛋 *pidan*) were quite welcomed there.⁴⁶ Although being in the mountainous region which was at least three hours' drive away from the county seat, with necessary facilities in their plant, the living standard of those miners perhaps enjoyed a scale-down urban lifestyle exceeding the average level of the county-seat dwellers of Hechuan.

In most cases, pork was still the most common meat dish on the urban residents' daily menu. Regarding the frequency of its appearance on dining-tables, a crucial factor even beyond people's income was the situation of supply, especially the production in local areas. Thanks to the stable development in the pig-raising industry in Hechuan, compared with many other regions, Hechuan residents (both urban people and peasants) had more chances to enjoy pork during the period of the Cultural Revolution. From the angle of supply, from 1963 to 1967, pork was sold without limitation in Hechuan. In 1967, despite the unrest in society and the paralysis in local authority, the sales of live pigs in Hechuan dramatically increased by 14,936. Just this

⁴⁶ Discussion with a former miner in Hechuan who began his work in 1966, male, Hechuan, 11 July 2019.

amount of increment was more than 1.5 times the total sales in 1961 (at the end of three lean years). From the next year to 1979, rationing was again applied in the pork supply in Hechuan, mainly in order to guarantee the amount for outside transportation to supply other places. As a result, the task of hog transportation from Hechuan in 1968 was over-fulfilled and the county was publicly praised by the State Council.⁴⁷ As for local pork supply, annual sales were maintained at between 100 and 150 thousand hogs during those years, at least ten times higher than the number in the early 1960s.⁴⁸ Besides the supply of fresh meat, a part of the pork was made into bacon and other kinds of pickled meat by the Food Company of Hechuan County, providing more choices for local people's menus, especially those with traditional tastes. Throughout the whole 1970s, every year about 1.5 million kilograms of preserved pork went on sale, the equivalent of 40 to 50 thousand hogs.⁴⁹ Given the number of households in all the urban areas of Hechuan, each family there could have consumed no less than 50 kilograms of pork annually. Due to the fact that refrigerators had not become a household appliance for most ordinary residents, few people would purchase and store a large amount of fresh pork at one time, except for making preserved meat before the Chinese New Year. The average number calculated above should be relatively reliable, and the calculation does not include the illegal businesses in which pork was one of the most welcomed goods. Taking all these

47 HCSY, 8.

48 Hechuanxian shipin gongsi 合川县食品公司 [Food Company of Hechuan County] ed., 合川县食品公司志 1915-1985 *Hechuanxian shipin gongsi zhi 1915-1985 (Gazetteer of Food Company of Hechuan County)* (internal materials, 1990), 33.

49 HCSY, 136.

situations into consideration, it is unsurprising to know that pork was not rare in many urban households' daily meals in Hechuan during that era.

Apart from pork, the supply and consumption of sheep and goat meat are also worth noting. In fact, the goat-raising and slaughtering industry has been an advantageous business in the countryside of Hechuan since the Republican era. Even under the policy of the planned economy, neither the sheep and goat-raising industries nor the business of mutton was strictly limited in rural Hechuan, which was likely a big motive for peasants, butchers, and tradesmen. At the same time, from the mid-1970s sheep and goat skins became important kinds of export goods in Hechuan, further encouraging the development of sheep and goat raising and slaughtering. Goatskin sales in the whole county could be tens of thousands of pieces annually, which also indicated the considerable volume of mutton business in local markets at that time.⁵⁰ Normally the price of mutton during the 1970s was lower than pork, partly due to its smell because many Chinese people did not like it. But in Hechuan there were several popular methods to cook mutton and remove the odour successfully. Remarkable examples include boiling rice noodles with diced mutton (羊肉臊子米粉 *yangrou saozhi mifen*), making soup with sheep stomach (羊杂汤 *yangza tang*), and stewing mutton with rice flour (粉蒸羊肉 *fenzheng yangrou*).⁵¹ Actually cooking with mutton was not typical in Sichuan dishes, but was introduced from outside. But from the 1970s, as remembered by a local cook in the county seat, all of these dishes with mutton became widely accepted and welcomed on people's

50 HCSY, 137-38.

51 HCSY, 212-14.

dining-tables. No matter whether in families or restaurants at that time, to enjoy some mutton was undoubtedly a more special way of *dayaji*.⁵²

Hechuan people during this period also had limited access to some other kinds of meat, like beef and chicken. But the amount of supply often fluctuated sharply due to relevant policies. Based on records, in Hechuan the annual acquisition of poultry (mainly chicken and duck) on average was above 40 thousand kilograms, but the lowest amount was only 700 kilograms, probably because of a policy of more rigid constraint on side-line production in the countryside. Beef was even harder to buy due to the policy to protect cattle for farming work. Only those too old to plough would be sold and slaughtered.⁵³

One further sort of meat notable in Hechuan was fish. Located at the confluence of three rivers, local residents had never lacked for fish in their diets. Between 1964 and 1979, the annual output of fisheries in Hechuan was 563.6 tonnes, while the total production from 1961 to 1963 was only 450 tonnes.⁵⁴ This tremendous increase partly resulted from the harvest from wild fish-catching, in addition to the expansion of artificially raised fish on a considerable scale.⁵⁵ The abundant output certainly led to an ample supply in local areas. Indeed, the recorded data might not reflect the full picture. In the policy, all aquatic products should be purchased and sold by the state. But, in order to get a better price, fishermen would usually bring their harvest to the

52 Discussion with a local cook who began his career in Hechuan since the early 1970s, male, Hechuan, 10 July 2019.

53 HCSY, 137 and 139.

54 HCXZ, 385.

55 HCXZ, 388.

county seat for sale by themselves. The gazetteer admits as a traditional business centre with thriving markets in east Sichuan, although being strictly inhibited, “black (illegal) markets existed all over the county seat and major towns”.⁵⁶ Trading activities in illegal ways did not even need a fixed market. As described by a local woman in the county seat whose house was near the river in the 1970s, if you walked along the river in the early morning, you would often come across someone with a small bucket. Then if you felt satisfied with the live fish jumping in it, for the dinner that day, there would be one more palatable dish, usually a chili-braised fish (红烧鱼 *hongshaoyu*),⁵⁷ which was always a well-received course in Hechuan.⁵⁸

Besides all the meat delicacies made from local foodstuffs, dishes with seafood could not be overlooked from many urban people’s dining tables in Hechuan, whose significance was not second to any meat at that time. The popularity of seafood in Hechuan was admittedly a surprising fact due to its long distance from coastal areas. In 1971 the sales of seafood in the county more than tripled compared to five years earlier, and the volume in 1975 almost doubled again. During that phase, the transportation and supply of seafood were not smooth due to political interference, but this did not block Hechuan people’s interest in trying something different from their familiar foods, even though they were as costly as meat on occasion. Seaweed once seemed to be Hechuan residents’ only choice of seafood until the early 1970s. It often played a significant role when making soup at home, especially when there was some

56 HCXZ, 449.

57 Discussion with a local resident in the county seat of Hechuan who lived near the river during the Cultural Revolution, female, Hechuan, 18 July 2019.

58 HCSY, 212-13.

pork chop. From then on, the proportion of other kinds of seafood in the total sales of Hechuan increased 10 to 35 per cent during the second half of the Cultural Revolution decade.⁵⁹ Considering the number of urban households in the county at that time, during 1975 each family on average might have consumed more than 23 kilograms of different kinds of seafood.⁶⁰ In the recollection of a local resident who was sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution, the rarest and most memorable taste in those years was the braised hairtail fish in brown sauce (红烧带鱼 *hongshao daiyu*) his mother cooked for him every time when he came back home from the countryside.⁶¹

3. Vegetables could be cooked as deliciously as meat

Besides the appetite for meat, different kinds of vegetables never disappeared from Hechuan residents' dining-tables during the Cultural Revolution, although people at that time normally did not have the contemporary obsession with a healthy and balanced diet. It is widely acknowledged that there are twenty-four specific kinds of flavours in *Chuancai*, many of which can be applied either in meat or vegetable dishes. For example, the flavour of *yuxiang* (鱼香) is a fish-like taste resulting from condiments including chili sauce, garlic, and white sugar, but without real fish. *Yuxiang rousi* (鱼香肉丝 shredded pork) is favoured by many people, and when meat is unavailable, you could try *yuxiang* eggplant, *yuxiang* potato chips, and

59 HCSY, 212-13.

60 HCSY, 153 & HYZZ, 38.

61 An informal memoir written by a Hechuan sent-down youth, male, found in the Old-book Market of Hechuan, 21 July 2019.

yuxiang cabbage instead. This diversity of cuisine in Sichuan dishes, combined with the fact that the climate and soil in the Sichuan Basin are suitable for the growth of many seasonal vegetables, significantly reinforced the alternative role of vegetables in Sichuan people's daily menus.

As for the supply of vegetables for the county seat, two channels were especially notable. On one hand, the Vegetable Company of Hechuan kept its responsibility to purchase from the countryside to satisfy the demand in the county seat. Although the annual amount of acquisition fluctuated due to the weather conditions, from 1971 onward both the annual volume of acquisitions and sales saw obvious increases from the average level between 2,000 and 2,500 kilograms to between 3,500 and 4,000 kilograms.⁶² On the other hand, county-seat dwellers' increasing demand for vegetables could be further supported by the vegetable production in the commune which was nearest to the county seat. As a major base to grow vegetables for the urban population in the county seat, its annual production rose from four million to six million kilograms after 1970. Excluding 1975, when there was a big flood,⁶³ the level of output remained nearly the same in most years throughout the 1970s.⁶⁴ Many common kinds of vegetable in Sichuan areas, such as cabbage, lettuce, tomato, and white radish, were cultivated on a large scale.⁶⁵ After fulfilling the quota of state procurement, vegetable-growing peasants there could sell what harvested from their private plots freely. This practice highlighted the geographic advantage of this village.

62 HCSY, 150.

63 HCXZ, 479.

64 HCXZ, 66.

65 HCXZ, 63.

It seemed that the supply of vegetables rarely became short in the county seat of Hechuan, either through the Vegetable Company or the free market. As a result, fried lettuce (sometimes with pork), sweet and sour cabbage, and tomato soup (sometimes with eggs) often appeared in the daily menu of people in rural Hechuan, as frequently mentioned in almost all the seniors' recollections. When you had some white radishes to make soup, putting them together with mutton, the taste would be even better.

4. No matter what you ate, the flavours of Sichuan style were always crucial

When discussing Hechuan people's eating habits during the Cultural Revolution, in addition to their enthusiasm for various kinds of meat and vegetables, the flavours they liked were another significant feature. As mentioned above, plenty of different flavours exist in Sichuan dishes, among which spice may be the most representative taste, but not the only one favoured by Sichuan people.

Chili pepper is for sure the major source of the spicy flavour which had been cultivated in rural Hechuan from three to four centuries ago. But until 1980, the annual amount of acquisition of chili pepper in Hechuan was 63.5 thousand kilograms on average, due to the backwardness in planting techniques. In contrast, the sales of chili pepper in Hechuan remained above 150 thousand kilograms per year from the 1960s onwards.⁶⁶ These figures indicate Hechuan residents' really high demand for

66 Hechuanxian gongxiao hezuo lianshe 合川县供销合作联社 [Supply and Marketing Cooperatives of Hechuan County] ed., 合川县供销合作志 (1937-1985) *Hechuanxian gongxiao hezuo zhi (1937-1985) (Gazetteer of the Supply and Marketing Cooperatives of Hechuan: 1937-1985)* [HCGX] (internal materials, 1989), 198.

spices. Facing the big gap between production and demand in the early 1970s, both new techniques and new varieties were introduced in rural Hechuan from other regions of the Sichuan Basin, resulted in an expansion of chili production. A similar situation prevailed in Chongqing where the total amount of chili acquisition in 1975 was 20 times larger than ten years earlier.⁶⁷ At the same time, *huajiao*, a kind of pepper unique to Sichuan as mentioned before, was included in the family side-lines, as one of the diversified economic products. Originally in Sichuan *huajiao* was more common in mountainous regions with higher elevation, especially on the margins of the basin. By the 1980s, in total 34 kilograms of *huajiao* seed had been attributed to Hechuan peasants for planting, intending to meet the local needs.⁶⁸

However, there were still gaps beyond the state supply, where free markets could function. An old resident remembered one of his neighbour's business in those years was to transport *huajiao* from Xichang in the southwest margin of the basin, a place abounding with it but nearly 500 kilometres away. Although the official permission from the Sichuan government for long-distance trade by individuals was not issued until the end of the 1980s,⁶⁹ "he started his business as early as the mid-1970s".⁷⁰

67 Chongqingshi gongxiao hezuo zongshe 重庆市供销合作总社 [General Supply and Marketing Cooperative of Chongqing City] ed., 重庆市供销合作志 *Chongqingshi gongxiao hezuo zhi (Gazetteer of the Supply and Marketing Cooperative of Chongqing City)* (internal materials, 1992), 329.

68 HCGX, 182.

69 Sichuansheng renmin zhengfu bangongting 四川省人民政府办公厅 [Office of the Government of Sichuan Province], "关于集体商业经营批发和个体商业从事长途贩运、批量销售业务有关问题的补充通知" *Guanyu jiti shangye jingying pifa he geti shangye congshi changtu fanyun, piliang xiaoshou yewu youguan wenti de buchong tongzhi* (Supplementary Notice about the whole-sale of collective commerce and issues on individual businessmen conducting long-distance transportation and large-scale trade), *四川政报 (Sichuan zhengbao)*, 1990 (08): 21.

70 Discussion with a local resident living in the county seat of Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution, male, Hechuan, 22 July 2019.

Eating *huajiao* makes people's lips and mouths feel numb. This feeling is called *ma* (麻) in Chinese. Its combination with chili pepper, which is called *la* (辣), results in the most representative flavour in Sichuan cuisine, both numb and spicy (麻辣 *mala*).

5. Occasionally eating in restaurants, as a treat in routine life

Apart from all the content mentioned above, for the foodies in Hechuan, eating out (known as 下馆子 *xia guanzi* in the Sichuan dialect) occasionally was a necessary supplement in their routine life. Admittedly, the catering industry did not have a good time throughout the ten-year era. Between 1967 and 1968, both the supply of grain and pork for the catering industry was interrupted due to the factional fighting that occurred in the county seat of Hechuan.⁷¹ In 1969, the annual sales of the Hechuan Catering Company, which was responsible for the majority of restaurants in the county seat, sharply decreased by 30 per cent compared with the previous year. But the decline did not last very long. The next year, its sales soon returned to the previous level in 1966. The year of 1972 even witnessed the largest sales of the catering industry in Hechuan during the period from the early 1960s to 1978.⁷² The less chaotic social environment is likely an important factor for this recovering tendency, which allowed more active business taking place in the county seat. For the restaurants in the county seat, more business activities brought more customers. An ex-waitress from a Hechuan Restaurant, one of the largest restaurants in Hechuan during those years, noted in her work notes: "Our work will become much busier

71 HCSY, 156.

72 HCSY, 161.

when many peasants enter the county seat to sell their side-line products, since they will normally come to our restaurant for a good treat after earning money”.⁷³

As for what people could enjoy in the restaurants, a series of dishes with local features had been inherited and developed by Hechuan cooks during this process. Examples included the dishes related to mutton. As indicated above, the habit of eating mutton was introduced by immigrants from other places, especially including the Hui (Muslim) people from Northern China. From the 1950s to the 1970s, a mutton restaurant remained open in Hechuan, intended to cater to the Hui people, who do not eat pork due to their faith.⁷⁴ This arrangement accidentally stimulated the popularity of eating mutton among other residents in the county seat of Hechuan. One more motivator might have been the rationing policy. While rationing in the pork supply was also applied in the catering industry, mutton was supplied more freely and sufficiently in Hechuan during the same period. As a result, in the restaurants, Hechuan residents could continue enjoying those delicacies with mutton, such as stewed mutton with rice flour and rice noodles with diced mutton. This was especially fine for those people who hoped to try some meat different from pork but had not mastered the way to remove the mutton odour in home cooking.

If you really did not like mutton, another choice to satisfy your appetite for meat was to have a bowl of chicken wonton (鸡肉抄手 *jirou chaoshou*) in a collective-owned restaurant in the county seat. Invented independently by a local cook around

73 Work notes of a former waitress in the Hechuan Restaurant during the Cultural Revolution, Hechuan, found in the Old-book Market of Hechuan, 15 July 2019.

74 HCSY, 156.

the late 1960s, the wonton was mainly filled with chicken breast, then boiled in a soup made from chicken bones. This new dish with a unique way of cuisine soon became well-received among Hechuan people because of its tender and palatable mouthfeel, and the cook himself became a famous chef in the Hechuan County after that.⁷⁵

At the same time, from the early 1970s, vendors began to reappear on the streets in the county seat which offered local residents more options in their daily eating. This was especially true for children who always looked forward to snacks different from home-cooked food. Due to the still strict limitations, the number of vendors was much fewer compared with the scale in Hechuan in the 1950s. But many characteristic snacks provided by vendors soon become popular among local residents. In the early 1970s, a local young man learnt the way to make numb and spicy pork lung (麻辣肺片 *mala feipian*) from Chengdu, then started his over-thirty-year career as a vendor in Hechuan. Most people living in the county seat became familiar with his skills and the featured way of his hawking, “Numb and chili, very tasty, good to go with your rice and beer!”

Through the case study based on the materials from urban residents in Hechuan, we can say that, although the conditions were limited both nationally and locally during the Cultural Revolution era, to some extent residents, mainly in the county seat, were still able to keep many of their traditional styles and preferred choices in dining. As an urban resident in Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution era, you could enjoy either rice noodles with diced mutton or stewed mutton with rice flour in

75 HCSY, 214.

a week. For the next week, it might be a chili-braised fish or stewed pork chop with seaweed (海带炖排骨 *haidai dunpaigu*). Every time after the monthly payday, you and your family members could have something more special in a restaurant, such as a bowl of chicken wonton. Even if you were a foodie, every day after work you would probably meet some vendors with local flavours on your way back home, so you did not need to worry if your appetite for delicacies was not totally satisfied by home-made food.

Notwithstanding, under the centrally planned economy, all these palatable dishes urban residents enjoyed in their everyday life would have been impossible without the sacrifice of people in the countryside, who during the same period still experienced serious deficiencies in daily eating.

Section Three: To Buy What They Dreamed About: Consuming Culture in a Sichuan County during the Cultural Revolution

Benefitting from the relatively stable income and other benefits of welfare, as a result of working in a factory or other work units in urban Hechuan, there would naturally be an improvement in the financial situation of those families. In addition to the declining growth rate of the urban population in Hechuan as mentioned before, the lighter a family's financial burden became, the stronger their ability to make daily purchases. What was also promoted was their confidence and expectations in consumption. This was not merely focused on the routine purchase of foodstuff as discussed in the section above, but also covered the consumption of durable items.

During the 1960s and 1970s, those durable products with long-term popularity in Chinese families particularly included the so-called *san da jianer* (三大件儿 three big items), sewing machines, wrist watches, and bicycles. These plus a radio were together labelled *san zhuan yi xiang* (三转一响 three rotating things and one sounding thing), since the first three items are all rotating (转 *zhuan*), and the last one can make a sound (响 *xiang*). Most of these commodities could also be viewed as luxuries in China as they were not so easy for individuals to afford at that time. In Chongqing City, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the price of a sewing machine from Shanghai was as high as 132.26 RMB,⁷⁶ almost equivalent to many worker's total salary for several months. Nonetheless, these items usually played very necessary roles in many urban families, especially for facilitating their children's marriages. This situation shaped the particular consuming culture during the Cultural Revolution, as what will be discussed in this section. Admittedly, frugality, as some scholars observe, was deemed the most essential trait in people's consumption at that time.⁷⁷ Red Guards in the late 1960s targeted households with particular sorts of commodities which they saw as symbolising bourgeois lifestyles.⁷⁸ However, it seems that "shoppers did not easily give up their favourite products and brands".⁷⁹ Such a

76 CQWJ, 69.

77 Xu Ben 徐贲, "‘文革’时期的物质文化和日常生活秩序" 'Wen'ge' shiqi de wuzhi wenhua he richang shenghuo zhixu (Material Culture and Order in Everyday Life), published in the author's blog, <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/11227-2.html> (accessed on 15 June 2019).

78 During the first few months of the Cultural Revolution, the Campaign of Destroying the Four Olds (破四旧运动 *Po siju Yundong*) was sweeping the whole country. In this process, plenty of stuffs with traditional or western elements were targeted by the Red Guards.

79 Gerth, 180.

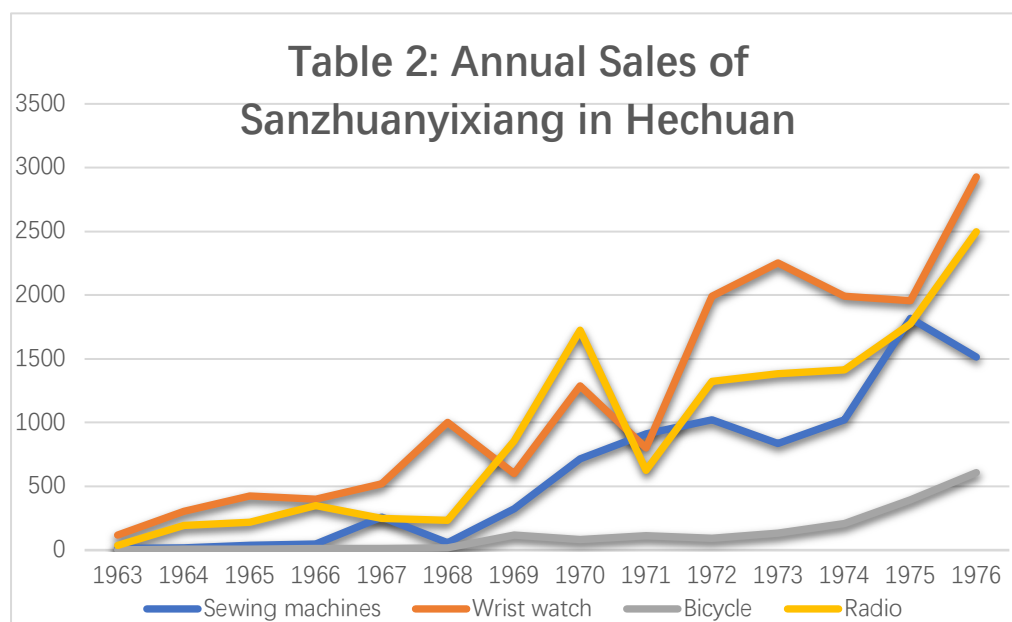
contradiction between official promotions and private preferences seemed to persist throughout the politicised era of the Cultural Revolution.

Yet due to the much higher prices than daily products, normally people's desire for luxury durable goods could not be satisfied as soon as they got a job. For the same reason, in order to bring home one of the *sanzhuanyixiang*, the whole family would have to save money and live a much plainer life for several months ahead of the purchase. Moreover, industrial products were strictly rationed under the national planned economy, buyers needed special tickets to purchase durable and luxury items. These tickets or coupons were much rarer than the tickets for daily goods in distribution to local residents. As a result, to fulfil the dream of owning a sewing machine or wrist watch, people needed to prepare for a long time, not just to accumulate enough cash in hand but also to secure the required tickets.

1. The remarkable sales of durable and luxury products in Hechuan

Taking all these positive and negative aspects into consideration, it will not be surprising for us to learn about the transformation of the sales of *sanzhuanyixiang* in Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution era. Throughout that decade, there was an overall increase in sales of these durable and luxury products in Hechuan County. But the improvement was not continuous, and the whole process was characterised by fluctuations, which seemed to be in accordance with the policy and other situations we have considered above.

From Table 2, we can clearly see the changes in the sales of sewing machines, wrist watches, radios, and bicycles in Hechuan between 1963 and 1976. Undoubtedly, the major buyers of such expensive goods were urban residents, not peasants.



(Statistics from: HCXZ, 485)

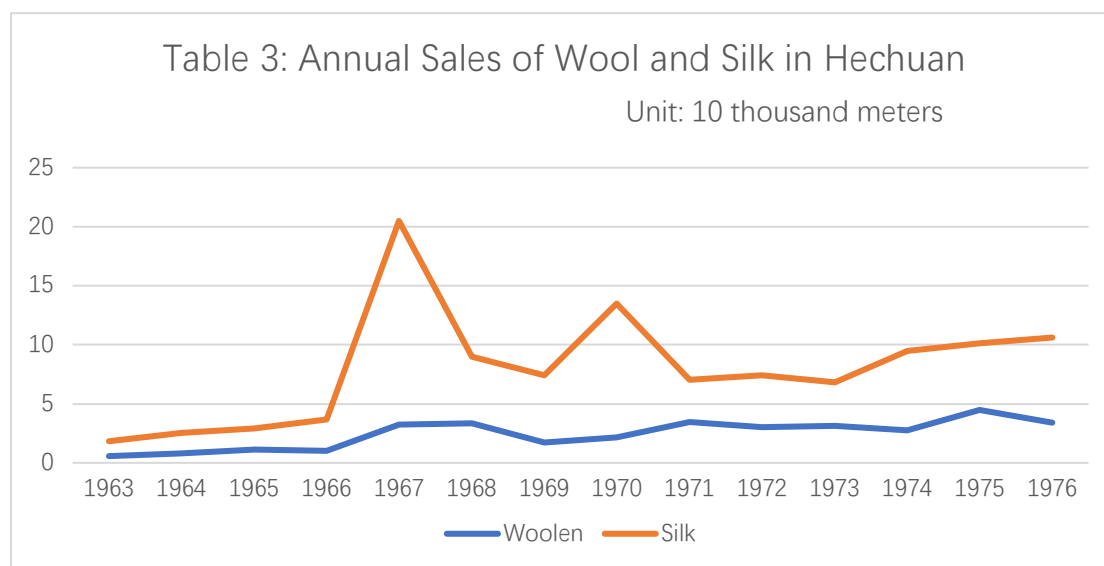
For wrist watches and radios, although people in Hechuan had started to purchase more and more of them between 1963 and 1965, in comparison much sharper increases took place after 1966. Between 1967 and 1968, the sales of wrist watches in Hechuan almost doubled. In the following year, residents in the county bought nearly four times as many as radios. Sewing machines, whose sales were very low before the Cultural Revolution, suddenly seemed to gain popularity among the residents in Hechuan, resulting in a six-fold increase in sales from 1968 to 1969. This remarkable expansion of the sales of these items in Hechuan during the late 1960s was in striking contrast to the extremely politicised and chaotic background at the same time. But from 1970 onward, despite some fluctuations, the growth became even more stunning through the rest of the Cultural Revolution. As Table 2 shows,

apart from bicycles, the sales of *sanzhuanyixiang* in Hechuan experienced tremendous increases. In 1976, Hechuan residents purchased almost four times as many wrist watches as they had bought five years before and over seven times the annual sales in 1966. A similar transformation also happened to the sales of radios and sewing machines during the same period. Bicycles had not been a very popular means of transport in the small county seat of Hechuan. But even bicycles saw growth in sales in the ten-year period, reaching annual sales of over 600 in 1976, 40 times larger than the number a decade earlier.

It seemed that the urban residents of Hechuan were just not interested in these big items like *sanzhuanyixiang*. Some other expensive goods also attracted them during the Cultural Revolution. In spite of the official promotion to live a plain life, all these items were symbols of private wealth. Notable instances included Hechuan people's enthusiasm for high-end material for clothes, like silk and wool. Yet due to political and social pressure, by the end of the Cultural Revolution, it was still impossible for most ordinary people to have professional tailors make beautiful silk dresses, such as cheongsam (旗袍 *qipao*), for them. In the meantime, to wear these clothes outside was under risk of being criticised as a bourgeois lifestyle. Instead, for safety reasons the silk people brought home might be made into quilt covers which were perfect for a new couple in the family. Anyway, people's desire to buy these goods appeared to be almost unaffected.

As Table 3 demonstrates, the annual sales of silk in Hechuan from 1966 to 1967 saw a dramatic expansion by nearly seven times, perhaps because the real influence of

the Cultural Revolution had not reached the county until the last quarter of that year. In the decade following, although there were drastic fluctuations, in 1976 residents in Hechuan still bought three times the amount of silk compared with ten years earlier. For woollen cloth, the changes were not so dramatic as the sales of silk, probably partly due to the warmer temperature making it less useful in that part of Sichuan. But at the end of the ten years, the annual sales of wool in Hechuan was still three times the amount in 1966.



(Statistics from: HCXZ, 486)

Similarities can also be found in other counties in the Sichuan Basin, which shows that the situation in Hechuan was not only a single case. For instance, in Tongnan County, which is located west of Hechuan, the total sales of bicycles were merely three bikes in 1966. After five years this number surged to 129, and finally reached to 631 in 1976. As for radios, the sales were 83, 204 and 420 in those three years.⁸⁰ Yet all the statistics cited which were only from official records cannot cover

⁸⁰ Tongnanxian shangye weiyuanhui 潼南县商业委员会 [Committee of Commerce of Tongnan County] ed., 潼南县商业志 *Tongnanxian shangye zhi* (*Gazetteer of*

the whole picture, since they do not include products that were traded outside the legal places. In Hechuan, at that time the department store in the county seat was probably the only place where certain durable and luxury goods were available. However, after Red Guards' ransacked many people's houses during the surge of the first years of the Cultural Revolution, large numbers of possessions including high-end products which originally belonged to the families with relatively higher social status appeared and enjoyed popularity in the second-hand markets.⁸¹ Ransacking took place in Hechuan as well, although on a much smaller scale compared with the situation in the big cities. For local residents especially those without the required tickets but looking forward to owning such items, opportunities came unexpectedly in the second-hand markets.

2. The context beyond economic factors

Behind all the economic factors either promoting or limiting people's potential and desire for durable and luxury consumption, the situation in Hechuan can also be comprehended from a number of other perspectives. One of them was the change in the social and political atmosphere during the Cultural Revolution era, which was likely to play an influential role especially in people's purchasing activities from the early 1970s onwards. After the tide of factional fighting faded by the end of the 1960s, as mentioned in many Red Guard's memoirs, people's strong enthusiasm in political and social movements gradually but inevitably faded away. In many cases,

Commerce of Tongnan County) (internal materials, 1990), 88-89.
81 Gerth, 180.

their interest was back to the family life in everyday.⁸² As for those individuals who had no such zeal for politics or fighting from the beginning, from the early 1970s onward they felt much less pressured when trying to live a life based on their own interests. More and more Chinese people started to rediscover and refocus on what they needed or liked materially. This transformation resulted in a release of many residents' desires to purchase things, especially durable and luxury items.

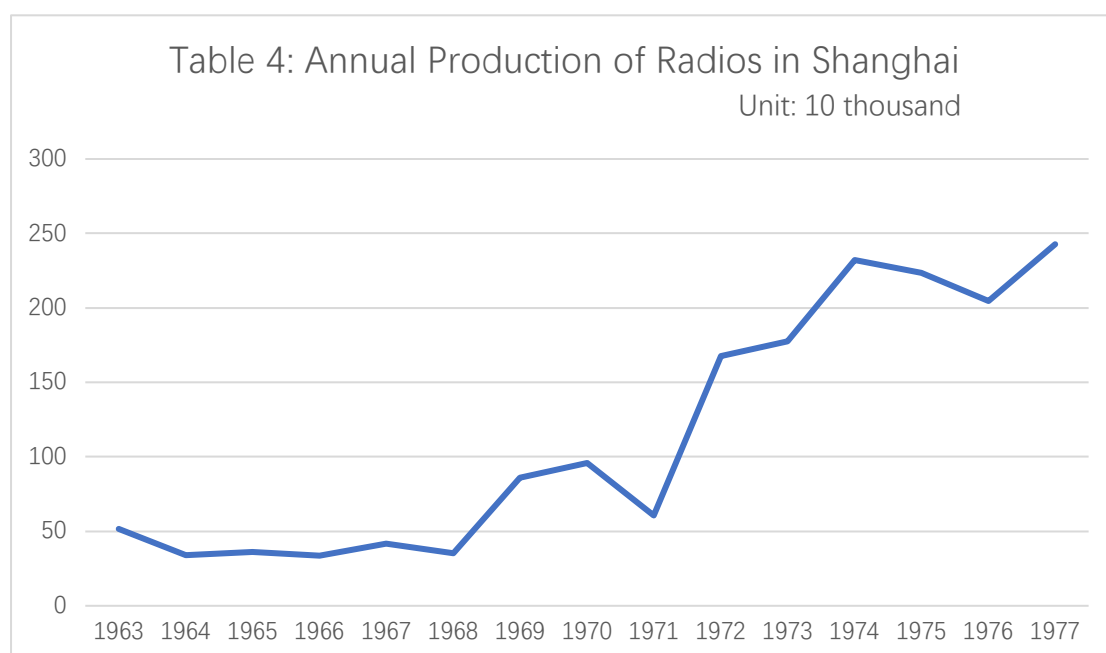
In addition to the consumers' perspective, the aspects of supply and circulation in durable and luxury goods consumption should not be overlooked. Under the specific circumstances of the Chinese centrally planned economy and the minute quantity of imported goods from abroad, the focus of our attention can be put on the domestic production of those durable and luxurious items both in and outside Sichuan.

A notable national background from the late 1960s was the launch of light industrial projects in a number of big cities, not only in coastal and eastern regions but also in hinterland and western regions. The development of radio production is an example. Through a series of policies, like tax rate modification, technology improvement, and price reduction, from the late 1960s, the Chinese radio industry had grown markedly.⁸⁴ Table 4 illustrates the annual output of radios in Shanghai from

82 A former activist in a rebel faction in Chongqing noted similar phenomenon in his autobiography, when the editorial board of their tabloid even began to print many other things, including cook books and song menus. See in Huang Zhaoyan 黄肇炎, 嘉陵旧梦: 一个大学生造反派的成长记忆 *Jialin jiumeng: yige zaofanpai daxuesheng de changzhang jiyi (An Old Dream by Jialin River: Memories of an Undergraduate Rebel)* (Hong Kong: Zhongguo Wenhua Chuanbo Chubanshe, 2014), 324.

84 Zhou Minning 周敏宁, “中国家电产品造型研究 (1949-1979 年)” *Zhongguo jiadian chanpin zaoxing yanjiu (1949-1979 年)* (Study of the Design of Chinese Household Appliances between 1949 and 1979), PhD diss., (Jiangnan University,

1963 to 1977. The growth trend started in 1968 and by 1976 its production was almost seven times higher than that ten years before. Shanghai had been a centre of light industry in China from the Republican era, selling products all over the country. This phenomenon became more marked during the planned economy period when many ordinary Chinese people dreamed of owning some light industrial products from Shanghai. These products included candies or durable items, as enviable things in everyday life. Hence the significant enhancement of industrial productivity in Shanghai from the 1960s to 1970s certainly made it easier for residents in other parts of China, including Sichuan, to get the goods they wanted. However, commodity circulation was under strict planning. Products from Shanghai were also more expensive.



(Statistics from Zhou Minning, 63.)

2016), 63.

In Sichuan's major cities such as Chengdu and Chongqing, the substantial development of light industry also took place during the same period. In Chongqing City, the origin of the electronic industry related to radio production can be traced back to the War with Japan when relevant factories moved there from coastal areas. From 1967 to 1970, based on policies from the central government, the industrial authorities of Chongqing organised three campaigns to promote radio technologies.⁸⁵ As a result, 1967 witnessed the first transistor radio produced in Chongqing. Annual output soon reached 25,700. Throughout the whole of the 1970s, the total number of radios produced in Chongqing was 265,800.⁸⁶ The local production of wrist watches and sewing machines also started and developed from the early 1970s. As shown in Table 5 and Table 6, the annual production of Shancheng (山城) wrist watches (produced by the Chongqing Watch Company) increased more than eight times within five years. During the same period, the Chongqing Sewing Machine Company expanded its production of Hongyan (红岩) sewing machines by nearly ten times. Since for local products the prices were normally lower than for those from coastal cities and the supply was more sufficient and convenient, these watches and sewing machines gained great popularity among local residents as soon as they became available in Sichuan. Table 7 demonstrates the annual profit of the Chongqing Sewing Machine Company in the 1970s. By the mid-1970s, the company had begun to make

85 Chongqingshi difangzhi bianzhuang weiyuanhui 重庆市地方志编辑委员会 [Editorial Committee of Local Gazetteers of Chongqing] ed., 重庆市志·第四卷上·电子工业志 *Chongqingshi zhi · disijuan shang · dianzi gongye zhi* (*Gazetteer of the Electronic Industry, First Half of Volume 4 of Gazetteer of Chongqing City*) (Chongqing: Chongqing Chubanshe, 1999), 460.

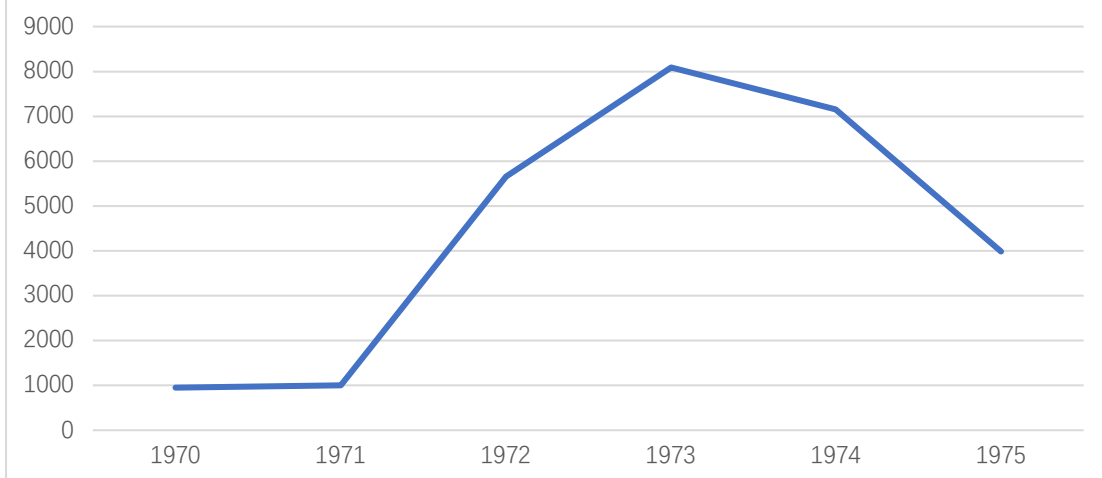
86 *Chongqingshi zhi · dianzi gongye zhi*, 472.

a profit from its production. As for bicycles, production only started in Chongqing in the early 1980s.⁸⁷ This was probably due to the hilly topography in the city which discouraged residents' interest in using bicycles. There was no doubt that the lack of local supply accounted for the relatively low sales of bicycles in Hechuan County in the 1970s.

On the one hand, local residents' expectations and ability to afford luxury and durable consumption grew. The growth in production and supply capacity both locally and nationally added to the shift. On the other hand, for certain kinds of products, some Cultural Revolution circumstances also exerted important effects. For example, the emphasis on propaganda legitimised people's desire to buy a radio in spite of its price. The sewing machine could also be regarded as a necessary tool for a self-reliant life, which was officially advocated along with frugality. These kinds of specific contexts made it much more politically correct for ordinary residents to buy such durable and luxury items. Whatever the encouragement from the official side, throughout the Cultural Revolution decade many urban people in Sichuan persisted in their enthusiasm and enjoyment for buying goods they desired.

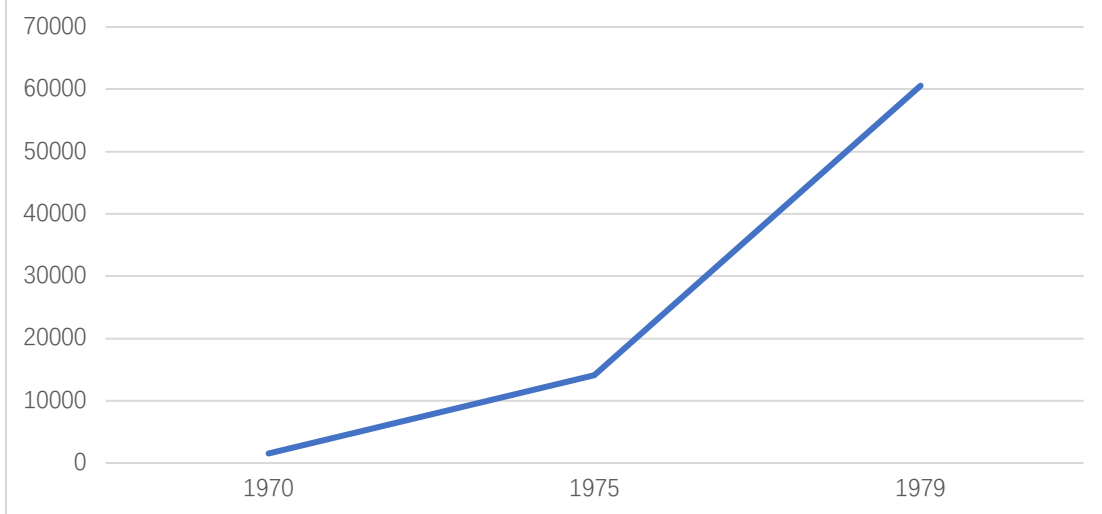
87 Chongqingshi qinggongye zhi bianji weiyuanhui 重庆市轻工业志编辑委员会 [Editorial Committee of *Gazetteer of Light Industry of Chongqing City*] ed., 重庆市轻工业志 (1840-1985) *Chongqingshi qinggongye zhi (1840-1985) (Gazetteer of Light Industry of Chongqing City 1840-1985)* [CQQGZ] (Chengdu: Sichuan Kexuejishu Chubanshe, 1995), 203.

Table 5: Annual Output of Wrist Watches by the Chongqing Watch Company

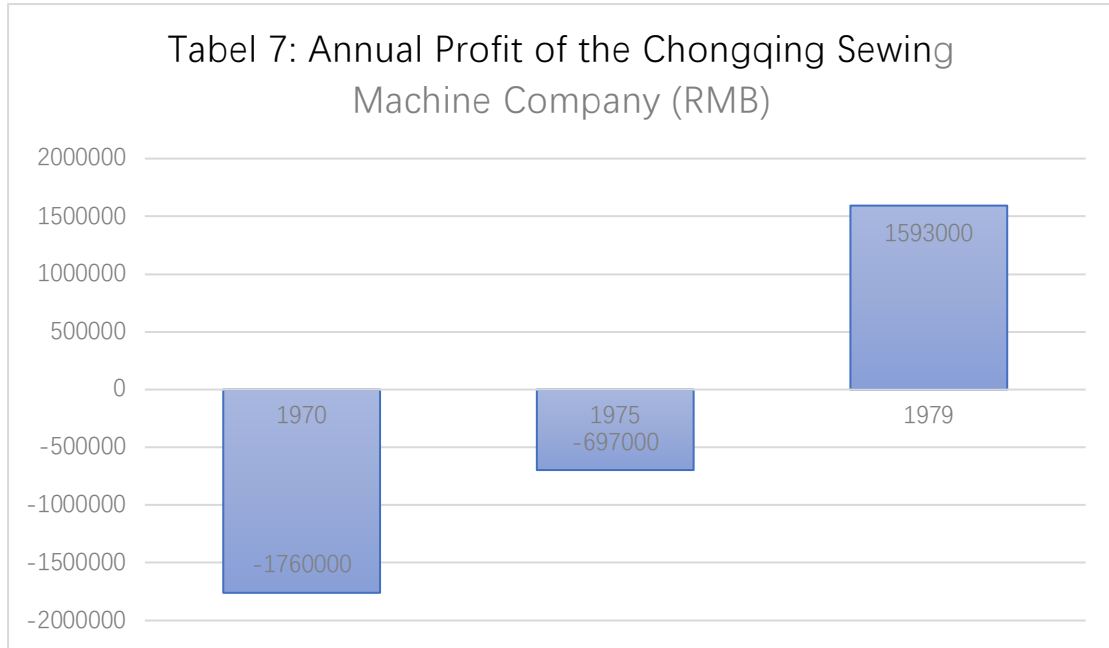


(Statistics from CQQGZ, 181.)

Table 6: The annual output of the Chongqing Sewing Machine Company



(Statistics from CQQGZ, 193.)



(Statistics from CQQGZ, 193.)

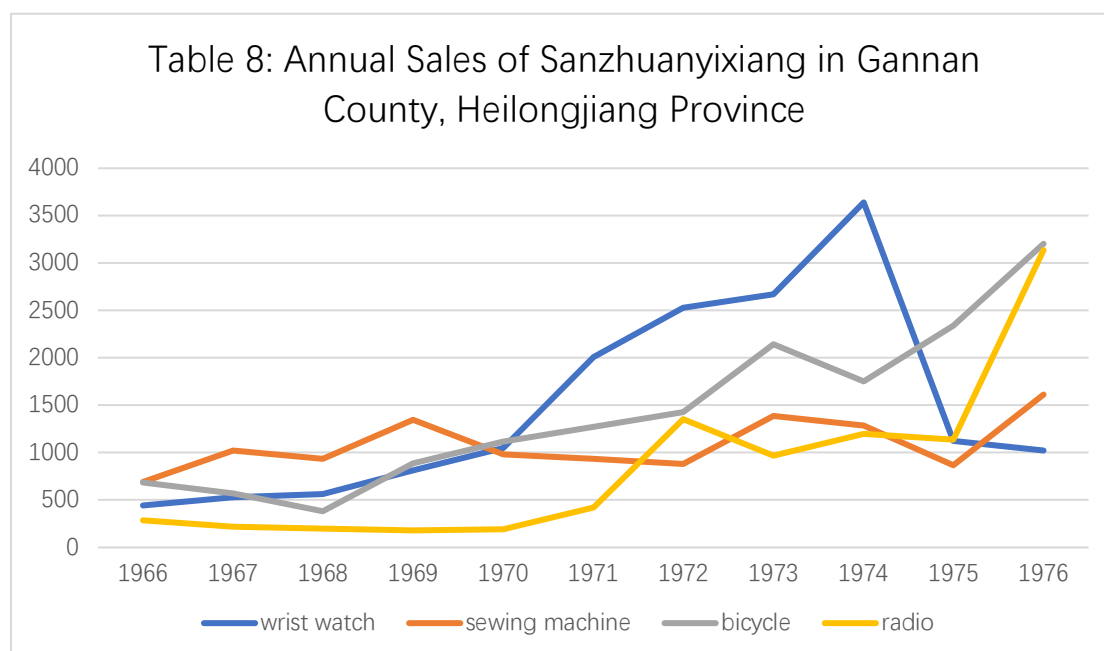
3. The situations in other parts of China

Although the increased supply of such kinds of industrial products seemed to be a national trend from the early 1970s, one may still wonder if the remarkable expansion of consumption of durable and luxury items was unique to Sichuan during the Cultural Revolution. Comparisons with counties in Northern, North Eastern, and Eastern China in the same period suggest Sichuan was not alone in this growth of consumption. In Yixian County, Hebei Province, the sales of sewing machines from 1966 to 1976 were 93, 123, 95, 261, 446, 898, 900, 711, 587, 966, and 794 units in each year.⁸⁸ In Hukou County, Jiangxi Province, the same data during this period

⁸⁸ Yixian difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 易县地方志编撰委员会 [Editorial Committee of *Gazetteer of Yixian County*] ed., 易县志 *Yixian zhi* (*Gazetteer of Yixian County*) (Beijing: Zhongyang Bianyi Chubanshe, 2000), 787.

were 103, 129, 99, 92, 226, 707, 250, 513, 658, 366, and 356 each year.⁸⁹ We can access a more completed picture in Gannan County, Heilongjiang Province, where statistics on the sales of *sanzhuanyixiang* between 1966 and 1976 are all available.⁹⁰

(See Table 8)



The counties of Yixian, Gannan, and Hukou are respectively located in the Northern, North Eastern and Eastern parts of China. The data from these different locations can to a certain degree represent a national picture about Chinese people's durable and luxury consumption at the county level, and accordingly, we can safely draw some conclusions. Undoubtedly, compared to the starting year of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese people (mainly urban residents) did purchase much more durable and luxury products by the end of the decade. In this process, the growth of

89 Hukou xianzhi bianzhuang weiyuanhui 湖口县志编撰委员会 [Editorial Committee of *Gazetteer of Hukou County*] ed., 湖口县志 *Hukou xianzhi (Gazetteer of Hukou County)* (Nanchang: Jiangxi Renmen Chubanshe, 1992), 321-22.

90 Gannanxian difangzhi bianzhuang weiyuanhui 甘南县地方志编撰委员会 [Editorial Committee of *Gazetteer of Gannan County*] ed., 甘南县志 *Gannan xianzhi (Gazetteer of Gannan County)* (Hefei: Huangshan Shushe, 1992), 333.

consumption in various locations all fluctuated periodically. In this sense, what took place in Hechuan County was in line with the nationwide tendencies.

A more specific comparison, however, suggests some situations in Hechuan were still distinct. In the years before 1970, there were no obvious improvements in *sanzhuanyixiang* sales in Yixian, Hukou, or Gannan. Some items even dropped. This was quite different from the situation in Hechuan, where residents purchased more and more wrist watches, sewing machines, and radios. On the other hand, although from the early 1970s, growth in luxury consumption occurred in all the other three counties, in most cases in those three counties the general growth rate of *sanzhuanyixiang* during the ten-year era was much lower than that in Hechuan. In other words, from the beginning to the end of the Cultural Revolution, compared with the situation in many other regions on a comparable level, Hechuan residents in the hinterland of China seemed to maintain a stronger enthusiasm and more persistent interest in durable and luxury items.

4. Why these luxuries appeared to be more attractive to Sichuan people

Further exploration is necessary for more reasons behind the phenomenon, especially from the angle of the local history and traditions of Sichuan.

As outlined in Chapter Two on the local history of Sichuan, since ancient times Sichuan residents had a long tradition of spending on fashionable or luxurious products, when conditions allowed. For many local people, besides the actual function of the products, buying them also provided pleasure in their everyday life.

The continual reshaping of demographic and social structures in the basin did not erase this characteristic of people in Sichuan. Each time newcomers arrived in the basin they usually brought fresh kinds of material culture, thus further promoting Sichuan people's interest in daily consumption. This effect became more obvious at the beginning of the modern times, along with the introduction of industrial and consumer culture from the West. Even after the planned economy had been established nationwide and communication with the West had been interrupted, the arrival of Third-Front workers from big cities in the 1960s still generated considerable influence in Sichuan. As a resident in Hechuan recalled his experience at that time, after being hired by a Third-Front factory in Hechuan, on many colleagues' hands he saw the Shanghai brand wrist watches. The brand was famous all over the country but he had not seen such a watch before. After that, buying a wrist watch, preferably a Shanghai brand, became a major motivation for his monthly saving.⁹¹

From this brief overview, it is easier to understand the durable and luxury product consumption in Sichuan during the era of the Cultural Revolution, which seemed much more prominent than in many other parts of China on the county level.

Although always restricted by both the political environment and economic conditions, urban residents in Sichuan never gave up their enthusiasm in daily purchasing, including a series of fashionable items. Together with the attempt to satisfy their appetites in daily cooking, to buy what they dreamed was another way for

91 Discussion with a resident in Hechuan who entered a Third-Front factory in the county during the Cultural Revolution, male, 10 June 2020.

them to have some enjoyment every day, both of which were extremely enviable for people in the countryside.

Chapter Four: SICHUAN PEASANTS' EVERYDAY LIFE DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Throughout the period of the Cultural Revolution, peasants always made up the majority of Chinese population, especially under the rigid restriction on people's migration to and household registration in urban areas. In Sichuan Province, in 1966 the proportion of urban population was only 9.4 per cent. Ten years later, this number even dropped to 8.2 per cent.¹ As a typical agricultural county in the Sichuan Basin, the proportion of peasants in Hechuan remained between 90 and 91 per cent throughout the Cultural Revolution era.² In this sense, the exploration of residents' everyday life during that decade is not complete without attention to the experiences of local peasants. From how they made their living and how they spent their life, this chapter intends to access Sichuan peasants' daily experiences during the decade of the Cultural Revolution. The rural areas of Hechuan county will still be a major source of local materials for my discussion.

Regarding the Cultural Revolution in the countryside, there has been some controversy on the time span as well as the degree of its influence. Although it is widely acknowledged that rural areas were not the focus of the campaign or conflict during that period, some scholars still stress the penetration of the Cultural Revolution

1 Sichuansheng difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 四川省地方志编撰委员会 [Committee of Local Gazetteers in Sichuan Province] ed., 四川省志·地理志 (上册) *Sichuansheng zhi · dili zhi (shangce)* (*Gazetteer of Sichuan Province, Gazetteer of Geography, First Half*) (Chengdu: Chengdu Ditu Chubanshe, 1996), 184.
2 HCXZ, 66.

movement into the countryside, especially after 1968,³ when the high tide of this movement had almost come to an end in urban areas. This argument seems to be reliable at least when referring to the annual change of the agricultural gross output value nationally at the same time. From the second half of the 1960s to the first half of the 1970s, from much more intense to relatively looser, the political atmosphere and practical policies in rural China experienced a roller-coaster process. Probably, this transformation accounted for the change of peasants' incomes by the end of the Cultural Revolution. In 1976, Chinese peasants' average annual allocation from their production teams reached 62.8 RMB, 20 per cent more than that in 1965.⁴ In the meantime, the annual consuming level of Chinese rural household rebounded and kept the increasing trend after several years' decline and stagnation between 1967 and 1969. By 1976 it was one-fourth higher than that in 1965.⁵

In Sichuan, it was probably a similar pattern in peasants' situation. The per capita net income of residents in rural Sichuan achieved an improvement of 20.2 per cent between 1965 and 1978.⁶ If calculated from the average purchasing power of every peasant in the province, there was also a growth of 25 per cent from 1965 to 1977.⁷ As a typical agricultural county in the Sichuan Basin, there was not an exceptional

3 Jonathan Unger, "Cultural Revolution conflict in the villages," *The China Quarterly*, No. 153, 1998 (03): 82-106.

4 Zhongguo guojia nongyebu zhengce yanjiushi 中国国家农业部政策研究室 [Office of Policy Research of the National Bureau of Agriculture of the PRC] ed., 中国农业经济概要 *Zhongguo nongye jingji gaiyao (A Brief Summary of the Chinese Agricultural Economy)* (Beijing: Nongye Chubanshe, 1982), 202.

5 Zhongguo guojia tongjiju 中国国家统计局 [National Bureau of Statistics of the PRC] ed., 中国统计年鉴 (1986) *Zhongguo tongji nianjian (1986) (Statistical Yearbook of China, 1986)* (Beijing: Zhongguo Tongji Chubanshe, 1986), 646.

6 *Sichuan shengqing*, 228

7 *Sichuan shengqing*, 228.

story in the countryside of Hechuan throughout the Cultural Revolution decade. The national political movement and social chaos undoubtedly had influences on the communities in rural Hechuan, although delayed for a period of time. For most peasants living their life locally, it was probably not until 1967 when the rebel groups attempted to seize power from communes that they authentically had a sense of the Cultural Revolution, which had been heard from loudspeakers in their villages for a long time. As recollected in an article about the power-seizing actions in Erlang Commune, Hechuan County, the day when the leader of the rebel faction seized the seal from the commune authority, symbolising his take-over of local power, was also the market day for this commune. While the rebelling leader was still immersed in the joy of success, 30 peasants suddenly surrounded him to get the seal for their certificates. At that time, if a peasant wanted to legally sell his/her pigs or other side-line products in the market, a series of certificates were needed. The rebel leader, who for the first time had the power to use a seal, however, did not know where to seal and how to issue the certificates. Being pushed and embarrassed by the anxious peasants, he had no good idea but to return the seal to the commune, so as to get rid of a big burden for him.⁸ In terms of the memoir of a local resident, such kinds of farce seemed not to be a rare thing in the countryside of Hechuan at the time, although most

8 Chi Zhengyong 池正永, “‘文化大革命’时期轶闻” “Wenhua dageming” shiqi yiwu (Interesting Stories during the Cultural Revolution), in 合川文史资料第九辑 *Hechuan wenshi ziliao dijiuji* (*Cultural and Historical Materials of Hechuan*) [WSZL], vol 9, ed. 政协四川省合川县委员会文史资料委员会 Zhengxie Sichuansheng Hechuanxian wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui [Committee of Culture and History of Hechuan County, Sichuan Province, of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)], (internal materials, 1992), 142-46.

communes changed their names in revolutionary style, such as *Qianjin* (前进 Go Forward), *Xiangyang* (向阳 Exposed to the Sun), and *Dongfanghong* (东方红 The East is Red).⁹

While for the peasants in those communes, as described above, going to the market for free businesses remained a regular and important component of their everyday life. Probably only when both the free markets and all the family side-lines including pig farming were limited more strictly or even totally prohibited, could local peasants concretely feel the significance of the Cultural Revolution in their daily experiences. Such bans took effect in rural Hechuan no later than the mainstream in the country. From as early as October 1966 onward, sugar canes, oranges, and mandarins all of which were major fruits produced by local peasants were not allowed for free trade any longer in Hechuan. Similar policies followed in the next two years, and the list of agricultural products prohibited from free sales was prolonged and continued till 1976, covering from grain and oil products, pigs and meat, to sugar canes, tea-leaves, palm sheets, wood, and bamboos.¹⁰ As for the frequency of market day, based on the policy modified in 1962, all the communes in Hechuan had their market (in the town) every three days which was as frequent as that in the 1950s. This arrangement in principle had no change until 1971,¹¹ probably due to the paralysed state of local

9 Xie Laiyu 谢来裕, “龙市农村的变革与发展 (1958-1993)” Longshi nongcun de biange yu fazhan (1958-1993) (Reform and Development of the Countryside in Longshi: 1958-1993), in WSZL, vol. 13 (1996): 62-67.

10 Hechuanxian gongshang xingzheng guanliju 合川县工商行政管理局 [Bureau of Industry and Commerce Administration of Hechuan County] ed., 合川工商行政管理局志 *Hechuanxian gongshang xingzheng guanli zhi* (*Gazetteer of Industry and Commerce Administration of Hechuan*) [HCGS] (internal materials, 1989), 28.

11 HCGS, 17.

bureaucracy at that time. Yet in practice, as admitted in the gazetteer, people who went to the market usually could not find the daily stuff they really needed, because of the drastic reduction of goods categories permitted for free trade.¹² In order to stop the so-called black capitalistic wind (资本主义黑风 *zibenzhuyi heifeng*), from 1971 all the markets in Hechuan were only open one day every week, although it was also the time when conservative policies on agriculture were reaffirmed by the central level of the CCP. During the busy farming season, in rural Hechuan there was no market at all,¹³ which might be an unprecedented phenomenon in local residents' daily experiences.

For the people of rural Hechuan, on the one hand, significant changes in their everyday life during the Cultural Revolution were not limited to the closure of free markets. Numbers of other transformations under the politicised atmosphere throughout the ten-year era unavoidably intervened in the ways local peasants had been accustomed to living. On the other hand, although rural residents had to accept and follow all those top-down designs, for their own interest, usually they seemed to have different methods, like the tactics described by de Certeau, of either avoiding certain limits or setting a foot into some forbidden areas.

When observing the specific content of Sichuan peasants' daily life, such situations appeared to exist no matter at the work of collective farming or during the time when conducting any job and business individually. To a certain degree, those phenomena were applications of what has been discussed by de Certeau about how

12 HCGS, 28.

13 HCGS, 17.

individuals can find opportunities and spaces for themselves from the public environment.¹⁴

In this chapter, mainly based on materials from rural Hechuan, the exploration covers peasants' work driven by the collective mode, their after-work attempts at family side-lines, and their participation in free markets. During the Cultural Revolution, these three parts constituted most Sichuan peasants' life experiences every day, throughout all of which notable tension and friction persisted between the management from upper levels and the responses from rural people at the grassroots. At the same time, the rural residents in Sichuan shared plenty of similarities with most peasants in other regions of China, as a consequence of the collective farming in a highly standardised form. But once making any preferable choice was possible, many of their options were still influenced or characterised by the continuity of local habits and traditions in Sichuan.

Section One: A Failed Experiment: Sichuan Peasants' Life in the Collective

Undoubtedly, during the Cultural Revolution, working in the fields in a collective and organised way continued to take up most of the peasants' labour time. This was expected by authorities, although the real efficiency of work as anticipated officially was never achieved. Under the top-down management, through mobilisation and organisation in a highly politicised style, the collective farming (in addition to many other tasks in groups, such as construction of farmland and water conservancy, in

14 de Certeau, 37-38.

which the local peasants were normally the main force involved) remained to be the most influential component circumscribing peasants' everyday life throughout the Cultural Revolution. This section will focus on Hechuan peasants' daily experiences driven by the mode of collective farming during those years, aiming to help re-access the process and result of such a large-scale and long-term experiment in rural Sichuan.

1. Learning from Dazhai

When talking about the collective work in rural China at that time, Dazhai was one of the most influential keywords. As a model of collectivised agriculture in the Maoist era, the hilly village located in Shanxi Province multiplied its grain output mainly through transforming the hillside land into terraced fields, in addition to artificial channels for irrigation. In this process, villagers' teamwork and devotion played a critical role. From 1964, under the instruction of Chairman Mao, the Movement of Learning from Dazhai in Agriculture (Learning from Dazhai for short) (农业学大寨 *Nongye Xue Dazhai*) was launched across the whole country, lasting until the end of the 1970s.¹⁵ Since the start of the Cultural Revolution, this movement had not been suspended but became more politicised and more focused on class struggle which was deemed the most important factor in the success of Dazhai. In the first half of the 1970s, the goal to popularise the Dazhai model in all the counties of China (全国普及大寨县 *quanguo puji Dazhaixian*) pushed the whole movement to a new tide. Under

¹⁵ For the specific process of this movement, see Li Jingping 李静萍, 农业学大寨运动 *Nongye xue Dazhai yundong (The Movement of Learning from Dazhai in Agriculture)* (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2011).

the extremely politicised atmosphere, in many cases, to learn from Dazhai was simplified as cutting the tail of capitalism (割资本主义尾巴 *ge zibenzhuyi weiba*), in addition to mechanically copying Dazhai's projects of farmland and reservoir construction. These activities significantly strengthened the collective part in peasants' daily work, regardless of whether the agricultural production could be benefitted or not.

In Hechuan County, as recollected by a local cadre, the Movement of Learning from Dazhai was initiated from 1965, ushered in the peak time after 1974, which was in line with the national trend.¹⁶ From late 1968, while the political chaos had not ended and social order had not been restored in Hechuan, five groups containing hundreds of representatives (including cadres from the county, commune, and brigade level) were sent from Hechuan to Dazhai village for experience learning. After their return, in the county, there was a large amount of propaganda about the Dazhai experience.¹⁷ On the provincial level of Sichuan, a visiting delegation, formed by more than 200 members from counties and prefectures in the province, was sent to Dazhai in January 1969.¹⁸ It signified the acceleration of this movement in the whole Sichuan. In late 1969, an exhibition of photographs about Dazhai organised by the authority of Sichuan Province was open in Hechuan County and lasted for nearly two months. More than 26 thousand local residents, especially including representative

16 Yang Chengshu 杨成术, “合川农业学大寨运动记略” Hechuan nongye xue Dazhai yundong jilue (Brief Record of the Movement of Learning from Dazhai in Hechuan), in in WSZL, vol. 21 (2013): 70-85.

17 Yang Chengshu, “Hechuan nongye xue Dazhai,” 70-85.

18 SCNYHZ, 92.

peasants selected from every production team, had the opportunity to concretely know about this model village.¹⁹ Since then, Dazhai had turned into a household name among Hechuan peasants, although in the beginning many of them might not realise what it would mean to themselves later on.

To be a Dazhai county, increasing the grain yield was indispensable. While the annual output of grain in rural Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution experienced a roller-coaster process. After three years of continuous drops, the production of the major kinds of staple crops (rice, wheat, corn, and sweet potatoes) began to recover from 1970 in the countryside of Hechuan. However, this positive tendency did not last long in the first half of the 1970s. Instead, repetitive fluctuations persisted for all those years.²⁰ For some special situations, such as 1975 when a drought for almost three months was followed by a heavy flood, the bad weather probably played a major role in an obvious reduction of the overall agricultural production. While in most of the other years, the low work efficiency resulted from the lack of enough dedication, a general phenomenon in the collective farming throughout the Chinese planned economy era, was more likely to be blamed.

In the countryside of Hechuan, a popular saying at that time vividly described local peasants' labouring process in their group work: going to the fields like a swarm of bees, then loafing on the job together (做活一窝蜂, 大家磨洋工 *zuohuo yiwofeng, dajia moyanggong*). Regarding the specific ways of loafing on the job (磨洋工 *moyanggong*), various excuses were useful. To go to the toilet was undoubtedly

19 SCNYHZ, 92.

20 HCXZ, 371-72.

a good reason for having a break during work. But it could not be used too frequently. For male peasants, the extra bonus was to take some time for smoking, in the name of refreshing themselves. Even women could not help doing the same thing. The grandmother of my wife spent her whole life in a small village in Northern Sichuan and was a heavy smoker. She formed this habit during the collective work in the Cultural Revolution. Such kinds of *moyanggong* in rural Sichuan vividly embodied the tactics described by de Certeau in his research on the practice of everyday life. In his theory, if individuals lack their own space, they can make clever use of time and tactics and can still preserve or obtain some personal benefit.²¹ In addition to loafing on the job, peasants probably never stopped pilfering things that were collectively owned. This behaviour can be viewed as another kind of weapon of the weak, as defined by Scott. According to a report in 1975 about the countryside of Hechuan, rural residents seemed to have expanded their ambitions, since it had been a more and more popular phenomenon that peasants illegally occupied collective property, cut down public trees, or even built new houses on the public land, all of which were for their private purposes.²²

In spite of different forms of mobilisation, no matter whether learning from Dazhai or not, this situation seemed to have no obvious improvement. One notable example was the modification of the way to evaluate and record work points. In the collective farming in rural China, the work point (工分 *gongfen*) was a basic standard

21 de Certeau, 38-39.

22 Yang Chengshu 杨成术, “合川基本路线教育运动概况” Hechuan jiben luxian jiaoyu yundong gaikuang (An Introduction of the Education Movement of the Party’s Basic Line in Hechuan), in WSZL, vol. 21 (2013): 1-13.

judging peasants' work amount and quality. For peasants who could not enjoy a ration of staple food during the planned economy era, the work point was a major criterion for the distribution of grain in each production team. As a significant part of the experiences from Dazhai, the way to record peasants' work points was changed in rural Hechuan. Instead of the original method mainly according to the working hours and labour intensity of peasants' participation in collective farming, during the Cultural Revolution, much more weight in the evaluation system was put onto the so-called political behaviour (政治表现 *zhengzhi biao-xian*).²³ As pointed out by Fei Xiaotong, a famous sociologist in Republican China, Chinese villages were an acquaintance society, where most people spent their whole life in a small circle formed by acquaintances.²⁴ Although both the interpersonal relationships and the productive relations in rural China had been seriously transformed after 1949, especially at the village level where cadres in many cases were not strangers, acquaintanceship still worked prominently in Chinese peasants' life experiences. As a consequence, the new system of work evaluation did not function as expected but ended up as an egalitarian but discouraging system among villagers. The number of people in a household accounted for another big part in the annual distribution. This made the system more difficult to motivate peasants to participate in collective work. As a result, there was no obvious gap among the villagers' income in the same

23 Ye Changlin 叶昌林, "合川农业生产经营概况" Hechuan nongye shengchan jingying gaikuang (An Introduction of the Agricultural Production and Business in Hechuan), in *WSZL*, vol. 13 (1996) 65-72.

24 More details about the claim of an acquaintance society in rural China, see Fei Xiaotong 费孝通, *乡土中国 Xiangtu zhongguo* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2012).

production team, although significant disparities still existed between villages with different conditions. After paying off the grain tax, cash was always quite rare. As a consequence, buying many things needed in daily life that could not be self-produced became very tough things for most families in the countryside.

In addition, a series of political and educational movements kept affecting the countryside of Hechuan, such as the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius (批林批孔运动 *PiLin piKong yundong*) from 1974 and the Education Movement of the Party's Basic Line (党的基本路线教育运动 *Dangde jiben luxian jiaoyu yundong*) from 1975. None of these attempts appeared to be effective in raising production levels in collective farming. In one commune of Hechuan, the gross output of grain in 1976 even fell to the level of 1953.²⁵

Apart from all those tendencies lasting in the ideological sphere, in order to promote the result of collective farming, endeavours in capital construction, agricultural mechanisation, and technical upgrade persisted in the countryside of Hechuan. All of them were driven by the national and top-down arrangements in the Cultural Revolution era. Unfortunately, except in few cases in which the experiments were suitable enough for the local conditions of rural Hechuan, the majority of these construction projects and technical trials achieved far less ideal results than originally expected, but instead interrupted peasants' daily work. This situation was probably true across the whole country.

25 Xie Laiyu, 62-67.

The capital construction projects in the countryside of Hechuan were noticeable during the Cultural Revolution decade, as another important aspect of learning from Dazhai. Since the three tributaries of Yangtze River and other smaller rivers and streams provided plentiful water for irrigation in rural Hechuan, as indicated by a local cadre, the focus in the construction was the transformation of farmland, especially transforming slopes into terraces.²⁶ From 1965 to 1968, over 1.2 million adults in Hechuan (mainly local peasants) were organised and engaged in such projects. Nearly 37 thousand *mu* (畝) of farmland was remoulded by them.²⁷²⁸

In 1974, during the Movement of Learning from Dazhai, to transform waste slopes was still the emphasis of the whole county. With an investment of 0.8 million RMB from the state, in addition to the allocation of large amounts of steel and explosive, just in that year Hechuan witnessed almost 13 thousand *mu* of land becoming suitable for cultivation.²⁹ Undoubtedly, these projects could have effectively facilitated the production of agriculture, as what was achieved in Dazhai village. This is also the assumption of some scholars when discussing rural Sichuan during the Maoist era.³⁰ But in rural Hechuan, it proved to be a different story, based on the aforementioned statistics about agricultural production.

26 Yang Chengshu, "Hechuan jiben luxian jiaoyu," 1-13.

27 HCXZ, 392.

28 *Mu* is a Chinese traditional unit of measurement. One *mu* approximately equals 666 square meters (two-thirds of a hectare).

29 HCXZ, 392.

30 Chris Bramall, *In Praise of Maoist Economic Planning: Living Standards and Economic Development in Sichuan since 1931* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 204-06.

More seriously, long before these projects became usable, the building process for them had inevitably disrupted farm work in most villages. According to the instruction from officials in Hechuan County, 20 to 25 per cent of the adult labour in each production team was required to take part in those construction projects.³¹ As a local peasant who was involved in the construction recalls, normally a project would last for months, even including parts of the busy season of farming.³² Based on the memory of the peasant mentioned above, although limited subsidies (from the county or commune level) were available in most cases, as the major labour force in his family, his long-time absence from the collective farming led to a significant reduction in the work points his family earned, let alone the postponement and losses in the family's side-lines because he was not at home.³³

Apart from these direct influences on agricultural production and the peasants' life, because of the extremely politicised background many of the projects associated with learning from Dazhai did not really fit into the local conditions, nor could they play the crucial role in farming as expected. Instead they resulted in considerable waste. What had been squandered was not only the state investment but also included the capital contributed by each local commune and production team involved. This made their financial situation even more overstretched in the annual allocation and

31 Yang Chengshu, "Hechuan jiben luxian jiaoyu," 1-13.

32 Discussion with a local peasant in Hechuan who had participated in the construction projects during the Movement of Learning from Dazhai, male, Hechuan, 1 August 2020.

33 Discussion with a local peasant in Hechuan who had participated in the construction projects during the Movement of Learning from Dazhai, male, Hechuan, 1 August 2020.

other welfare distribution.³⁴ This result inevitably influenced the quality of every peasant's daily life, which, based on local records, was not a rare phenomenon during the process of learning from Dazhai in the countryside of Hechuan either.³⁵

Although the Movement of Learning from Dazhai seemed to induce more negative effects than desirable consequences, it remained an influential part of Hechuan peasants' everyday experiences throughout the Cultural Revolution era whether being welcomed or not.

2. Hard to be acclimatised: The plight behind the official promotions in agriculture

Besides learning from Dazhai, as a result of the national promotion of agricultural mechanisation and planting techniques, all of which were advanced and fresh things in the countryside, local peasants' traditional and habitual ways of daily producing experienced many more variations. Especially in collective farming, the top-down promotion normally exerted overwhelming influences throughout the Cultural Revolution. Nonetheless, in most cases these influences did not continue once the official management dissolved, indicating a local plight behind the top-down promotion during the Cultural Revolution.

In rural Hechuan, the total horsepower of agricultural machinery in 1979 was nine times higher than that ten years before.³⁶ What had been introduced in Hechuan

34 Wang Ruifang 王瑞芳, “成就与教训: 学大寨运动中的农田水利建设高潮” *Chengjiu yu jiaoxun: Xue Dazhai yundong zhong de nongtian shuili jianshe gaochao* (Achievements and Lessons: The Tide of Farmland and Water Conservancy Construction in the Movement of Learning from Dazhai), *中共党史研究* (*Zhonggong dangshi yanjiu*), 2011 (08): 47-55.

35 Yang Chengshu, “Hechuan jiben luxian jiaoyu,” 1-13.

36 HCXZ, 364.

during the Cultural Revolution decade included walking tractors, thresher machines, feed grinders, oil presses, and even cultivators towed by motorboats.³⁷ For Hechuan peasants, all these machines were totally new in their accustomed ways in agricultural production and were expected to play a crucial role in collective farming.

Unfortunately, most of these novelties proved disappointing and even unreliable in practice. In the case of walking tractors, the Agricultural Machinery Plant of Hechuan County tried to make some adjustments in the design. The goal was to make them suit the geographical conditions in local areas, such as slopes on hillsides, which were common in rural Hechuan. However, they still could not be fully functional as useful tools for ploughing. Instead, most of the walking tractors in Hechuan were usually used for transportation (for both passengers and goods) in the countryside, though at a high risk of traffic safety. In the 1980s, once the collective economy came to its end in rural areas, the majority of these tractors was disassembled and normally only the diesel engine could continuously serve as a power plant, while most other components were turned into metal scraps in recycling stations.³⁸ The stories about thresher machines and cultivators towed by motorboats in Hechuan did not differ much from that of tractors. Although the Agricultural Machinery Plant of Hechuan had managed the technology of manufacturing these two machines and had begun batch production by the mid-1970s, between the late 1970s and early 1980s (at the ending of collective farming in rural China) neither of them was kept in large amounts in the countryside

37 HCXZ, 364.

38 HCXZ, 364.

of Hechuan. As admitted officially, the main reasons for Hechuan peasants' choices included the low quality of these machines, the potential damage they might cause to grain, and the high chance of accidents.³⁹

The processing machinery for agricultural products seemed to be the only successful trial in the countryside of Hechuan at that time. For example, feed grinders and oil presses throughout the Cultural Revolution period were used in Hechuan and become significant tools in peasants' routine work. This situation remained unchanged until the mid-1990s. During my childhood, while spending my holidays with my grandmother in the countryside, I often accompanied her to the mill of the village where an oil press was located. As my grandmother told me if there had not been such a machine which was installed in the village since the mid-1970s and had kept working in the following decades, my mother and her siblings might not be financially able to have further schooling after their primary education.

Comparatively speaking, among all these machines introduced in rural Hechuan at that time, if they could meet peasants' real needs seemed to be the essential factor for the success of the mechanisation for agriculture. Machines designed for large-scale collective cultivation, such as the tractors and cultivators, were always the focus of the national and top-down promotion. But they were never favoured by local people in rural Hechuan. As a Chinese scholar mentioned about his experiences as a Sent-down Youth, since rice was easily damaged by the newly introduced threshers, peasants even encouraged the rusticated youngsters to put pebbles into the machine to

39 HCXZ, 364.

break it. Then the threshing task could only be finished in traditional ways.⁴⁰ This story happened in Guangxi. While in rural Sichuan, as an old peasant in Hechuan recalled, during those years they still preferred to use those threshers in the old style, including hand-operated and foot-pedal.⁴¹ From the top-down and national perspective, the goal of agricultural mechanisation, which had been pursued from the 1960s to the 1970s, was abruptly abandoned by the Central Level of the CCP in 1978.

In contrast to the plight of most new machines introduced into rural Hechuan, the popularisation of irrigation equipment during the same period seemed to achieve much better results, becoming a dependable helper in collective farming. Making use of the rich water resources in Hechuan, the horsepower of pumping irrigation dramatically and continuously increased throughout the 1960s and '70s. The number in 1976 was almost seven times that of ten years earlier.⁴² In 1966, 30,000 *mu* of farmland in Hechuan for the first time was irrigated by electric pumps.⁴³ From the 1970s more and more electric pumps had been put into use, replacing those powered by diesel. During the second half of the Cultural Revolution era, 73 pumping stations with a total capacity of over 6,000 kilowatts were established along all the three rivers in the countryside of Hechuan.⁴⁴ A peasant in Hechuan recalled that when he was a youngster in the early 1970s and began to work for the production team, watering

40 Qin Hui, 秦晖, "Reform in rural China," (a lecture delivered at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China, 30 November 2018).

41 Discussion with an old peasant in rural Hechuan who was a labourer from the 1960s to the 1980s, male, Hechuan, 16 December 2019.

42 HXCZ, 365.

43 HXCZ, 366.

44 HXCZ, 366.

crops became a sought-after task when the team leader assigned work to each member. The only reason was that the electric pump near their village started working and functioned well.⁴⁵ During the same period, it was a similar situation in many other villages of Hechuan, except for those located in remote hills. On this basis, the development of irrigation systems was carried into the next decade after the Cultural Revolution, a result different from the story of most other agricultural machines as mentioned above. By the mid-1980s the total capacity of electric pumps in Hechuan was nearly four times higher than that in 1976. At the same time, irrigated areas took up 63 per cent of the whole farmland in rural Hechuan,⁴⁶ despite the disappearing of collective farming in the countryside. In this process, not only for agricultural production, but also for daily life, pumping water (either from rivers, reservoirs, or ponds nearby) gradually became a common part of rural people's everyday experiences in Hechuan.

This effect undoubtedly once more verified the fact that only changes that practically satisfied individual peasants' needs could really be accepted and successfully take root in local people's life, regardless of the official promotion or collective arrangements. In short, acclimatisation was the crucial issue in this process.

While the introduction of novel machines did not boost collective farming as officially anticipated, the yield of agriculture, especially grain, was always deemed as the key link during those years (以粮为纲 *yiliangweigang*). Driven by the instruction

45 Discussion with an old man who grew up in rural Hechuan and began to work in his production team during the Cultural Revolution, male, Hechuan, 10 December 2019.

46 HCXZ, 366.

from upper levels, new methods aiming to improve per unit output kept being introduced in collective farming and left remarkable imprints on peasants' daily experiences. One notable example was the official promotion of double-cropping rice.

In the history of rice cultivation in Sichuan, peasants normally did not have the tradition of cropping twice in a year. In the months after the rice had been harvested, Sichuan peasants usually just left the field as natural reservoirs, storing water in the winter until the next spring, known as *dongshuitian* (冬水田) in Chinese. During this period some peasants might set up fish-farming there if they liked, but rarely would they think about cropping one more round instead. The fresh technology of cropping and harvesting twice a year was experimented with in many counties of Sichuan Province (including Hechuan County) for the first time in the mid-1930s. The goal of increasing output had been achieved in the experimental fields, although the total scale was quite limited. From the mid-1950s, a much larger-scale experiment and promotion was carried out under stronger guidance and support from the newly founded state. In 1956, 2.6 million *mu* of farmland in Hechuan was cultivated for double-cropping rice. The peak during this period was reached two years later when 3.5 million *mu* of rice fields harvested twice a year in rural Hechuan.⁴⁷ Behind these soaring numbers, there was a significant transformation in local peasants' experiences of daily work, since they could no longer, as they used to, enjoy several leisure months after the busy season of agriculture. Instead, once the first season's rice had been harvested, peasants needed to plough the fields again, and sow seeds as soon as

47 HCXZ, 393.

possible, so as to ensure another reaping before the arrival of the severe winter. This timetable, consistent with the sharp shrinking of the area of traditional *dongshuitian* in rural Hechuan,⁴⁸ meant that for the majority of Hechuan peasants, no matter whether they wanted to or not, had to keep working busily all year from early spring to early winter.

But this trend was soon suspended during the Great Famine from the end of the 1950s. In the early 1960s, there were a series of modifications in rural policies from the central level of the CCP as mentioned before, and the agricultural production gradually recovered. But the cultivated area for double-cropping rice in Hechuan continued to decline. It was not until 1969 that the double cropping of rice was stressed again in Sichuan. As a part of learning from Dazhai in that year, the provincial authorities viewed the transformation from *dongshuitian* into double-cropping fields as an important way to raise grain output.⁴⁹ In the countryside of Hechuan, the rebound of double-cropping did not arrive until 1971. This time, although the force of promotion under the politicised context was not weaker than that in the 1950s, the expansion of double-cropping fields was maintained for no more than two years. From the mid-1970s, obvious declines in the area of double-cropping rice reappeared in Hechuan.⁵⁰ As for its fate of double cropping after the Cultural Revolution, it ended up in a similar way to most of the agricultural machines which were introduced during the same period. In 1977, on account of the provincial policy

48 HCXZ, 358.

49 SCNYHZ, 92.

50 HCXZ, 393.

of Sichuan, double cropping was no longer required in rural areas.⁵¹ In Hechuan by 1980 to crop twice a year had been removed from the schedule of most peasants. As recalled by some old people, in many cases it was replaced by hybrid rice instead.⁵² One year later, the total area for double-cropping rice in rural Hechuan was only 800 *mu*, which was extremely low compared with the situation decades earlier.⁵³

Regarding the reasons for this failure, the actual yield of double-cropping rice in Hechuan between 1956 and 1980 perhaps provided a simple answer. Throughout these two and a half decades, its yield per unit on average was only equivalent to or even lower than that from single cropping rice.⁵⁴ This was like getting half the result with twice the effort (事倍功半 *shibeigongban* in Chinese).

In addition, there were other reasons for such unsatisfying yields. As suggested by an old resident in Hechuan who once worked in the Bureau of Agriculture of the County, besides the lack of technical support, “it seemed that the peasants in Hechuan always felt hesitant during the double-cropping promotion, although the government never gave up its efforts to popularise this new mode for cultivation”.⁵⁵ The reluctance of peasants probably led to reductions in the effectiveness of practice. As indicated by research on double (and even triple) cropping rice in other parts of rural China at the same time, during such a prolonged and up-and-down process, similar

51 SCNYHZ, 115.

52 Yi Fuzhi 易复智, “合川全面推广杂交稻的历史回顾” Hechuan quanmian tuiguang zajiadao de lishi huigu (A Recollection about the History of the Generalisation of the Hybrid Rice in Hechuan), in WSZL, vol. 21 (2013): 86-92.

53 Yi Fuzhi, 86-92.

54 Yi Fuzhi, 86-92.

55 Discussion with a local resident who once worked in the Bureau of Agriculture of Hechuan County, male, Hechuan, 18 January 2020.

negotiation and compromise in various forms probably existed between the cadres and peasants in the countryside of Hechuan.⁵⁶

Yet no matter how reluctant peasants were, they had no other choice but to be involved in the cultivation of double-cropping rice, even like a political task with symbolic significance, in practice loafing on the job was still inevitable. Especially given the fact that most rural residents did not used to continue toiling in the fields so late in a year, not to mention the equalitarian distribution system in production teams at that time, *moyanggong* would unavoidably become even more common in their collective work. From this perspective, same as the agricultural machines promoted in rural Hechuan, a mismatch between the promotion from the authorities and the authentic needs of local peasants still accounted for the unpopularity and failure of double-cropping rice in Hechuan. Again, fitting with the local conditions was still the crucial issue.

3. Adjusting measures to local conditions was more feasible and productive

While different forms of discordance seemed to be everywhere in officially required tasks during peasants' collective labour every day, in a few cases, work proved to be a smoother process when the targets and measures proposed were more consistent with the indigenous traditions, as well as more suitable for the local conditions (in Chinese this is called 因地制宜 *yindizhiyi*). In the countryside of Hechuan, the industries of tea planting and fishing were two such instances.

⁵⁶ Zhou, Xiao Kate, 33.

Sichuan had a very long history of tea plantations and tea consumption, as mentioned in Chapter Two. During the Cultural Revolution period, this tradition remained through the form of tea gardens run by production teams. Although in the collective mode, these gardens turned out to be an influential part of many Sichuan peasants' life experiences. In April 1973 a provincial conference was held to communicate experiences in tea plantations and business in Sichuan. As one of the most substantial resolutions from this conference, a grain ration equivalent to urban residents nearby would be provided to members of the production teams focusing on tea production.⁵⁷ This policy undoubtedly solved the biggest issue for those peasants. As a commercial crop, although all the business proceedings from plantations to sales still belonged to the collective ownership, due to tea's relatively more attractive input-output ratio than most grain products, rural individuals were further motivated when engaging in tea production. In Hechuan, the collective tea gardens kept developing for ten years from the mid-1960s, resulting in an expansion of more than 40 times in the area of tea plantations.⁵⁸ Even during the decade after 1975, while collective agriculture was going to its end, 110 tea gardens founded (or co-founded) by local villages remained. Such collective tea plantation occurred in over one-third of the communes of rural Hechuan, especially those in hilly regions where the topography and weather were more suitable for tea growing.⁵⁹ As for the marketing channel of the tea-leaves, based on the decisions from the aforementioned conference, through the

57 SCNYHZ, 103.

58 HCXZ, 390.

59 HCXZ, 390.

state's trade department, a system of purchasing in advance was applied to all the output from the tea gardens in Sichuan.⁶⁰ In Hechuan, the official department of foreign trade involved in this industry from the 1960s. This made the locally-produced tea-leaves an important kind of export commodities.

Benefitting from the development of tea plantations and business, the life experiences of a tea farmer appeared to be enviable to many other local peasants. This advantage would become even more obvious when Sichuan officials modified the allocation standard in the income of production teams, leading to an increase in the cash peasants could get, especially those in villages with more commercial crops.⁶¹ “All our diligent work in the tea garden was finally not in vain. With the income from tea production, I can have the chance of further study, although I am only a girl and there are three brothers in my family.”⁶² This was from the diary of a Hechuan resident who was born in a village with a tea garden. She wrote that when receiving the chance to study in the high school in the county seat at the mid-1970s. Obviously her diary on that day is full of joy and gratitude because of this fortune.

As for many other production teams in Hechuan which were not so lucky to have a tea garden, developing fishery was another approach to improving the collective economy and peasants' daily life. Favoured by plentiful water resources from rivers, streams, and reservoirs, in Hechuan fishing had always been a profitable business, even throughout the Cultural Revolution period. Between 1964 and 1979, in Hechuan

60 SCNYHZ, 103.

61 SCNYHZ, 105.

62 Diaries written by a female resident in Hechuan who was born in a production team with a tea garden, found in the old book market of Hechuan, 28 December 2019.

the annual output of fishery on average was 563.6 tonnes, while the total production from 1961 to 1963 had only been 450 tonnes.⁶³ Besides the harvest from natural fish-catching, one more phenomenon worthy to be noted was the expansion of artificial cultured fish (in rivers and ponds). From 1966, the water area for cultured fishery in Hechuan grew year by year until 1974.⁶⁴ Either through cultured or natural fishery, in the annual aquatic production of Hechuan, the output contributed by peasants was over 95 per cent during those years.⁶⁵

While the Movement of Learning from Dazhai was launched and developed in Sichuan between the mid- and late-1960s, although under the more and more politicised background, “acting according to local circumstances (*yindizhiyi*)” was still emphasised by the provincial authorities. This was a way to facilitate the diversified economy (*多种经营 duozhong jingying*) in addition to grain production.⁶⁶ In rural Hechuan, the effect of this policy was coupled with the application of new techniques and devices, all of which worked in the collective mode. To develop cultured fishery, 1970 witnessed the introduction of many sorts of new fingerlings into Hechuan, in addition to experiments in artificial propagation for local fish. In 1975, Qiantang Commune built a river dam to block fish for the first time in the county. Based on this project, a fishing ground was co-founded by several production teams nearby, which achieved annual production of five to eight tonnes.⁶⁷

63 HCXZ, 385.

64 HCXZ, 388.

65 HCXZ, 388.

66 SCNYHZ, 94.

67 SCNYHZ, 385.

Regarding the sales of the fish, compared with tea-leaves, individual peasants enjoyed slightly more freedom from the collective economy, though state acquisition still played the dominant role. Since fish had always been one of the favourite dishes on Hechuan residents' dining tables, as described in the previous chapter, during the Cultural Revolution people could often buy fresher fish directly from peasants no matter in the legal market or not.⁶⁸ When the rectification of free markets happened in Hechuan in 1975, panic-stricken peasants were chased after only if they had brought some fresh and live goods (certainly including fish) to the county seat or some towns. As summarised and admitted officially, this phenomenon continued until the end of the Cultural Revolution.⁶⁹ Behind the scene that was depicted so briefly in the gazetteer, for many rural people in Hechuan, fish-farming and fish-selling had become significant income source as well as parts of their everyday life, regardless of the looser or tighter controls from officials.

Throughout the Cultural Revolution decade, the tea and fishing industries seemed to be one of the few high spots in Hechuan peasants' daily experiences under the collectivised economy. Thanks to rural people's diligence, persistence, and their strong desire for a better life, plus the suitability between official policies and local conditions, some of the top-down arrangements under the collective economy finally had satisfying outcomes during the Cultural Revolution era.

⁶⁸ Discussion with a resident living in the county seat of Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution era, male, Hechuan, 6 January 2020.

⁶⁹ HCGS, 52.

Dominated by the collective economy, the official management and policies promotion by the CCP in most cases failed to improve the agricultural yield or upgrade peasants' quality of life. All the peasants were expected to spare no effort in their participation in collective work every day, but as explored in this section, people always had ways of foot-dragging, desertion, and pilfering in rural Hechuan. These kinds of behaviours are either similar to the tactics defined by de Certeau or parallel to weapons of the weak as summarised by James C. Scott. These tactics proved effective for individuals subject to top-down monitoring and without adequate private space.

As a result, officials assumed that peasants would enthusiastically embrace the arrangements on what and how they should plant, but in fact, the rural residents of Hechuan discarded most of the official instructions once they had the chance to make a choice. The CCP promised that all peasants would enjoy an equal life with a standardised mode of collective farming. But in rural Hechuan, there were always considerable gaps in peasants' daily experiences between different villages. While some peasants benefitted from the water or hills nearby (靠山吃山, 靠水吃水 *kaoshanchishan, kaoshuichishui* in Chinese), not to mention those close to urban areas, many other villages were never favoured by any of these advantages under the collective mode.

These situations raise the question whether the collectivised way in rural areas actually improved peasants' everyday experiences, or just created considerable barriers in their lives.

Section Two: Keeping Busy in Spare Time: Peasants' Family Side-lines

As the major part of Sichuan peasants' routine life was occupied by the work for collective farming, after-work hours should have been their valuable rest time. But most peasants chose not to take rest in their rest time but devote themselves to various kinds of side-lines to make money. Through the small but valuable private spaces, peasants could slightly change their quality of life beyond the level obtained through collective work. Including rural residents' work in their private plots as well as other family side-lines in the discussion, this section presents a picture of Sichuan peasants' private production in every day, based on primary materials from Hechuan and nearby areas.

Under the lasting pressure from the politicised environment, for a peasant, there was always a shifting boundary between what was allowed and what was forbidden. But with official permission or not, rural residents never gave up the attempt to get extra cash, which was quite rare in the equalitarian distribution system of the collective economy. Their persistent endeavours formed the hidden transcripts of peasants' daily experiences. The hidden transcripts, as argued by Scott, were facilitated to grow through the local social contexts and were "defendable in the teeth of power"⁷⁰. In rural Hechuan, the strong traditions of family side-lines, the continuity of free marketing, and peasants' habitual participation in these markets, all of which were full of Sichuan colour, kept generating such contexts as identified by Scott.

⁷⁰ Scott, *Domination*, 52.

The policies on private plots and side-lines in the aforementioned Sixty Regulations on Agriculture had not significantly changed for 20 years since the late 1950s.⁷¹ But there were repeated transformations and fluctuations when those policies were applied in local areas. Especially during the decade of the Cultural Revolution, peasants experienced the strengthening and loosening of restrictions. By the mid-1960s, in the countryside of Hechuan, the economy beyond collective farming had achieved a considerable scale. In one commune, as recorded in the gazetteer, apart from the distribution of small plots of farmland (in the name of temporarily lending) to villagers, a variety of family businesses including pig raising and sericulture had achieved substantial development.⁷² However, this growth could by no means continue once the Cultural Revolution started and the countryside was involved in the movement. Almost all private production and business were seriously denounced as capitalist activities, especially during the Movement of Learning from Dazhai. This trend lasted to the end of the Cultural Revolution. In 1975 when a number of production teams were formally praised by the authorities of Hechuan County, their activism in criticising capitalist activities was still a major criterion. In one of the production teams, as reported, there was reportedly no trend of privately digging and planting (私挖乱种 *siwa luanzhong*) or giving up farm work to engage in trade (弃农经商 *qinong jingshang*).⁷³ Obviously, even under such constant political pressure

71 Xin Yi 辛逸, “农村人民公社家庭副业研究” *Nongcun Renmingongshe jiating fuye yanjiu* (A Study on the Family-Sidelines in People’s Communes in Rural Areas), *中共党史研究* (*Zhonggong dangshi yanjiu*), 2000 (05): 57-63.

72 Xie Laiyu, 62-67.

73 Yang Chengshu, “Hechuan nongye xue Dazhai,” 70-85.

from the upper levels, rural residents' economic activity was not a monolithic picture in the countryside of Hechuan. Phenomena inconsistent with official expectations persisted in their daily life, whenever they had any chance and space to earn some extra money. Throughout the whole process, both the local peasants and cadres at the basic level played crucial roles, usually leading to an implicitly reciprocal outcome.

1. To raise a pig was always a good idea

At that time, one of the most significant ways in which peasants could work and profit privately was pig farming. It was also perhaps the most officially recognised and subsidised industry for most households in rural Sichuan. As a traditionally advantageous industry, raising pigs was never explicitly prohibited even during the most politicised stage of the Cultural Revolution. The national background was closely related to Chairman Mao's famous instruction, known as "more pigs, more fertilizer, more grain" (猪多, 肥多, 粮多 *zhuduo, feiduo, liangduo*). This made pig raising in rural China a politically rightful thing without any doubt. The only issue was that whether alongside the collective form of pig farming, peasants could raise some pigs by themselves, as a family side-line. As mentioned in Chapter Two, pig farming had been a significantly profitable business among rural households in Sichuan since the Qing Dynasty. During the Cultural Revolution, this tradition did not disappear. At the provincial level, in April 1969, the Sichuan authorities called for the development of pig raising mainly based on individual households and clearly rebuked the tendency to deny peasants' pig-raising rights in recent years.⁷⁴ The next

74 SCNYHZ, 93.

year witnessed the reaffirming of the rewarding policy on selling live pigs to the state (生猪奖售政策 *shengzhu jiangshou zhengce*), according to which 25 kilograms of grain would be earned by the peasant selling one pig to the state.⁷⁵ Although private slaughter was still forbidden, and so was selling pork freely, the reward undoubtedly further stimulated rural residents' motives to raise pigs, especially when the output and distribution of grain remained at a low level during those years. A year later, the state acquisition policy was confirmed as "one of every two pigs is for sale, and the other one can be left for the peasant". At the same time, the rewards became more attractive since tickets for cloth were included and larger amounts of grain would be rewarded if the pig was fat enough.⁷⁶ This supportive attitude from the local authorities was strengthened in 1974 when raising pigs by individual peasants in Sichuan was especially emphasised, for fear that pig farming collectively by the production team might occupy more human or material resources and impair the production of grain.⁷⁷

As for the specific situation in Hechuan, apart from the rewarding policy consistent with the provincial standards, from the mid-1960s after the pig was slaughtered, through exchange of many by-products, such as bristles, sausage casing, and pigskin, pig farmers in rural Hechuan could receive extra bonuses. Normally the bonuses included tickets for industrial products,⁷⁸ which were quite difficult to get in rural areas at that time. Probably encouraged by these policies, the number of pigs

75 SCNYHZ, 95.

76 SCNYHZ, 97.

77 SCNYHZ, 110.

78 HCGX, 211.

raised in Hechuan soon recovered from the three-year Great Famine. As admitted officially, it was mainly a result of private raising.⁷⁹ This improving trend was interrupted during the first couple of years of the Cultural Revolution, but it seemed that Hechuan peasants' enthusiasm for pigs endured. The picture is clearer if taking the number of rural households in Hechuan into consideration. In 1972 when the annual quantity of pigs being raised in the whole county reached its peak before 1978, on average each rural family had more than two pigs,⁸⁰ which would undoubtedly become a significant source of income. For almost all the informants who grew up in rural Hechuan between the 1960s and 1970s, one of the most important tasks after school was cutting several baskets of pigweed. Even a small child under five years old would take a small basket on his or her way to the kindergarten and try not to return home empty-handed. One of the peasants recalled that the pig, when it was only a piglet, would be the centre of the whole family's attention. To make it grow more quickly, some of the grain originally for humans, such as corn, would even be provided to the pig.⁸¹ Given this popularity of pig raising, it was no wonder that Hechuan artists chose (once they had the chance) to present a stage play about a peasant girl whose main work was to raise pigs, as discussed in the following chapter about Sichuan people's cultural life during the Cultural Revolution. Similarly, as mentioned in the section about Sent-down Youth life in the countryside of Hechuan,

79 HCSY, 140 & HCXZ, 381.

80 HCSY, 141 & HCXZ, 66.

81 Discussion with a local peasant who lived in rural Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution, female, Hechuan, 14 May 2020.

to raise a pig was usually a major option to improve their standard of living, although many of their trials might not be successful due to a lack of practical experience.

Viewed from a longer timeline after the Cultural Revolution era, by 1985 the number of slaughtered pigs had grown 87 per cent, compared with five years earlier, while the average growth rate in the other counties of Sichuan was 54 per cent.⁸² This explosive growth in Hechuan in the 1980s was undoubtedly an extension of peasants' traditional enthusiasm for pig farming after being circumscribed for quite a long time.

2. The tradition of sericulture continued and developed

During the period of the Cultural Revolution, if pig raising privately did not help peasants' daily life as much as expected, especially taking the considerable cost into consideration. Fortunately, rural residents in Hechuan could take part in a number of other businesses, most of which also originated from traditions of rural Sichuan. Pig farming at least was never disapproved by policy-makers, but for many other businesses, negotiations between grassroots people and local officials were always required.

One noticeable instance was sericulture which had been a traditional side-line for rural families in Sichuan since ancient times. Mulberries planted around peasants' houses or beside the fields were a very common sight in the countryside of the Sichuan Basin. It was also an important part of many peasants' everyday life to feed silkworms with mulberry leaves. As indicated by the gazetteer of Sichuan, Hechuan was one of the counties in the province with outstanding achievements in

82 HXCZ, 381.

sericulture.⁸³ From the early 1960s, together with the recovery of the rural economy, mulberry planting also revived in Hechuan. The four years between 1963 and 1966 witnessed the planting of 610 million new mulberry trees, which exceeded the largest number of mulberries in Hechuan previously. But due to the influence of the Cultural Revolution, this growth was interrupted and suspended from 1967 to 1972. In those years the mulberries which were removed even exceeded those newly planted in Hechuan,⁸⁴ as a consequence of the politicised circumstances and the overemphasis on grain production.

In 1973, the Sericulture Conference of Sichuan Province (四川蚕桑会议 *Sichuan Cansang Huiyi*) was held in Hechuan County. The reasons behind the choice of the conference location are unclear, but this promotion from provincial officials directly accelerated the development of sericulture in rural Hechuan. The conference confirmed that open spaces next to fields, slopes, roads, streams, and around houses, as in the local tradition, were the most suitable for mulberry planting.⁸⁵ In early 1974, based on further instruction from the provincial level, the trees peasants planted in front of or behind their houses should not be destroyed, and more meaningfully, who planted the tree, who owns it.⁸⁶ During the years when increasing grain output was regarded as the key task, this attitude valuably legitimised and facilitated the existence

83 Regarding the history of sericulture in Sichuan areas, see in 四川省志·丝绸志 *Sichuansheng zhi · Sichou zhi (Gazetteer of Sichuan Province, Gazetteer of Sericulture)*, ed. 四川省地方志编纂委员会 *Sichuansheng difangzhi bianzhuang weiyuanhui [Committee of Local Gazetteers in Sichuan Province]* (Chengdu: Sichuan Kexue Jishu Chubanshe, 1988).

84 HXCZ, 375.

85 HXCZ, 375.]

86 SCNYHZ, 93.

and expansion of mulberries. This shift in local policies was likely a consequence of effective negotiation between cadres and peasants in the province.

From then on, mulberries again became a common sight in rural Hechuan. As recalled by an old woman who grew up in the countryside, peasants usually cared much more about those trees planted near their houses or yards, which were in fact also a part of the side-lines operated by rural households.⁸⁷ As a continuity of this trend, by the mid-1980s, the total number of mulberries in Hechuan amounted to 120 million, and those planted beside peasants' houses or fields made up 95 per cent of the total.⁸⁸

All the mulberry planting was ultimately for silkworm rearing, where new techniques were always needed for the improvement of cocoon production. In Hechuan, relevant explorations and experiments restarted only a couple of years after the foundation of the PRC. As recorded in the gazetteer, in addition to the introduction and promotion of new types of silkworm eggs, experience about the ways of feeding and the methods to prevent diseases were summarised and adjusted continuously from the 1950s to '70s. During all the procedures, both scientific workers at the local level and peasants in Hechuan involved.⁸⁹ Even during the first few years of the Cultural Revolution, the earlier achievements in techniques, in addition to the aforementioned effort and result on mulberry planting between 1963 and 1966, had provided favourable conditions for the development of silkworm

87 Discussion with an old woman who grew up in the countryside of Hechuan, Hechuan, 20 March 2020.

88 HXCZ, 375.

89 HXCZ, 377-379.

breeding. In 1968, while most other agricultural production dropped to much lower levels, the amount of cocoon production in Hechuan reached the highest point in records. Three years later, Hechuan witnessed another 50 per cent improvement in cocoon yields based on the number in 1969, and for the first time ranked first in the whole province.⁹⁰ By 1976 the statistic was more than two times as large as that ten years earlier.⁹¹ Besides, in 1973, in order to encourage peasants to sell their harvested cocoons to the state, a rewarding policy was introduced by the authorities of Hechuan County. According to the policy, 50 kilograms of chemical fertilizer would be awarded to the peasant if he or she sold certain amounts of cocoons to the state.⁹²

As a result of all these attempts, every step of the sericulture industry, such as preparing enough mulberry leaves to feed the larvae of silkworms, waiting for them to get older and bigger, and finally spinning their cocoons, became a very common and significant component in many Hechuan peasants' everyday experiences. Due to the much lighter labour intensity compared with working in the fields, silkworms were normally looked after by the women and children at home. The opera contributed by Hechuan artists and amateurs named *The Girl Breeding Silkworms*, which premiered in 1975, as mentioned in the discussion about people's cultural life during the Cultural Revolution era, was a vivid on-stage re-creation of this family work on silkworms, with plenty of local colour in Hechuan peasants' daily routines.

90 HCXZ, 377.

91 HCXZ, 380.

92 HCGX, 211.

3. To keep working hard on the private plots

While either raising pigs or breeding silkworms were the most characteristic Sichuan peasants' experiences in family side-lines during the Cultural Revolution, what took up the majority of their time and energy apart from collective farming was normally the cultivation of their private plots. This was little different from other parts of rural China at the time, while Sichuan peasants' persistence and endeavours in their plots still deserve specific discussion. In accordance with the Sixty Regulations on Agriculture, as mentioned above, peasants' right to keep small pieces of land in hand was never denied, in principle, throughout the decade of the Cultural Revolution.⁹³ But in local realities, the existence of private plots was often jeopardised by the tightening of the political atmosphere. In rural Sichuan, at one point returning the plots back to production teams became a popular method of learning from Dazhai.⁹⁴ Although this trend was rectified by the provincial authorities in 1969,⁹⁵ tensions and negotiations on the issue of private plots between peasants and cadres undoubtedly lasted until the end of the 1970s.

In the Hechuan countryside, even during the last couple of years of the Cultural Revolution, tensions around private plots tightened again. Due to a spring drought followed by a big flood in the summer, 1975 was a very difficult year for peasants in Hechuan. Confronting the predicament, according to a memoir by a resident who grew up in the countryside, his production team decided to enlarge the size of their

93 Xin Yi, 57-63.

94 SCNYHZ, 93.

95 SCNYHZ, 93.

private plots, through distributing parts of the collective land. Thanks to the team leader who dared to take the risk of being punished, the author's family planted corn in the small plot they got and received a good harvest several months later. As he recalled, "it saved the lives of my whole family, without any exaggeration". All the villagers kept a low profile during this process. In other words, both the peasants and cadres in this village shared a tacit understanding and maintained a reciprocal relationship. But after only one season of planting and harvest, the newly distributed plots, as an extra bonus for the peasants, were confiscated.⁹⁶ The background of the confiscation was probably the launch of the Educational Movement of the Basic Line of the Party in rural Hechuan between December 1975 and August 1976. During that period, it seemed that taking back the plots distributed earlier was a common task in rural Hechuan. In another production team, because their plots exceeded the standard size, the villagers were required by officials from the county seat to remove all the vegetables planted there. As a peasant girl sighed when she was forced to destroy the immature pumpkins which were also planted by herself, "Will our stomachs feel pain after eating them?"⁹⁷

Based on what has been described above, it is safe to conclude that the repetitive expansion and shrinkage of private plots remained one of the most common and problematic issues in peasants' everyday life. It was in fact an embodiment of the tensions and negotiation between officials and rural residents on how they should

96 Yang Chengshu, "Hechuan jiben luxian jiaoyu," 1-13.

97 Chen Binru 陈彬如, "参加基本路线教育运动的几点感受" *Canjia jiben luxian jiaoyu yundong de jidian ganshou* (Several Feelings of Participation of the Education Movement of the Party's Basic Line), in *WSZL*, vol. 21 (2013): 47-53.

cultivate, collectively or individually. Once the political atmosphere became looser, specifically when there was no direct pressure from authorities at the upper levels, the negotiation between peasants and local cadres was much more likely to reach a compromising result, as shown in the cases above. The negotiation might even lead to surprising outcomes. In Longshi Commune of Hechuan, prior to the Cultural Revolution, small fields had already been lent to the peasants in more than 70 per cent of the production teams, as an embryonic form of what was the fixing of farm output quotas for each household which was implemented from the early 1980s. In the most politicised stage of the ten-year Cultural Revolution era, according to the recollection of an old man who had spent his whole career as a cadre in that commune (later known as Longshi town), similar trials in more than half of the villages of the commune were not interrupted, but instead carried on in a highly secretive way.⁹⁸ Obviously, the land scale that these peasants could cultivate individually was larger than many of their Hechuan peers as discussed above. In this practice, a higher degree of tacit agreement between the local peasants and some of the core cadres in the commune undoubtedly played an indispensable role.

No matter how the boundary between collective farmland and private plots shifted throughout the Cultural Revolution era, based on a report from one of the major communes in Hechuan, most peasants tended to save not only their energy from the work of collective farming but even the fertilizer and the water which should

98 Xie Laiyu, 62-67.

be used to irrigate the collective land, in order to have better inputs in their private plots.⁹⁹

To achieve a more satisfying input-output ratio for their own, various kinds of crops fitting local conditions were planted in their private plots. Due to the overemphasis on grain in collective farming, most of the other crops had disappeared from the major part of the farmland for decades, including vegetables and fruits, as well as many economic crops such as sugar cane, peanuts, and oil-seed rape. The popularisation of the oil presses, mentioned in the previous section, provided the technical support for the processing of those oil-bearing crops. In the meantime, as indicated by the gazetteer, a sugar factory established in Hechuan in 1966 which generated a new and lasting motive in the planting of sugar cane in rural Hechuan.¹⁰⁰ As for vegetables, as suggested by people's food choices in the county seat and the Third-Front factories, peasants living near these sites, in addition to those around some big towns with regular markets, were more interested in vegetable planting. Another notable instance was the planting of fruit, especially mandarin oranges which had been a speciality in Hechuan since the Republican era and had increased in production until 1957.¹⁰¹ During the Cultural Revolution decade, though under the collective farming system which never regarded fruit as a necessity, to plant numbers of mandarin trees was still a common option when Hechuan peasants had an opportunity to grow what they wanted. Statistics showed an escalation of the

99 Yang Chengshu, "Hechuan jiben luxian jiaoyu," 1-13.

100 HCXZ, 390.

101 HCXZ, 389.

mandarin output between 1967 and 1970 and once again from 1971 to 1975.¹⁰² In this progress, peasants' hard work on their private plots certainly functioned as the main cause. What happened the next year proved this situation too, although from a converse angle. In 1976 when peasants' freedom to farm private plots was strictly limited again, as a consequence of the aforementioned Educational Movement of the Basic Line of the Party, the annual yield of mandarins in Hechuan slumped to an unprecedented level.¹⁰³

In some cases, parts of their private harvest could often help rural families have some preferable experiences in daily dining. As recalled by a local peasant, peppers were never absent from his family's private plots, even during the difficult years of the Cultural Revolution when the staple food was usually not enough. Most of the pepper harvest was used to satisfy the whole family's strong interest in chilli paste in daily dining.¹⁰⁴

The majority of the products from their individual work was usually turned into cash on hand, as a result of sales in free markets. Although never escaping the constraints of politics, peasants' toil on their family side-lines, whether pig farming, sericulture, or cultivation on their private plots, could always produce some significant return. Viewed from a national perspective, between the end of the Cultural Revolution and the start of the economic reform two years later, 26.8 per

102 HCXZ, 391.

103 HCXZ, 391.

104 Discussion with a resident who spent most of his life in rural Hechuan, male, Hechuan, 28 April 2020.

cent of Chinese peasants' total income came from side-lines.¹⁰⁵ Actually, in many cases, the benefit peasants received through family side-lines, which were normally in the form of cash, might far outweigh that obtained through collective work. By 1976 when the annual gross output of grain in Hechuan dropped back almost to the level of 1965, one year before the Cultural Revolution,¹⁰⁶ the average purchasing power of peasants in the whole Sichuan had improved more than 20 per cent during the same period.¹⁰⁷ Given these achievements of family side-lines in rural Hechuan, including pig farming and silkworm breeding, compared with the average level of Sichuan province, Hechuan peasants seemed to have enjoyed more cash earnings.

Some scholars in China, probably influenced by Western theorists, such as Scott, also deem Chinese peasants' devoting themselves to side-lines as a form of resistance toward the system of top-down management.¹⁰⁸ But there may be some risk of overstating the actual motives of these rural people. For these individuals in rural Hechuan, their hard work on pig raising, vegetables cultivation, or rearing silkworms, all of which had taken root in local Sichuan, was probably not so much an intentional resistance as a realistic and familiar way to tackle the difficulties in daily life. Behind all these traditions that had not been uprooted during the Cultural Revolution was local people's continuing desire to live a better life, regardless of any changes in the

105 Zhongguo dabaikē quanshu bianzhuān wēiyuānhuì 中国大百科全书编撰委员会 [Editorial Committee of *Encyclopedia of China*] ed., 中国大百科全书·经济学 *Zhongguo dabaikē quanshu · Jingjixue (Encyclopedia of China, Economy)* (Beijing: Zhongguo Dabaikē Chubanshe, 1988), 874.

106 HCXZ, 371.

107 *Sichuan shengqing*, 228.

108 *Xin Yi*, 57-63.

political atmosphere. “Each time when I return home from school for holidays, in comparison with joining the farm work in groups, I felt more enthusiastic and energetic to help the side-lines of my family. Whether feeding the pigs or watering the vegetables, I believed the work I did would be immediately transformed into my tuition fees”.¹⁰⁹ This was from a diary whose author had just finished his primary education and was looking forward to entering the middle school in a commune of Hechuan. Although the young boy’s words were politically incorrect at that time, he might not have intended to resist the politics at all. Instead, what motivated the boy, his family, and all the peasants was more a vivid and practical goal of improving their personal lives. This need not be considered intentional resistance to the authorities, as highlighted by Scott.

Section Three: The Weeds Growing beyond Control: Peasants’ Indispensable Role in Free Markets

Based on what has been explored previously, it is safe to say that peasants in the countryside of Hechuan spared no effort on side-line production, in order to directly improve their families’ quality of life. Apart from those products intended for state acquisition, such as pork and silk cocoons, most of the peasants’ endeavours would ultimately have ended in vain if there had been no free market where they could sell their output from the family side-lines.

¹⁰⁹ Diaries written by a young boy in rural Hechuan. Found in the Old-book market of Hechuan, 2 July 2019.

1. Dancing in fetters: official restrictions on free markets

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Hechuan County had maintained a rich tradition of commerce since ancient times, and both in the county seat and townships, prosperous markets kept expanding until the foundation of the PRC. In 1962, as a result of the loosening policy for economic recovery from the Great Famine, the number of free markets rebounded and almost returned to the highest level in the history of Hechuan.¹¹⁰ But this trend was soon interrupted again the next spring by a new instruction from the CCP, which once more required strict regulation on the markets in urban areas. In less than the two years that followed, hundreds of free markets in the cities and county seats of Sichuan Province were shut down.¹¹¹ This shrinkage in marketing sites unavoidably caused inconvenience for urban residents, although state-run commerce was expected to be a sufficient replacement. At the same time, peasants in rural Sichuan lost a large number of valuable opportunities to make money through trading their products freely.

In Hechuan County, throughout the decade of the Cultural Revolution, the actual number of free markets never recovered to the level of the early 1960s.¹¹² In spite of this disappointing situation, some good news for Hechuan peasants came from the officially permitted frequency of markets. Since 1962, every three days there had been a market in all the towns of Hechuan, similar to the arrangement during the

110 HCGS, 16.

111 Sichuansheng difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 四川省地方志编撰委员会 [Editorial Committee of Local Gazetteers in Sichuan Province] ed., 四川省志·统计 工商行政管理 劳动志 *Sichuansheng zhi · Tongji gongshang xingzheng guanli laodong zhi* (*Gazetteer of Sichuan Province: Gazetteer of Statistics, Industry and Commerce Administration, and Labour*) (Beijing: Fangzhi Chubanshe, 1998), 165.

112 HCGS, 16.

Republican era. Additionally, different towns in the same commune would no longer hold the market on the same day, which between 1958 and 1962 worked as a way to limit local peasants' opportunities to go to different markets.¹¹³ No modification in principle was made to these policies in Hechuan throughout the first half of the Cultural Revolution, which at least legally guaranteed peasants' marketing activities twice a week. Their bad fortune came again in 1971 when the political environment became more intense. Free markets surely remained one of the major targets in "cutting off the tail of capitalism", resulting in marketing frequency which changed from every three days to once a week. In Hechuan, Sunday became the only market day for all towns. More discouragingly, during the busy season for farm work, no market was officially allowed in the whole county. In order to let the rural residents become accustomed to this unprecedented situation of no free market at all, as vividly described in the gazetteer, many communes sent people to the crossroads at those original market sites, aiming to block peasants and persuade them to give up any effort of money-making through selling their side-line products.¹¹⁴ This absurdity in the history of free markets continued in Hechuan during the second half of the Cultural Revolution.

Strict limitations not only continued on the frequency of markets, what and where people could trade freely were also under more and more comprehensive interventions from local authorities. The changes of the marketing sites in the county seat of Hechuan were a representative issue. Originally, the marketing sites which had

113 HCGS, 17.

114 HCGS, 17.

kept the same for 17 years in the county seat were greatly modified by officials in 1971. In consequence, over three-fourths of the places previously allowed for free trading were closed. This situation remained in place for the next ten years until 1982.¹¹⁵

Apart from the restrictions on marketing sites, at the same time, considerable pressure was never absent from the kinds of products which peasants could trade freely. In October 1966, when the start of the Cultural Revolution had caused unrest in society, what was allowed in free markets tightened up again. In Hechuan, many kinds of economic crops, especially local fruits such as oranges, mandarins, and sugar cane, were removed from the markets.¹¹⁶ This was probably only a signal for the rigorous control throughout the decade that followed. Even between 1967 and 1968, when the Cultural Revolution had led the whole country into political and social disorder, it seemed that the Hechuan authorities did not want to give up their management of marketing affairs. Notices were issued in 1967 and 1968 aiming to strengthen the control of free business. Any kind of grain and oil crops could not appear in the markets, so as to guarantee state acquisition.¹¹⁷ Similar regulations remained active until the end of the Cultural Revolution era. In February 1976, based on a new notice from the prefecture-level authorities, grain and oil, plus cotton, sugar, and tea, were still the key prohibited goods. Peasants needed certificates from the brigade level to sell woodwork or bamboo ware they made.¹¹⁸ Only in the last couple

115 HCGS, 22-23.

116 HCGS, 28.

117 HCGS, 28.

118 HCGS, 28-29.

of months of the Cultural Revolution era were there some relaxations officially permitted. According to a provincial regulation published in July 1976, a limited number of side-line products became allowed for free trading, after completing state acquisition quotas. At the same time more essential agricultural products, such as grain, oil, sugar, and pork, were still forbidden from the markets, even if the state acquisition had already been finished.¹¹⁹

In a word, throughout the Cultural Revolution, the marketing activities under official restrictions were just like dancing in fetters. No matter how strict the limits were, as we will see in the rest of this chapter, Sichuan peasants' enthusiasm and patience in free marketing were never extinguished.

2. A cat-and-mouse game: black markets never disappeared

Despite all these restrictions in Hechuan on almost all aspects of free marketing, there was continuous tension, shifting boundaries, and persistent cat-and-mouse games in marketing activities. No matter whether trading in illegal places, at an unapproved time, or with banned products, these trends kept growing like weeds, despite crackdowns from the local authorities.

During the first few years of the Cultural Revolution, while official control over society was weakened, so was official management of free markets. It was in fact a happy period for peasants in Hechuan. When they brought those products without official permission or traded with people at an unlawful time or place, to their great

119 HCGS, 29.

surprise, there were much fewer officials (公家人 *gongjiaren*: the way peasants usually called people representing the government or the Party) than they used to see (sometimes even none of them was around). In the official view, market management work in Hechuan had almost reached a standstill after the start of the Cultural Revolution. This was mainly due to Red Guards and rebel factions' attacking the official department responsible for marketing affairs. As described in the gazetteer, some *gongjiaren* in charge of markets were abused or even beaten, which caused inconvenience, and turmoil in people's marketing activities.¹²⁰ This statement sounds plausible, but probably obscures and distorts people's experiences and impressions in reality. What the factional rebellion and social disorder actually weakened was officials' capability to control the scale and content of private trading. This dramatically resulted in an expansion of the freedom peasants and urban residents enjoyed in the process of buying and selling. The official permitted frequency of legal markets was heavily limited because of the chaos, but it was also admitted by the same source that people's private trading without any official permission, normally known as black markets, became much more rampant than before. To a considerable extent, during this phase, the popularity of black markets in the urban and rural areas of Hechuan nearly substituted for the regular and legal markets in people's daily buying and selling. This situation, once more, raised the question whether what the authorities intended to do, in the name of socialism and collectivism, really facilitated residents' everyday experiences, or created barriers in people's everyday life.

120 HCGS, 52.

Actually, no matter how the policies regulating the markets changed, as a peasant who resided in rural Hechuan at that time recalled: “We could by no means bear to see all we harvested from our hard work in side-lines, which we always felt reluctant to eat, going rotten or mildewed”.¹²¹ Trading privately for certain cash, an extra but necessary part of their normal income alongside the collective allocation mainly in physical form, was insisted by Hechuan peasants regularly. If there were always limits on legal marketing activities either due to the chaotic situation in society or the tightening up of policies, why not go to those black markets instead? As a result, during the years of the Cultural Revolution, “a lot of black markets existed all over the county seat and major towns” in Hechuan.¹²²

Even when the restrictions on free markets became intensive again, resulting from the organisation and re-functioning of the regime in local areas after the late 1960s, it seemed that Hechuan peasants’ enthusiasm for marketing was not dampened at all. They turned more and more enthusiastic and active in the private business, which was stimulated by the relaxation of the limitation on family side-lines during the same period. According to the recollection of the same rural resident cited in the paragraph above, although in principle all the legal markets could only be held on Sunday, in fact, the previous schedule of marketing still worked informally, as many Hechuan peasants stayed accustomed to bringing their side-line products to nearby towns every three days.¹²³

121 Discussion with a resident who lived in rural Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution, male, Hechuan, 5 May 2020.

122 HCXZ, 449.

123 Discussion with a resident who lived in rural Hechuan during the Cultural

Benefitting from the original wide distribution and large numbers of the markets in rural Hechuan, as mentioned in Chapter Two, peasants in Hechuan normally had more than one place they could go on foot when intending to sell or buy something. Simply by making a timetable to visit the market in town A on Monday, town B on Thursday, and town C on Sunday, many peasants in rural Hechuan would not miss any opportunity to make money, no matter lawful or not. Moreover, the widespread waterway and convenient transportation by rivers in Hechuan provided more possibilities for peasants to visit some more markets at longer distance, including those more prosperous ones in the county seat, if they attracted them too.

Compared with the situation in most towns where there was normally a narrow street for trading activities, the marketing sites in the county seat of Hechuan were far more spacious, although many of them ran without official permission. Some venues were located in the rural-urban border zone which tacitly took advantage of the gap of administrative power. Others existed in the centre of the county seat and originated from the traditional markets in Hechuan. Such places continued functioning spontaneously and significantly in the county-seat residents' daily life, although being abandoned officially due to the aforementioned dramatic modification of markets in 1971. Admittedly, all the free businesses taking place anywhere outside of the official markets (normally called 场外交易 *changwai jiaoyi*) were always under relentless attack from the authorities. As reiterated by the officials in Hechuan County in 1971, all such kind of *changwai jiaoyi* would also be regarded as actions of black market,¹²⁴

Revolution, male, Hechuan, 5 May 2020.
124 HCGS, 23.

But, as mentioned above, the existence of black markets everywhere proved one more failure of the official management.

In other words, it seemed that the more officials intended to play an omnipotent role in peasants' activities of private business, the more uncontrolled the realities of free marketing in Hechuan turned to be. Such a situation that became out of control even existed in the townships of the county. As described in the gazetteer about a town near the northern margin of Hechuan, outside the unique lawful market there had been seven more formed spontaneously. More notably, in principle, the black market should always be held underground, or at least keep a low profile. But in fact, on every marketing day (no matter whether legal or not), over 10,000 people would gather together.¹²⁵ Undoubtedly the narrow streets in the town would become extremely crowded and noisy. Such a large-scale but illegal activity went on publicly and regularly in Hechuan until the last months of the Cultural Revolution. It was finally ended by the official team sent there repeatedly by the county authorities.

As a consequence of the cat-and-mouse game between local residents and officials, the extent of Hechuan peasants' private trade beyond administrative regulations kept shifting during the ten-year era. As acknowledged in the gazetteer, there are no accurate statistics about the total black markets (regular or temporary) once active in Hechuan.¹²⁶ The tenacity and flexibility of Hechuan peasants facilitated their enthusiasm and persistence in the free businesses, which meant the

125 HCGS, 53.

126 HCGS, 28.

black markets never disappear throughout the years of the Cultural Revolution era but kept growing wildly, just like weeds.

3. Unexpected or reasonable? prosperity under the crackdown

On the basis of all the possibilities both in time and space (no matter whether legal or not) for free marketing, the commodities available in the local markets of Hechuan seldom appeared very scarce. This trend lasted throughout the Cultural Revolution decade, despite the fact that there was always a red line warning on what kinds of products were forbidden from private marketing. From an official perspective, the prosperity in free markets was surely unexpected, while it was a reasonable result from the content explored in this chapter above.

Admittedly during the first few years of the Cultural Revolution era (specifically between 1966 and 1969), due to the social and political disorder, there were a very limited number of official records about in Hechuan. “It was over all an extreme muddle.”¹²⁷ These concise words were repeatedly used by local authorities in the early 1970s to legitimise the re-tightening of regulations on free market in Hechuan. They actually revealed the prosperous picture of private businesses in the county by the end of the 1960s.

For the rural residents of Hechuan, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, this was a period of memorable experiences of bringing any kind of side-line product for sale as they liked. Once the force of political intervention faded, the power of local traditions resumed its function as naturally as before. According to the recall of a resident in the

127 HCGS, 52 and 166.

countryside of Hechuan, even at the most chaotic stage during the Cultural Revolution, her family members kept on going to several markets near their village as usual. Although the political movement had already tapped into the rural society, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, many peasants in Hechuan had not realised what it meant to their daily life. As this informant clearly recollected: “At first, upon arriving at the markets my father or mother were surprised to find that the businesses there had become much more active, and the commodities were much more plentiful and diverse than before.”¹²⁸ In contrast with the fact that most peasants did not have a keen feeling for the transformation in politics, many of them responded smartly to the changes in free markets. As mentioned by the same informant, once realising the new situation, her family soon decided to extend the list of what to bring to the markets for sale, despite many of them still being forbidden officially, such as sugar, peanuts, and pigskin. From the perspective of the informant, the youngest child in the family, from then on, she looked forward to accompanying her parents to the markets. Without any risk of being chased and even caught by *gongjiaren*, who were always dreadful, going to the markets became a much more worry-free and interesting experience. The more products her parents could sell and the more cash they could earn from the businesses, the higher chance her parents would be happy to buy her several kinds of tasty snacks before leaving the markets and returning home. “During one period, I remembered that every time I came to those markets, there would be some new kinds of food, either pastries or cold dishes, which I had never seen before, really tempting me quite

128 Discussion with a resident who grew up in the countryside of Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution, female, Hechuan, 6 June 2020.

a lot.”¹²⁹ The period cherished so much by this woman was probably during the first few years of the Cultural Revolution.

Although regular and even more rigid limitations soon returned to the markets in Hechuan as mentioned above, they failed again to produce an actual ending to the continuity of free businesses, most of which were beyond the legal boundaries.

Alongside the return of *gongjiaren*, in addition to the recruitment of large numbers of villagers who were familiar to local situations, from the early 1970s the cat-and-mouse game reappeared in a much larger scale. The brief description in the gazetteer vividly presents a common picture in the county seat and many towns of Hechuan in those years. “Peasants were usually chased after along the streets, even when they only brought some sesame seeds or peanuts with themselves.” If fresh products, such as poultry and eggs, were discovered in their baskets, things would end up in a real mess. The live hens or ducks ran about in the market, and eggs were scattered and crushed all over the ground.¹³⁰

The constant attempt at supervision and suppression proved to be far less effective than official expectations, although there were more and more cases of punishment of prohibited behaviours, most of which in Chinese were called *touji daoba* (投机倒把 profiteering activities). In 1974, a total of 1,532 cases were reported from the rural and urban areas of Hechuan. Through dealing with these cases, over 10,000 RMB in cash was confiscated, in addition to hundreds of

129 Discussion with a resident who grew up in the countryside of Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution, female, Hechuan, 6 June 2020.

130 HCGS, 52.

kilograms of peanuts, grain, poultry, and eggs. In addition, many kinds of tickets or coupons, such as those for cloth and grain, were also included in the illegal exchange, since they also appeared in confiscation list.¹³¹ In the next year the number of reported cases reached 2,818, almost doubling that in the previous year. Also, in 1975, the total value of the confiscated products amounted to 166,000 RMB, a growth rate unbelievably 16 times compared with one year before. In the meantime, there were 19 big cases in 1975 each of which included more than 1,000 RMB or 500 kilograms of grain, resulting in the involvement of local police and the arrest of four people.¹³²

Even when the ten-year political movement was finally over in the autumn of 1976, controls on free markets in Hechuan did not come to an end but became even stricter. Throughout the whole year of 1976, the total number of illegal cases being investigated and handled in the markets of Hechuan was 11,057, nearly four times as many as that in the previous year.¹³³ The expansion was not just quantitative. In addition to goods that always appeared in confiscation lists, there were hundreds of kilograms of alcohol, over one tonne of mandarins, nearly 100 carts (for underground transportation of goods), and even 20 cattle.¹³⁴ While the private sales of wine and mandarins demonstrated the development of family side-lines in rural Hechuan, the popular application of carts indicated peasants' motivation and passion in bringing their harvests to markets. The selling of cattle possibly reflected peasants (or even

131 HCGS, 166.

132 HCGS, 166.

133 HCGS, 167.

134 HCGS, 167.

leaders of production teams) had lost their interest in farm work after more than two decades toil under the collective mode. At the same time, big cases with significant sums of commodities and money continued to be reported.¹³⁵

Generally speaking, apart from confiscation or fines, most individuals with limited goods did not face a very heavy punishment. Normally, those people being punished and reported as typical cases had almost turned out to be professional merchants focusing on the private trade of agricultural products between local peasants and urban buyers. On the one hand, the emergence of this kind of middleman with considerable quantities of goods probably indicated Hechuan residents' larger demand for agricultural commodities. On the other hand, it also indicated peasants' stronger interest and potential for free businesses. With the help of these professional middlemen, peasants no longer needed to bear the difficulty of walking to the markets and the risk of conducting any illegal behaviour. Based on the memory of a peasant who grew up in rural Hechuan between the 1960s and '70s, the visits by strangers for the aim of private acquisition became more and more frequent in his village during the second half of the Cultural Revolution decade. At the same time, they were more and more welcomed by the villagers, since the offers of purchasing they made became much more attractive than the payments for state acquisition.¹³⁶ This process of trading through middlemen was by no means lawful at that time. But it seemed that

135 HCGS, 167.

136 Discussion with a resident who grew up in the countryside of Hechuan between 1960s and 1970s, male, Hechuan, 15 May 2020.

both the peasants and the middlemen shared a tacit understanding and kept a reciprocal relationship.

Regarding the higher price of private acquisition and non-collective businesses, the limited information in the gazetteer provides evidence from another angle. In order to prove that the black market was not a good thing for customers, a comparison between the prices of rice and pork in illegal trade and that in state-run business was used as an example. Compared to the price in state-run stores (normally the only legal place where rice or pork were sold at that time), to buy a kilogram of rice from the black market in Hechuan cost at least seven times more money. As for pork, about twice as much money was needed.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, in black markets, such kinds of rationed commodities were traded freely without ration tickets which always played an indispensable role in state-run shops. Regardless of the high price, businesses in the black markets seemed to benefit all the participants and stakeholders, including the local peasants, middlemen, and customers.

As a very predictable result, various forms of black markets, either trading in unlawful places, at illegal times, or with banned goods, were much more prosperous and popular than the legal markets, as admitted officially in the gazetteer. More specifically, as described previously about the situation in the town near the northern margin of Hechuan, the available categories and types of commodities in the black markets even exceeded those in the department store located in the county seat of Hechuan, which was the largest lawful shop in the whole county at that time.¹³⁸

137 HCGS, 53.

138 HCXZ, 53.

To put the situation during the first half of the 1970s in a nutshell, from the perspective of the local authorities of Hechuan, most of their attempts at more rigid management of free markets and more severe punishment of illegal businesses proved to be an inevitable failure. Behind this outcome, peasants' persistence and tactics in coping with the top-down supervision worked even in the most chaotic and politicised periods during the Cultural Revolution. In theory, in the cat-and-mouse games around the black markets, peasants, middlemen, and even customers were always the "mouse" facing a huge risk of being caught. In practice, however things were not so bad since all the *gongjiaren* normally had a schedule of working, but neither the sellers nor buyers in markets had to trade in fixed hours. Compared with those *gongjiaren* who were allegedly working for the collective interest (and for their belief in socialism theoretically speaking), peasants who worked for their own families paradoxically appeared to have much more available time, more flexible schedules, and more patience for marketing. The same was true for residents in the county seat and townships, who hoped to purchase from the market as they needed. Waiting until the "cat" was absent, it was never too early or too late for both sides to conclude a transaction. This was once again a successful application of the tactics described by de Certeau through "clever utilization of time".¹³⁹ Although the top-down supervision and crackdowns did not leave much space for the urban residents and peasants in Hechuan, in most cases they still survived the game of cat and mouse with

139 de Certeau, 39.

officials. Sometimes the “cat” had already been bribed by the “mouse”. Such things were not uncommon during those years, according to informants.

4. More cash in hand, less worry in mind: peasants’ everyday consuming, gifting, borrowing, and banking

Unsurprisingly, a result of peasants’ persistent attempts to trade their side-line harvest through free businesses was the improvement of peasants’ cash incomes. The more cash in peasants’ hands, the more possibilities in their life, including but not limited to basic everyday needs. All these goals constantly motivated rural residents to spare no effort in private production and free marketing.

Moreover, as mentioned by the woman who was a girl lured by the fresh snacks at the markets, the process of private trading in Hechuan proved to be a virtuous circle. The more rural people made money from selling at the markets, the larger demand, higher willingness, and stronger capability they had in consuming. Conversely, once the businesses became more and more prosperous at the markets, peasants’ earning through free trade became more and more satisfying.

Although there can never be reliable data about peasants’ consumption in free markets during this period, some statistics from the Supply and Marketing Cooperatives (供销社 *Gongxiao hezuoshe*), the only state-run organisation charged with providing everyday goods to peasants during those years, may help us access the realities. With branches at the centre of each commune, Hechuan Supply and Marketing Cooperatives’ sales of major daily goods, such as salt, tea, wine, and

cloth, all experienced significant increases by 1976 in comparison with ten years earlier. The highest growth happened in the sales of tea, which was ten times those in 1966. Even the lowest increase was 37 per cent, for sales of cloth. In 1976 wool and silk, expensive materials for clothes in that era, for the first time appeared in the sales statistics of the Hechuan Supply and Marketing Cooperatives, whose customers were mainly peasants.¹⁴⁰ Admittedly, for those rationed commodities, tickets were necessary for the rural buyers too. When the rationed supplies from the state shop could not satisfy peasants' growing needs, a look at the free markets and buying what they wanted without any ticket was always a dependable solution, even if it might be illegal.

An account book from a rural household in another county in the southeast part of Sichuan (about 100 kilometres from Hechuan) provides similar information for the virtuous circle between peasants and free markets. According to the detailed recording of the revenue and expenditure in this family, in the second half of 1976, normally every two weeks members of the family went to markets to sell chicken eggs. What they could earn from egg-selling was between one and two RMB each time. Egg trading, plus the sales of some seasonal vegetables, seemed to guarantee the family's routine daily consumption. As recorded, every month about three or four RMB would be used by them at the markets. Oil, salt, sugar, chili paste, cigarettes, and alcohol regularly appeared in the family's purchasing list. To a certain extent, such products show what a rural household needed to buy every day under the

140 HCGX, 140-45.

collective economy, to maintain a living standard at a basic level. In addition, members of this family regularly wanted to buy something more beyond basic needs, like cloth, scented soap, and body lotion. At the same time, they would occasionally use cash to buy tickets for specific kinds of rationed goods, especially pork and grain.¹⁴¹ In policy, peasants could never enjoy the state ration of such foodstuffs at that time. For big families in the countryside, as the allocation from their production teams was often not enough, getting tickets to buy some extra grain or pork was a practical way to solve the issue, although also illegal.

For families with many children, as previously mentioned by the woman in Hechuan, snacks in different styles and tastes was another kind of commodity usually bought. My mother, who was a young girl during the Cultural Revolution and dreamed of tasty food every day, was attracted most strongly by a sort of rice cake sold at the market in Hechuan. Each time pieces of this cake were brought home, as recalled by my mother, they would be made even tastier if fried with a little oil.

According to that account book, a much more significant sale for this family took place in December 1976, when the Cultural Revolution decade as a political era had just come to its end. But Chinese society still ran in the old ways. Through selling a pig raised by them at the market (probably under the policy that peasants could raise two pigs, and one of them could be traded freely), 26.5 RMB was earned in a one-shot deal. With such a considerable sum of money, they brought home 10 kilograms of salt

141 An account book found in the Old-book Market of Fuling District, Chongqing City, 25 May 2020.

and three pairs of new shoes, in total costing ten RMB. Based on the account book, it was indeed a big shopping day in this family in the decade.¹⁴²

Although there are no statistics directly illustrating the shopping situation in the free markets of Hechuan during those years, there are other indicators of growth. In the early and mid-1970s the annually increase in cases being punished for illegal businesses suggested a boom in free markets. The frequent appearance of middlemen in towns and countryside was another indicator. Behind the boom was an expanding capability and a growing demand in Hechuan peasants' everyday lives. Ironically, none of these transformations was in line with official expectations and authorities continued to direct serious criticism and crackdown on the markets.

On the basis of purchasing for daily use, the extra cash in hand enabled rural people to keep active in the reciprocating relationship of gifts sending and receiving, which had been a tradition rooted in the acquaintance society of local villages. Normally gifts or gift money were sent on certain important dates for a person, especially weddings and funerals. This social practice was undoubtedly contrary to the ideology and culture of socialism, which aimed to wipe it out. During the period of the Cultural Revolution, as emphasised in a 1975 report, one of the common capitalistic behaviours in rural Hechuan was the holding of parties and dinners for birthdays. On these occasions, gifts (often in cash form because of material scarcities) were received.¹⁴³ If you attended someone's party, it was a courtesy to invite them

142 An account book found in the Old-book market of Fuling District, Chongqing City, May 25, 2020.

143 Yang Chengshu, "Hechuan jiben luxian jiaoyu," 1-13.

back sometime later (in Chinese this is called 来而不往非礼也 *laierbuwang fei li ye*, which means one should return as good as one receives). Under this understanding relationships never came to an end in a continuous cycle of reciprocation. The situation in rural Hechuan turned out to be so common that it tested official's tolerance. In 1975, when it became the major target of official criticism, it was perhaps a consequence of the development of family side-lines and private businesses during the period. In the aforementioned account book, such kinds of records repeatedly appear in the early and mid-1970s, especially frequently in 1976, when there were gifts being sent or received every month. In most cases, the amount of gift money was one to two RMB each time. Besides the interactivity of gifting, in this account book there are records of money borrowed from or lent to other villagers, normally between five to ten RMB each time.¹⁴⁴ This worked as another way of a reciprocal relationship, to some degree making up for rural households' financial deficiencies.

The continuing gifting and reciprocal relationships, as a significant part of peasants' economic experiences in the every day, enhanced individuals' ties to the rural society through the private practices that pursued during the collective era.

Last but not least, after daily use and occasionally gifting, what if there was still spare money left in peasants' hands? Saving some money for the future was a major tradition in the Chinese way of budgeting. It seemed that the rural residents in Hechuan maintained the habit of saving money throughout the Cultural Revolution. In

144 An account book found in the old-book market of Fuling District, Chongqing City, May 25, 2020.

the Credit Cooperatives (信用合作社 *Xinyong hezuoshe*) in rural Hechuan, which were the nearest bank-like organisation for most peasants, the amount of the deposits fluctuated during those years. At the end of 1976, there had been a decline of 40 per cent compared with ten years earlier. However, this was completely different from the situation at the Agricultural Bank of Hechuan County. This was the other institution whose business focused on peasants' financial issues at that time. Except for the first and the last years of the Cultural Revolution, between 1967 and 1975, the total savings (including both current deposits and fixed-term deposits) in the Agricultural Bank kept growing year by year. By the end of 1975, the money saved in this bank was more than 120 per cent greater than eight years earlier.¹⁴⁵ This achievement made the Agricultural Bank as significant as the Credit Cooperatives to the rural residents in Hechuan. In total, throughout the Cultural Revolution decade, there was a 30 per cent growth in the amount of Hechuan peasants' savings in financial institutions.¹⁴⁶ The purchasing power of the RMB had almost no change during those years since there was almost no inflation in the planned economy, plus a very tight monetary policy. Those deposits at that time undoubtedly laid a solid foundation for the material life of the rural households in Hechuan.

One more interesting phenomenon was Hechuan peasants' obvious preference to put their extra money on fixed-term deposits, for a better interest. Although it meant

145 Zhongguo nongye yinhang Hechuanxian zhihang 中国农业银行合川县支行 [Hechuan Branch of the Agricultural Bank of China] ed., 合川农村金融志 1937-1988 *Hechuan nongcun jinrong zhi 1937-1988 (Gazetteer of Rural Finance of Hechuan, 1937-1988)* [HCNJ] (internal materials, 1990), 193 and 196.

146 HCNJ, 193 and 196.

much less flexibility in their savings, fixed-term deposits appeared to be a major option for peasants in Hechuan. The total savings on fixed-terms in rural Hechuan throughout the Cultural Revolution era was normally five to ten times higher than the amount on current deposits.¹⁴⁷

In order to receive an even more appealing rate of return, as reported officially, usurious loans among villagers, which were deemed as a typical social evil before 1949 and should have disappeared in the socialist times, re-emerged in rural Hechuan during the 1970s.¹⁴⁸ No further information indicates the specific rates or scale of the usurious loans at that time. In an era when there was no other officially permitted financing way, it was likely that these activities functioned as a major supplement in individuals' choices of managing their spare cash, especially for those not satisfied with the rate in banks. Another perspective regarding this situation was the restriction on peasants' borrowing from banks. As a way to learn from Dazhai, during the Cultural Revolution era, a series of limiting policies were applied if a Hechuan peasant wanted to get a loan from the bank, most of which were based on egalitarianism. For example, only poorer families could get a loan, instead of richer ones. Similarly, households without any pigs to raise would be financially supported much easier than those with pigs in their sty. As a consequence, compared to the ten years between 1956 and 1966, during the decade of the Cultural Revolution, the total amount of loans officially granted to Hechuan peasants declined by 50.8 per cent.¹⁴⁹

147 HCNJ, 193 and 196.

148 Yang Chengshu, "Hechuan jiben luxian jiaoyu," 1-13.

149 HCNJ, 226.

Given this, to make up the financial gap in many rural households, usurious loans became a choice that both the lender and borrower wanted to take.

If viewed from the perspective of the authorities, there was continuous supervision and serious crackdowns on peasants' private sales and consumption in the free markets of Hechuan. Most of these activities were deemed as weeds that should be wiped out. From the bottom-up angle, considerable improvement happened in rural residents' private trading, daily purchasing, and financing situations. Paradoxically, during the Cultural Revolution it was the weeds which grew so wildly that led to the valuable progress in rural residents' everyday life.

From peasants' participation in collective farming to their work on family side-lines and their involvement in free markets, similar paradoxes persisted in rural people's daily experiences. As the discussion in this chapter has shown many times, what the officials intended to promote in the countryside was usually not welcomed by peasants. Nor could it upgrade rural people's living standards in most cases. On the other side, what the officials intended to wipe out were those mechanisms really needed in peasants' attempts to live a better life. Despite the top-down intervention, it was Sichuan peasants' enthusiasm, insistence, and tactics in maintaining many of the traditions in agriculture and commerce that accounted for almost all the growth in their everyday lives. Ridiculously, in the official narration, there seems to be no difference between the improvements in rural people's life quality during the Cultural Revolution and any other achievement in China after 1949, all of which are described

as the results achieved under the leadership of the CCP. This chapter has suggested the role of the CCP was often negative and unwelcome in the everyday life for many rural dwellers

Chapter Five: SICHUAN RESIDENTS' CULTURAL LIFE DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Due to the economic scarcity and political restrictions, as I have discussed all above, the cultural life of normal Chinese people was by no means abundant throughout the Cultural Revolution era. Nevertheless, both rural and urban people could always rest and entertain themselves through various forms of culture, which was a significant part of individuals' everyday experiences. In addition to top-down promoted and organised activities such as model opera performances and movie projections, memorable experiences also came from various spontaneous, grassroots pastimes related to personal interests and local traditions. As what has been introduced in Chapter Two, the local society of Sichuan has for a long time been famous for the strong popularity of distinctive folk culture and since ancient times Sichuan people have the enthusiasm to enjoy cultural activities in their everyday life. To explore how Sichuan people enjoyed their cultural life during the Cultural Revolution, this chapter mainly focuses on the situations of Hechuan. As a typical county in the basin, primary materials collected there reveal that even under the politicised background of the Cultural Revolution, both urban and rural people in Sichuan were no less enthusiastic in cultural enjoyment. In this process, many local and traditional forms, including but were not limited to the Sichuan Opera, still featured in their cultural life.

1. Enjoying the model operas, but preferably in the Sichuan style

Undoubtedly, regarding cultural life during those 10 years, the model operas or performances are most often mentioned in old people's recollections or researchers' discussions. As a result of the modernisation and revolutionisation of traditional operas after 1949, the modernised version of the Peking Opera (京剧 *Jingju*) was more and more stressed. In 1964, Beijing witnessed a Trial Performance Convention of Modern Peking Opera lasting five weeks, in which many of the later famous works were staged. The term "model" (样板 *yangban*) appeared the next year, being used at the central level of the CCP and widely covered by official media. Especially promoted by Jiang Qing,¹ the wife of Mao Zedong, the repertoire of model operas soon expanded. Between May and June 1967, the second year of the Cultural Revolution, eight works were performed repeatedly in Beijing. For convenience, they were temporarily described as the Eight Model Performances (八个样板戏 *Bage yangbanxi*). From then on, the term of *yangbanxi* was normally used to refer to all the stage works deemed models during the decade, and over 20 were included in the final repertoire by 1976.² Those works were not only modernised Peking Operas but also in the forms of dance dramas, ballets, symphonies, piano accompaniments, and concertos.

Therefore, the model performances and their derivatives in many other art forms, such as films, radio broadcasts, and even story-telling, accounted for the major part of

1 On the relationship between Jiang Qing and *Yangbanxi*, see Yawen Ludden, "The transformation of Beijing opera: Jiang Qing, Yu Huiyong and *yangbanxi*," *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*. vol.4, Issue 2-3: (2017):143-60.

2 On the development of *Yangbanxi* during the Cultural Revolution, see Yang Jian, "Yangbanxi lishi," 90-104.

people's cultural life during the Cultural Revolution, especially as an effective result of national popularisation from the central to local levels. In October 1969, when the *People's Daily* newspaper called on readers to study and defend the revolutionary model operas,³ provincial- and city-level troupes gathered in Beijing and Shanghai to learn from the model troupes. During this process, not only were the scripts expected to be consistent with Peking Opera but also the singing tunes and performing patterns, regardless of various styles existing in different local performances.

Nevertheless, when the popularisation was implemented at the grassroots level across the country, it was almost impossible if there had not been large-scale transplantation by innumerable Chinese local troupes with uneven professional levels and different artistic traditions. In 1970, the *People's Daily* published another article with a modified view, in which suitable trials according to local customs and conditions were allowed, especially at basic levels such as communes, production teams, and work units.⁴ This could be understood as a signal of official permission for transplanting the model operas from the standardised form. For most troupes nationwide, especially those located remotely, the practice of learning and transplantation became much more feasible in 1972 when several of the model operas were filmed. For local audiences, as Clark indicates, once "given a choice," they "appear to have continued to prefer their own, local versions of musical drama".⁵

3 Zhe Ping 哲平, "学习革命样板戏, 保卫革命样板戏" Xuexi geming yangbanxi, baowei geming yangbanxi (Study the Model Operas, Defend the Model Operas), 人民日报 *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), October 19, 1969.

4 *Renmin ribao* pinglunyan 人民日报评论员 [Commentator of *People's Daily*], "做好普及革命样板戏的工作" Zuohao puji geming yanbanxi de gongzuo (Do the Task of Model Opera Popularisation Well), *Renmin ribao*, July 15, 1970.

5 Clark, *Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 21.

From the early 1970s onward, as a kind of compromised result between top-down promotion and bottom-up taste, many plays reappeared on stage that were derived from the model operas but with full of local styles. These works might have been more in line with local people's diverse cultural tastes, although their subjects were still uniformly revolutionary.

These shifts in the top-down instructions and national background unavoidably dominated the cultural activities enjoyed and participated in by Hechuan residents during the same period.

In April 1963, all members of the Sichuan Opera Troupe of Hechuan County were rehearsing classical and traditional works for a provincial-level select performance. However, their endeavours suddenly turned out to be in vain when the performance, which was not modernised or revolutionised enough, was cancelled according to a higher instruction.⁶ As the only professional Sichuan Opera troupe in Hechuan County, all of its performance projects from then on had to be suspended for seven years. In other words, during those years, residents of Hechuan had no opportunity to watch any formal performance of Sichuan Opera, which they had been very familiar with enjoying. It was not until October 1970 that some of the performers (probably those with reliable political backgrounds and behaviours) got the chance to return to the stage as members of Hechuan County's Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team.

⁶ Xie Bochun 谢伯淳, 合川戏剧史话 *Hechuan xiju shihua (History of Drama in Hechuan)* (Chongqing: Chongqing Chubanshe, 2011), 74.

At the same time, numbers of propaganda teams (normally consisting of semi-professionals and amateurs) were established in the schools, factories, and communes of Hechuan, all of which also concentrated their work on learning and transplanting model operas. Due to the lack of proficiency in performing Peking Opera, most propaganda teams in Hechuan chose to stage only parts of the scenes of model operas. An extraordinary case was from a Third-Front factory moving from the coastal area. In the early 1970s, perhaps taking advantage of many immigrant workers' familiarity with Peking Opera, all scenes of *Shajiabang* (沙家浜) were performed by the propaganda team in that factory. It offered people in and around the plant a valuable chance to watch a live performance of a model opera in full. As a result of these efforts to copy the model opera in modernised Peking Opera form, in the county seat of Hechuan there were two large-scale performance festivals in 1970 and 1971. For most local residents, probably few of them had had the chance to enjoy so many Peking Opera plays, although they might not feel very accustomed to enjoying the performances. In the meantime, three scenes from *The White Haired Girl* (白毛女 *Baimaonü*) and *The Red Detachment of Women* (红色娘子军 *Hongse niangzijun*), the so-called model ballets, were performed on stage. For most audiences in Hechuan, it was probably their first time of watching live ballet shows.⁷

During this period, model operas in modernised Peking Opera form were still the mainstream in Hechuan people's cultural life. As recalled by a rusticated youth who actively participated in the model opera performances in the countryside, peasants felt

⁷ HCWY, 217.

that enjoying Peking Opera was fresh and exciting; its performance style—especially the singing tunes—obviously differed from what they got used to. But gradually the majority of the audiences lost their interest.⁸ Because of the difference in dialects, it was not easy for most local people in Sichuan to learn the songs of Peking Opera, whereas audiences' mimicry was always a tradition in Sichuan Opera (known as 打围鼓 *da weigu* in Chinese). This difficult situation among amateurs might account for the predicament that Peking Opera confronted in Sichuan. The tide of Peking Opera performances gradually faded in Hechuan when the county-level propaganda team was disbanded in 1973. By the following year, as admitted officially, performances of Peking Opera, as a type of exotic art in Sichuan, had almost disappeared from Hechuan.⁹

Almost from the same time, performances of Sichuan Opera reappeared and revived, together with many other cultural activities rooted in local Sichuan. In 1973, an article in the initial issue of *Sichuan Literature and Art* focused on model operas' transplantation into Sichuan Opera. As indicated by the author, "to bring the model operas in a familiar form to local audiences" was one of the main purposes of transplantation.¹⁰ This could be regarded as a clear signal for the return of Sichuan Opera to Sichuan residents' cultural life. In Hechuan between 1973 and 1976, 15 Sichuan Operas were rehearsed and staged for local residents. One-third of them were

8 Discussion with a former sent-down youth who was in rural Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution, male, Hechuan, 13 August 2019.

9 HCWY, 304.

10 Tang Zhengxu 唐正序, "移植革命样板戏, 深入开展川剧革命" *Yizhi geming yangbanxi, shenru kaizhan chuanju geming* (To Transplant Revolutionary Model Operas, and to Carry Out the Revolution of Sichuan Opera), *四川文艺 (Sichuan wenyi)*, 1st trial issue (1973): 89-91.

directly transplanted from model operas, while others mostly came from popular and approved films or novels during that era. In May 1976, a completely original work premiered on the stages of Hechuan. Undoubtedly, the limitations on creation and performance were still strict; nevertheless, these Sichuan Opera shows still provided local residents with precious opportunities to relive what they had enjoyed before. Although all were unavoidably in a revolutionised style, which had no difference from the model operas, the preservation of many traditional elements of Sichuan Opera, especially some rather unique things, was likely to play the key role in attracting and entertaining audiences. None of these live performances in Hechuan were recorded on film, but we can still access some realities through the recollections of local people. As one former Sichuan Opera actress in Hechuan who was able to restart her performance career from 1973 recalled, to make the performance more attractive, many representative skills from Sichuan Opera were retained on stage in transplanted model works. A notable example is face-changing (变脸 *bianlian*), a unique Sichuan art form often employed in Sichuan Opera, where the performer swiftly changes his face mask to show a totally different expression. Previously only male performers had the chance to perform this skill on stage, but from the 1970s onward actresses also got the opportunity, which made local audiences feel refreshed. When this was unprecedentedly applied to the heroes or heroines in model operas, it was surely surprising and fascinating for all viewers.¹¹

11 Diaries of a former actress in the Sichuan Opera Troupe of Hechuan, found in the Old-book Market of Hechuan, Hechuan, 17 August 2018.

Beyond performances in the county seat, the performers also provided Sichuan Opera shows around the countryside in Hechuan. To enjoy the opera, peasants were happy to walk tens of kilometres after a day's work in the field. Normally the shows finished late at night, but people were still willing to accept the danger of crossing hills in the dark to return home. Audiences' enthusiasm can also be identified from statistics. From 1973 to 1975, the annual performances given by the Sichuan Opera Troupe of Hechuan County increased by 50 per cent. This growth resulted in a doubled attendance and 1.8 times the income (admission fee for the performance remained the same throughout the Cultural Revolution, which was not above 0.2 RMB, and the price in the countryside was even lower than that in the county seat).¹²

2. Other choices for enjoying a live show

From the early 1970s onward, local people were not limited to Sichuan Opera for enjoying a live show. A series of other cultural and art activities rooted in folk society recovered at the same time. All of them entertained Hechuan residents, although in most cases they were still in the form of propaganda. In 1972, even before the recession of Peking Opera's exclusive status, two plays of *quju* (曲剧), an opera genre newly derived from ballad singing, known as a form of *quyi* (曲艺), were created and performed by the propaganda team of Taihe Commune. Locating in the western part of Hechuan, a group of semi-professionals and amateurs gathered Taihe and worked

¹² Xie Bochun, 81-83.

together to provide original performances for local people. Some of them remained active in Hechuan's cultural field throughout the next two decades.

Another form of *quyi* that Sichuan people had commonly enjoyed for quite a long time was *qingyin* (清音), a kind of narrative performance with music. Previously it was normally performed in teahouses, which were quite common in the towns and cities of Sichuan. Since the 1950s, it was gradually put on the formal stage. Because of the relative simplicity of performing, *qingyin* was preferred by amateurs for public performance. Between 1973 and 1976, at least two original *qingyin* plays premiered in Hechuan and received positive comments from the local audiences. The first play was adapted from the story of a revolutionary hero in Hechuan who died at a young age. The second, created three years later, was about an ordinary peasant girl in rural Hechuan who raised pigs. From heroic story to everyday topics, this change in subject may also indicate the transformation in the political and social atmosphere.

In Sichuan, in addition to these kinds of performances with music, storytelling is another long-standing narrative tradition, known as *longmenzhen* (龙门阵). To some extent, it is equivalent in popularity to *pingshu* (评书) in Northern China. Combined with Sichuan people's preference for killing time in teahouses, it was an appealing performance given there by well-trained storytellers. After 1949, although the number of teahouses in Sichuan shrank dramatically and the habit of spending a long time in teahouses was criticised, people's interest in listening to stories did not fade, especially during the Cultural Revolution when cultural activities were not plentiful. Simultaneously, the promotion by the authorities made it more possible for local

people, including those living in the countryside, to listen to fresh stories. Between 1974 and 1975, one of the main tasks for the Culture Bureau in Hechuan County was to promote the activity of storytelling. As a result, more than 2,000 storytellers were recruited and trained among local people in Hechuan. Later their work was to tell stories to peasants. Travelling around all the 68 communes of the county, these storytellers attracted over 1.8 million attendees.¹³ Under official promotion and orientation, stories told there were always in the revolutionary style, although a large part of which directly derived from model operas, this trend stimulated residents' fervour for the tradition of storytelling. As some old people in Hechuan recalled, at that time there were still one or two teahouses on the main street of several large towns. From then on, some storytellers, especially those with previous storytelling experience, reappeared in the teahouse with their reserved stories in the old style, such as popular pieces about the Three Kingdoms (三国 *Sanguo*).¹⁴ On market days, groups of peasants gathered there after finishing selling and purchasing in towns, not only to rest but also to enjoy the storytelling. Even if many of the stories had been heard multiple times, different tellers could always present the same story in different styles. In this process, a part of the cost of tea (normally 0.03 to 0.05 RMB per cup) was actually paid to the storytellers.¹⁵

13 HCWY, 194.

14 Discussion with an old man who liked listening to stories in teahouses during the Cultural Revolution, male, Hechuan, 15 January 2019.

15 Discussion with a former story-teller active in teahouses during the Cultural Revolution, male, Hechuan, 17 January 2019.

Together with the recovery of various forms of folk culture, amateur singing, and dance teams were successively re-established from the early 1970s. On the one hand, this was a continuation of the structured and mass activities prior to the Cultural Revolution. On the other hand, these singing and dancing activities appeared to be quite different from and more enjoyable than the loyalty dance (忠字舞 *zhongziwu*),¹⁶ which was very popular in China during the first few years of the Cultural Revolution. Following the fading of the prevalent but somewhat awkward loyalty dance by the late 1960s, choreographers in Hechuan restarted their creative work from the early 1970s with much richer flavours and colours of local life. Many of their original dance plays were enjoyed by locals. One was *The Girl Picking Mulberries* (采桑姑娘 *Caisang guniang*), from which many elder audiences might recall *The Dance of Tea-leaf Picking* (采茶舞 *Caichawu*), a work choreographed and well-received in Hechuan 18 years earlier. As mentioned before, from ancient times to modern era, both tea and mulberry cultivation had been advantageous industries in Hechuan.

By 1975, 354 singing teams had been organised in Hechuan County, with more than 4,000 amateurs involved in performing activities.¹⁷ For those who preferred to be audience members of more professional shows, in addition to the choruses of the revolutionary songs prevalent during those years, they had the chance to enjoy original works contributed by local composers in Hechuan, such as a work named *The*

16 Between 1966 and 1968, *Zhongziwu* was very popular in China as a kind of large-scale group dance, showing people's loyalty to Mao Zedong. Its dance movements were similar to kinds of gymnastic exercises without adequate aesthetic feelings.

17 HCWY, 190.

Girl Raising Silkworms (养蚕姑娘 *Yangcan guniang*). Premiering in late 1975, this modern musical work was also filled with local flavours. Besides the tradition of mulberry planting, peasants in Hechuan had had a long history of sericulture.

As a result of the rehabilitation of all these cultural activities among locals from the early 1970s, a county-level performance convention was held in September 1975 in Hechuan. More than 150 amateur performers including workers, peasants, and rusticated youth put on 93 shows in total. More than two-thirds were original performances, including dance, singing, Sichuan Operas, storytelling, and different types of *quyi*.¹⁸ Throughout the decade of the Cultural Revolution, this was perhaps the largest-scale convention of performances in Hechuan mainly contributed to by local artists and amateurs. For the residents of Hechuan, this was quite a precious chance to enjoy many works full of local and familiar colours. Compared with the model operas in the Peking Opera form, which were dominant on stages during the first half of the Cultural Revolution, it seems that in the second half of the ten-year era these indigenous shows left much greater imprints both in official gazetteers and grassroots recollections.

3. Why not enjoy a movie?

During the same period, apart from the aforementioned live performances, Sichuan people retained no less enthusiasm for watching movies. This was not only another enjoyable way to kill time after work, but also a completely novel form of

18 HCWY, 186.

entertainment for most local residents. As an extension of the development in the Chinese film industry since the 1950s, by 1966 when the Cultural Revolution had already commenced nationwide, the annual number of film screenings in Hechuan still reached 3,489, servicing 4 million viewers in urban and rural areas. In contrast, the next four years saw a sudden and continuous decline, with none of the annual screenings exceeding 500.¹⁹ This situation was in accordance with the fact that over 600 movies released after 1949 had been banned since 1966 (except for the case of restricted screenings as negative materials).²⁰ This scarcity of movies to enjoy lasted until the early 1970s. An obvious rebound in Hechuan started from 1971 when there were 2,258 screenings for almost 3.5 million viewers. This ascending trend continued, and by 1976 the annual number of screenings was nearly six times that of five years previously, reaching more than 10 million viewers.²¹ The fast recovery was probably related to the promotion of model opera films in the same period. Between 1971 and 1976, model opera films had been projected 137,000 times in Beijing.²² In Hechuan, the situation would not be very different, although the available copies of those films could not be that plentiful. Normally the projection of model opera films was organised regularly by work units in urban areas or production teams in the countryside, similar to the “periodic model-performance film festivals” in many cities during the same period, as mentioned by Clark.²³ However, once those films had been

19 HCWY, 321.

20 Clark, *Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 150.

21 HCWY, 322.

22 Tian Jingqing 田静清, 北京电影业史迹 1949-1990 *Beijing dianyingye shiji 1949-1990 (The History of the Film Industry in Beijing, 1949-1990)* (Beijing: Zhongguo Dianying Chubanshe, 1999), 181.

23 Clark, *Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 181.

projected repeatedly, they became less and less attractive to local residents. Instead, films imported from foreign countries became much more appealing and enjoyable. One movie-goer in Hechuan wrote about the experience of watching *The Flower Seller* (卖花姑娘 *Maihua guniang*) in their diary. It was a North Korean film, which premiered in 1972 in China and achieved the largest admissions of a foreign movie by the 1970s. To not miss the chance, this movie-goer finished his or her work much more actively that day, even leaving the work unit an hour early, at the risk of being criticised, to catch the movie on time.²⁴

During the Cultural Revolution era, as there was only one cinema in Hechuan until the late 1970s, in the countryside, mobile and semi-mobile projection teams providing open-air screenings still functioned as the main force. In addition to the state-owned projection teams that had already been established, collective-owned projections teams founded by communes began to appear after 1973. Before the end of this decade, the number of such teams in Hechuan reached 32. Four of them used the new-type 8.75 mm projector, which was lighter and more portable.²⁵ In fact, it was still difficult for rural people to enjoy films, especially those living in remote and hilly areas. However, this condition did not dampen their zeal. Several old people from different parts of rural Hechuan recalled that to watch a film, they were willing to walk for 10–15 kilometres to and from the screening sites.²⁶ In rural areas, although

24 Diaries written by a movie-goer in the county seat of Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution, found in the Old-book Market of Hechuan, Hechuan, January 21, 2019.

25 HCWY, 325-30.

26 Discussion with several movie-goers in the countryside of Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution, male and female, Hechuan, 23 January 2019.

both the state-operated and collective-founded projection teams ran their work based on the administrative division (normally within a commune), peasants usually made their own choices regardless of the division. Especially when copies of foreign films were borrowed from higher-level units and could only be projected once or twice, people that came from many other communes would cause the screening to be extremely crowded.

On the one hand, film projection was undoubtedly a means of ideological propaganda by the state. On the other hand, it provided opportunities for individual and family entertainment, as well as for social networking, where audiences' enjoyment and interaction made the atmosphere like a carnival. In the countryside of Hechuan, the atmosphere became even livelier when Third-Front factories held their weekly movie night. Both workers from the factories and residents living in nearby towns and countryside wished to participate in the carnival, not only as a relaxing night off work and routine but also as a chance for getting together and communication. The chatting and interaction took place before, during, and after the movie, which were not always limited to the same group of audiences. Instead, the once obvious boundary between workers and peasants sometimes disappeared, as communication would not harm either party. For the workers, especially those who newly migrated from urban areas outside, this would be a good opportunity to meet local people who could offer them foodstuffs with a farmhouse flavour, such as cage-free chicken, eggs, and homemade honey. For the peasants, it would also be a less laborious and more efficient way to trade their side-line products with those workers.

Children of the audience members would find it easier to make new friends and play together, especially when the projected film was not appealing to them. As an old man who was born in a family of immigrant workers and grew up in a Third-Front factory in Hechuan recalled, it was really exciting for him to make friends with local kids who came to the movies. Later he could play in the countryside outside the factory, which he had desired for a long time, but would not have been realised without the guidance of his new friends.²⁷

The screenings in the countryside had normally been prepaid by the communes; thus, peasants would not be charged individually. However, usually this free offer could not completely satisfy people's need for movie watching. Two old people who regularly commuted between the countryside and the county seat still remembered that almost every time they visited the county seat of Hechuan, they would buy a ticket to enter the cinema and to watch a film.²⁸ From 1967, an adult ticket for a feature film in Hechuan's cinema was normally 0.15 RMB, and the price for a widescreen film was 0.05 RMB higher.²⁹ Given the fact that in 1970 the average purchasing power of a Sichuan peasant was 37.49 RMB per year,³⁰ it should not be surprising when hearing one of them admitted that each year, nearly one-eighth of his cash on hand was spent on movies; he would go to the county seat at least twice a month and would not waste a single chance to visit the cinema there.

27 Discussion with a resident in Hechuan who was born in a family of immigrant workers and grown up in a Third-Front factory, male, Hechuan, 24 January 2019.

28 Discussion with two peasants who regularly commuted to the county seat of Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution, male, Hechuan, 25 January 2019.

29 HCWY, 320.

30 *Sichuan shengqing*, 226.

“What lured me was that kind of life which was totally different from ours”. This peasant’s explanation probably illuminates the reason for many Chinese people’s preference for foreign films during that era. “A Korean film: weep, weep, smile, smile; a Vietnamese film: guns and artillery; an Albanian film: all hugs” (朝鲜电影：又哭又笑；越南电影：飞机大炮；阿尔巴尼亚电影：全是拥抱 *chaoxian dianying: youkuyouxiao; Yuenan dianying: feiji dapao; Aerbaniya dianying: quanshi yongbao*). This jingle, popular across the whole country at that time, indicated people’s real feelings about those strange films from foreign countries. Even they did not fully understand the films’ plot and meaning, it was still interesting to them. This sense of freshness could help local people temporarily dissociate themselves from the monotonous and boring routines in everyday life, even though this function was far from the educational or propagandistic expectations behind the permission of those foreign films’ domestic projection. In fact, this kind of attraction remained evident even during the most politicised and chaotic phase of the ten-year era. What happened in Chongqing City, 80 kilometres away from Hechuan, was an illustration of this. In 1967, a documentary ballet film, *The Red Sun Lights Up the Ballet Stage* (红太阳照亮了芭蕾舞台 *Hongtaiyang zhaoliangle balei wutai*), premiered around October 1, the National Day, which was also the time when the fighting between conflicting factions of Red Guards in Chongqing was most fierce. However, as a local cadre noted in his diary when he went to the Shancheng Cinema located in the centre of Chongqing City, he was surprised to witness quite a long queue of people waiting for

the film. In the end, he almost had no chance to buy a ticket.³¹ In Chongqing that day, nearly no fighting occurred because people's attention and enthusiasm suddenly shifted to the film of the ballet, which was still a novelty to most Chinese people at that time. In addition, as some researchers indicated, the body language in the ballet had a special attraction to young audience members, especially young men, when they watched the dance for the first time during that officially desexualised era.³² As for the aforementioned two model ballets which were staged in Hechuan between 1970 and 1971, kinds of sexual attraction probably contributed to people's acceptance as well, although being presented in the revolutionary style.

At the same time, many songs in these films enjoyed great popularity independently from the movies, such as the famous *Song of The Red Star* (红星歌 *Hongxingge*) in the film named *Sparkling Red Star* (闪闪的红星 *Shanshande hongxing*). In Hechuan, one notebook found in the old-book market was filled with hand copies of film songs popular during the Cultural Revolution, such as *Song of Praise for Heroes* (英雄赞歌 *Yingxiong zange*) from *Heroic Sons and Daughters* (英雄儿女 *Yingxiong ernü*) and the theme song of the Korean film *The Flower Seller*.³³ Clearly, the owner of this notebook was a music lover with a certain level of musical

31 Chen Maozhi 陈懋智, “重慶武鬥見聞日記” Chongqing wudou jianwen riji (The Diaries of Witnessing Chongqing Fighting), in He Shu, Appendix.

32 Clark, *Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 155. Also see 彭麗君 Peng Lijun, 復制的藝術: 文革期間的文化生產及實踐 *Fuzhi de yishu: Wen'ge qijian de wenhua shengchan ji shijian* (*The Art of Copying--The Cultural Production and Practice in the Cultural Revolution*), trans. 李祖喬 Li Zuqiao (Hong Kong: Zhongwen Daxue Chubanshe, 2017), 171.

33 A notebook found in the Old-book Market of Hechuan, Hechuan, 20 October 2018.

knowledge. As a hobby to pursue during leisure time, those melodies and lyrics accompanied his or her everyday life in Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution era.

Taking all the aforementioned situations into consideration, it is interesting that Sichuan people, on the one hand, entertained themselves through various traditional and local activities of culture with which they were already familiar. On the other hand, a series of fresh and exotic cultural forms, such as films and ballets, facilitated their exploration of what had previously been unknown.

4. What if one stays at home?

What has been mentioned above were mainly structured activities, and in most cases, residents were officially motivated, organised, or even required to step outside under the revolutionary slogan. What if people stayed at home, especially peasants residing in the vast countryside which allowed at least some gap between private space and the official intervention? In some cases, the distance even made it difficult for cadres to make in-home visits or inspections. However, the development of China's broadcasting network facilitated the extension of structured cultural life into peasants' homes. From a national perspective, by the end of 1976, 2,503 radio stations had been established at the county-level across China, and the loudspeaker network covered 97 per cent of communes in rural areas. Moreover, over three-fifths of rural households had a speaker installed either in their houses or yards.³⁴ Without a control switch

34 Dangdai Zhongguo bianweihui 当代中国编委会 [Editorial Committee of *Contemporary China*] ed., 当代中国的广播电视 (上) *Dangdai Zhongguo de guangbo dianshi (shang)* (*Broadcasting and Television in Contemporary China, First Part*) (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1987), 362.

installed at the same time, this might not always be enjoyable for many residents. The loudspeaker would blare out on time every day whether they liked it or not.

Undoubtedly, the cultural programmes people could hear were almost all model operas and their derivatives. This situation, although without frequent visits from cadres, was similar to de Certeau's description of people not being able to isolate themselves from the larger environment.³⁵ As one person who grew up during the Cultural Revolution in the countryside of Hechuan recalled, she could even recite many lines in those model operas after listening to them from the radio numerous times, while the children's programmes that were genuinely appealing to her were quite infrequent and difficult to wait for.³⁶

However, the time spent at home was not always bad. Behind closed doors, and with no unexpected visits from officials, local people could at least maintain some private space and enjoy some kinds of cultural life other than organised or structured activities. To some extent, this was one of the very limited opportunities when most peasants and urban residents could temporarily isolate themselves from the public environment.

In Hechuan, compared with the county-seat residents, people in rural areas seemed to have an even larger scope for their cultural life and entertainment activities at home, including something beyond the official boundaries. The scattered residential pattern caused by the hilly landscape, making it even more difficult for

35 de Certeau, 37-38.

36 Discussion with a local resident who spent his childhood in the countryside of Hechuan, female, Hechuan, 27 January 2019.

official supervision, was perhaps a reason for this situation. Probably from the early 1970s, certain card games had reappeared in peasants' houses and yards. These games were many people's preferred options for relaxation and entertainment at home. Not only bridge (桥牌 *qiaopai*) and poker, but dice (骰子 *touzi*) could also be played for fun or even for gambling. Especially when the limitations on family side-lines were loosened and peasants thus had more cash on hand, gambling (the wager was normally less than 0.05 RMB per game) would be more common in their homes, although nominally this activity was strictly prohibited and remained on the list of official inspections. During the Educational Movement of the Basic Line of the Party which was conducted in 1975 in rural Hechuan, gambling was often reported by different villages as one of the behaviours with a capitalistic trend that should be criticised.³⁷ Despite the political pressure, villagers in private seemed to continue taking it for granted as a pastime and winning or losing might not be so important. This situation could also be confirmed from the diary of a rusticated youth in the countryside of Hechuan. Based on the recollection, poker had become a major way to kill the lengthy daytime, especially during the slack season of farming. When they played with local young peasants, the wagers were usually peas instead of real money.³⁸

In the meantime, peasants' yards in the open air facilitated more entertaining activities, which were more acknowledged officially during that era, such as skipping

37 Yang Chengshu, "Hechuan jiben luxian jiaoyu," 1-13.

38 Diaries of a former sent-down youth in the countryside of Hechuan county, found in the Old-book Market of Hechuan, Hechuan, 3 April 2018.

rope and kicking shuttlecocks. Even in the 1990s when I spent my summer holiday with peers in my grandparents' house in the countryside of Hechuan, we still enjoyed ourselves with these activities, which were surprisingly the same as my parents' childhood. Born in 1963, my mother specifically remembered her happy playtime in the yard every day after returning home from primary school. Similar games were probably also available in the open space of urban areas and enjoyed by urban children during the same period.

While all these cultural activities, regardless of whether they were officially organised or permitted, regained popularity among Sichuan residents from the early 1970s, it was likely that at the same time many people's enthusiasm for politics declined after a few years of political movements. This was probably not a coincidence. As a former member of a rebel faction in Chongqing City recalled, the editorial department of their faction, which once focused on publishing numerous Red Guard tabloids,³⁹ from 1970 started to print and sell many other publications related to people's interests in everyday life. What sold quite well in Chongqing included daily recipes and playlists of popular songs.⁴⁰

Although the social and political atmosphere remained rigid during the Cultural Revolution, and most cultural activities were in an organised form and for a propaganda purpose at the time, Sichuan residents' enthusiasm in cultural enjoyment

39 Besides fighting with each other, factions of Red Guards used their tabloids as another way to defend their political standpoint and attack others.

40 Huang Zhaoyan, 324.

did not fade. Instead, either through structured activities or in private forms, they could to a certain degree relax and amuse themselves through traditional or novel forms, no matter if it accorded with the official expectations and the top-down organisation.

Chapter Six: MIGRANTS' LIFE IN SICHUAN DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION: SENT-DOWN YOUTH AND THIRD-FRONT WORKERS

Throughout the whole era of the planned economy in China, people's mobility was always strictly limited, with the household system playing the key role. The national chaos in the beginning phase of the Cultural Revolution once loosened the limit, but the situation soon returned to the normal status by the late 1960s when the social and political atmosphere was broadly reordered. While it was often an illegal and risky thing for any individual in the country to privately leave the province or even the county he or she resided, at the same time, groups of Chinese people were mobilised and organised officially for a relocation from time to time. Shaped by the planned economy, it was not a coincidence that the direction of their migration was always from urban to rural areas, from more advanced regions to less advanced ones. Among those migrants, the sent-down youth and *Sanxian* people were two representative groups, both of which had one of their destinations in Sichuan during the Cultural Revolution era. For presenting a picture of people's everyday life in Sichuan in those years, these migrating groups should not be overlooked. Their relocation experiences were significantly moulded by the local society of Sichuan.

Section One: The Everyday Life of Sent-down Youth in Sichuan during the Cultural Revolution

The Sent-down Youth Movement, as mentioned previously, was initiated from the mid-1960s and finally came to its end by the end of 1970s. Although it was launched earlier than the commencement of the Cultural Revolution, the continuation of this movement during the Cultural Revolution decade exerted far-reaching influence toward Chinese society throughout that ten-year era.

In this prolonged movement, totally more than 17 million Chinese young people born in urban areas were relocated to the countryside.¹ These youngsters, most of whom finished their junior or senior middle school before moving to rural areas, were viewed and labelled as youth with knowledge (知识青年 *zhishi qingnian*) at that time. However, whether they were educated and knowledgeable enough to contribute significantly to the countryside, especially during the years when politics severely influenced the education in schools, was in fact highly questionable. Hereafter I prefer to call them sent-down youth or rusticated youngsters, instead of *zhishi qingnian* (知青 *zhiqing* for short) which in Chinese normally refers to this group of immigrants in the Sent-down Youth Movement.

According to the highest instruction from Mao Zedong, sending the urban youth to rural areas was because they can “do great things in the vast countryside” (广阔天地，大有作为 *guangkuo tiandi dayouzuowei*).² To achieve this goal, first all the rusticated youngsters needed to live their lives in the new and strange environment, which remained almost unsolved by the end of this movement.

¹ Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, Preface, 1.

² Mao Zedong 毛泽东, “广阔天地大有作为” *Guangkuo tiandi dayou zuowei* (do great things in the vast countryside) 河南日报 *Henan ribao* (*Henan Daily*), 27 June 1968.

During such a long-lasting and large-scale national movement, the situation in Sichuan Province was notable, due to its status as one of the most populous and largest provinces in China. Apart from over 40 thousand Sichuan urban youth migrating to military farms outside of the province, mainly to the border areas in Yunnan,³ for the majority of the urban youngsters in Sichuan their destination was the vast countryside within their own province. By 1979 there had been over 1.42 million youngsters, rusticated from urban Sichuan to the rural areas in the province, which was the third-largest number in all the provinces across the country. This number of rusticated youth was only behind Liaoning and Heilongjiang Province in Northeastern China.⁴

In this section, under the provincial context of Sichuan and mainly based on materials related to the rusticated youngsters settled in Hechuan County, I will examine their departure for the countryside, their housing and dining issues in rural areas, as well as their cultural and entertainment activities during their leisure time. All these parts authentically and significantly formed the everyday life of the sent-down youth in Sichuan during the Cultural Revolution. While the majority of the rusticated youngsters had to find pleasure from bitterness, some urban youth managed to enjoy some privileges in their rural experiences. All their experiences offer us local and bottom-up angles to rediscover the Sent-down Youth Movement in China.

3 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 180.

4 Gu Hongzhang 顾洪章 ed., 中国知识青年上山下乡始末 *Zhongguo zhishiqingnian shangshanxiaxiang shimo (The History of Chinese Youth being Sent to the Countryside)* (Beijing: Zhongguo Jiancha Chubanshe, 1997), 259-60.

1、 An overview of the national movement in Sichuan during the Cultural Revolution

In the first couple of years during the Cultural Revolution, this movement was inevitably suspended as a whole, due to the political and social disruption. In the meantime, large numbers of people who had previously been rusticated left the countryside and flooded back to cities. Many of them were involved in the fighting among Red Guards and rebel factions, until early 1967 when young people were called from the central level of the CCP to go back to villages and play their revolutionary roles in agricultural production. However, this top-down appeal did not seem to be effective until the second half of 1968 when the authority in a number of provinces began to motivate graduates of junior and senior high schools, organising them to settle in the countryside.⁵ A major reason for this official attempt was the large-scale accumulation of students graduating between 1966 and 1968. All the high school graduates in these three years were widely known as *laosanjie* (老三届) whose number amounted to 10 million across the whole country.⁶ Due to the launch of the political movement and the national disorder they could neither find jobs nor enter higher education. The situation appeared to be more troublesome in Sichuan Province, as a result of the factional conflict lasting for an even longer period.⁷ Some substantial changes finally took place after December 1968 when Mao Zedong issued his famous instruction about the necessity for urban graduates to go to the countryside, “to be re-

⁵ Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 113.

⁶ Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 106.

⁷ Sun Chengmin, *Sichuan zhiqing*, vol. 2, 35-39.

educated by poor and lower-middle peasants.”⁸ In the next year, a total of 2.67 million urban youngsters nationwide were relocated to the countryside, not to mention those students who originally came from rural areas and returned to their home villages after graduation.⁹ This year (1969) was the highest annual number in the 15-year Sent-down Youth Movement.

During this period, Sichuan saw a significant modification in the way to settle those young people. From the late 1960s most of the rusticated youth were no longer separated from villages, but were settled into production teams in rural Sichuan, a process generally known as *chadui* (插队 joining a production team). This shift was in accordance with the instruction from the CCP centre and the national trend at the same time, as a more radical way to integrate in and learn from peasants.¹⁰ By 1972, 6.66 million urban youngsters had become members of production teams all over the country, taking up 76 per cent of the sent-down youth nationally that year. The rest of them mainly entered state and military farms (known as 生产建设兵团 *shengchan jianshe bingtuan*, production and construction corps).¹¹ As for the *laosanjie* in Sichuan, all the graduates between 1966 and 1968 were required to relocate to the countryside of Sichuan, based on the provincial policy issued in January 1969, as a follow-up to Mao’s instruction one month before.¹² In the process of sending the

8 Mao Zedong 毛泽东, “知识青年到农村去, 接受贫下中农再教育, 很有必要” *Zhishi qingnian dao nongcun qu, jieshou pinxiazhongnong zaijiaoyu, henyou biyao* (It is very necessary for the sent-down youth to go to the countryside and to be educated by the middle- and lower peasants),” *Renmin ribao*, December 22, 1968.

9 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 170.

10 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 195.

11 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 193.

12 Sun Chengmin, *Sichuan zhiqing*, vol. 2, 131-32.

young people to rural areas, the specific way in Sichuan was similar to many other provinces which preferred to place youngsters from their own province in villages relatively close to some major cities and prefectures.¹³ This was probably a result of the pressure from local parents. Among the 189 thousand sent-down youth from Chongqing City, 141 thousand of them were relocated in Fuling, Wanxian, Daxian, and Neijiang, all of which were all big prefectures around Chongqing.¹⁴ As for those less fortunate youngsters, the vast but sparsely populated mountains and grasslands on the margins of the basin provided more choices for the local policy-makers. Xichang Prefecture locating in the southwest border of Sichuan accepted 32 thousand young people from Chengdu City during this period.¹⁵ In only two months after the issuance of January's policy in 1969, more than 160 thousand urban youngsters had begun their new life in rural Sichuan. According to the official plan, this was equivalent to 40 per cent of the target in the whole 1969.¹⁶ By the end of this year, almost all the high school graduates from 1966 to 1968 in Sichuan had settled into the countryside.¹⁷

A similar story of a swift migration also took place in Hechuan county. Totally nine thousand *laosanjie* graduates from urban Hechuan left their homes and started their rural life between 1969 and 1970.¹⁸ While the 11 youth farms previously

13 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 186-87.

14 Sun Chengmin, *Sichuan zhiqing*, vol. 2, 132.

15 Sun Chengmin, *Sichuan zhiqing*, vol. 2, 132.

16 Dangdai Sichuan congshu bianjibu 当代四川丛书编辑部 [Editorial Committee of the series of *Contemporary Sichuan*] ed., 当代四川大事辑要 *Dangdai Sichuan dashi jiyao* (*Summary of Events in Contemporary Sichuan*) (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 1991), 267.

17 Sun Chengmin, *Sichuan zhiqing*, vol. 2, 133.

18 Lu Zhiquan, 13.

founded in the countryside of Hechuan by 1966 had been abandoned, all of those rusticated youngsters became members of the production teams in rural Hechuan.¹⁹ At the same time, as a big agricultural county near Chongqing, Hechuan accommodated significant numbers of young people from Chongqing City. Throughout the whole process between 1964 and 1978, 26,933 young men and women settled in rural Hechuan, and 10,762 of them came from Chongqing City.²⁰ In addition to the local sent-down youth who had grown up in Hechuan County, these youngsters from Chongqing City formed a relatively distinct group in the movement in rural Hechuan. Several communes on the southern margin of the county, which adjoined the suburban area of Chongqing attracted considerable numbers of Chongqing youngsters to immigrate in the form of *toukao* (投靠 to take refuge from somebody). This was a way of settling in a village where you had relatives, normally where your parents or grandparents came from, as an alternative policy and solution approved by the CCP for sent-down youth's migration from urban to rural areas.

With rusticated youth from both the county seat (or the township) and big cities like Chongqing, the situation in Hechuan thus provides a picture of sent-down youth's everyday experiences in Sichuan during the Cultural Revolution.

2. To leave or to stay

In spite of the seemingly efficient mobilisation and organisation in the movement as mentioned above, the actual process of sending youth to the countryside was not as

19 Lu Zhiquan, 123.

20 Lu Zhiquan, 3.

smooth as expected by officials. For many urban youngsters and their families, their feelings were not as straightforward and without any hesitation or reluctance as demonstrated by the eye-catching title of an editorial in the *Sichuan Daily* in late December 1968: *Shuozou jiuzou* (说走就走 Leaving right now).²¹ By the end of 1970, in Hechuan there were 1,161 *laosanjie* graduates, more than one-fifth of the total number, still staying in the county seat, although according to the aforementioned provincial policy issued in January 1969, all of them should have been sent to the countryside.²² A year and a half later, when a local official gave a speech on sent-down youth mobilisation, he continued to try to persuade young people and their parents to give up the wait-and-see attitude.²³ To hasten the departure of those remaining youngsters, a series of actions were taken. A quite common method not only in Hechuan but also in other regions of Sichuan was hard-to-avoid classes studying Mao Zedong Thought which were repeatedly held among parents.²⁴ However, despite such heavy political and social pressure, some individuals still tried to find other possibilities. In 1969 when all the graduates were required to settle in villages, a girl in the county seat of Hechuan did not follow the tide, but went off on a

21 Sun Chengmin, *Sichuan zhiqing*, vol. 2, 123.

22 Hechuanxian geweihui biye fenpei zu 合川县革委会毕业生分配组 [Group for Graduates Distribution of the Revolutionary Committee of Hechuan County], “关于当前知识青年上山下乡安排意见的请示报告” *Guanyu dangqian zhishiqingnian shangshanxiaxiang anpai yijian de qingshi baogao* (Draft Report on Arrangements for Sent-down Youth Going to the Countryside), 5 December 1970, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 13-1970-15-0084.

23 “Fayang chengji, zongjie jingyan: jinyibu zuohao shangshanxiaxiang de dongyuan gongzuo” 发扬成绩，总结经验：进一步做好上山下乡的动员工作 (Carrying forward the Achievements and Summarise the Lessons: Do A Better Job of Sent-down Youth Mobilisation), 31 August 1972, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 13-1972-15-0101.

24 “Fayang chengji,” archive no: 13-1972-15-0101.

visit to Shandong Province, where her father came from, intending to find a job opportunity.²⁵

Economic growth in Hechuan in the early 1970s provided more hope for young people. From 1970 to 1972, the annual number of new sent-down youth settled in rural Hechuan declined continuously,²⁶ probably as a consequence of the growth of the job vacancies as mentioned in Chapter Three. Even by 1973 when factories' recruitment was strictly limited again and going to the countryside once more became the focus of official arrangement on urban youth, the climax of rustication seemed impossible to reoccur. In Sichuan, during the first half of 1973, 22 thousand urban youngsters left for rural areas, merely less than 14 per cent of the planned number for that year.²⁷ At the same time, because of more and more feedback from sent-down youth's real experiences in rural areas, the longer time the movement was carried on, the more difficult it became to mobilise the urban youngsters and their families. In 1976, only 981 young people from Hechuan county seat moved to the countryside by the end of July which was normally the graduating season for students and also the peak time for their migration to rural areas, while the total quota for youth rustication for Hechuan was 2390 in that year.²⁸ This indicated that nearly 60 per cent of the future sent-down youth were still living in the county seat.

25 Discussion with a local woman in Hechuan who graduated from junior high school in 1969, Hechuan, September 17, 2019.

26 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 269.

27 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 270-71.

28 Lu Zhiquan, 191.

After 1973 parents nationwide were allowed to keep one child with them.²⁹ But the majority of the urban youngsters in the Cultural Revolution era had no choice but to follow the official arrangements and spend at least a couple of years in the countryside. Even the aforementioned young woman who left for Shandong Province in 1969 had to return Hechuan a year later and began her sent-down career there.³⁰

3. The hardship of rural life

For the arriving rusticated youngsters, in front of them was a real picture of the Chinese countryside. Honestly speaking, for young people from the county seat (or the townships), the rural realities were not so astonishing or disappointing as for those from big cities. But a number of basic obstacles were still unavoidable in the sent-down youth's everyday experiences in rural Hechuan.

Mao Zedong in his famous instruction in 1968 required that all comrades in the countryside should welcome the arrival of the sent-down youth, resulting in a general uplift in peasants and rural cadres' enthusiasm for this movement.³¹ Many difficulties and limits, however, took time to resolve, especially prior to the National Sent-down Youth Conference in 1973 and related reforms that followed.

(a) Housing was the first issue

29 Zhongguo guojia tongjiju 中国国家统计局 [National Bureau of Statistics of the PRC] ed., 中国劳动工资统计资料 1949-1985 *Zhongguo laodong gongzi tongji ziliao 1949-1985 (Statistics of Workers' Wages in China: 1949-1985)* (Beijing: Zhongguo Tongji Chubanshe, 1986), 110-11.

30 Discussion with a local woman in Hechuan who graduated from junior high school in 1969, Hechuan, 17 September 2019.

31 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 166-67.

One of the most urgent but also long-lasting problems for all the young people newly arrived was their housing in the countryside. Admittedly, since 1969 authorities both in the central and the provincial level had allocated certain amounts of subsidy for sent-down youth's settlement. For those who individually became members of a production team in Southern China, the subsidy was 230 RMB per person based on the central standard,³² while in Sichuan the local policy was 30 RMB lower during the same period.³³ According to national and provincial level regulations, the expenditure on house-building should be included in the subsidy. Nevertheless, the money allocated seemed inadequate in solving the problem. Even three to four years later, based on national statistics, the number of sent-down youth with newly-constructed houses to live in merely took up 64 per cent across the country. In Sichuan the proportion was 60 per cent.³⁴ While the data collected from local reports may help us access more striking realities. By the end of 1972, in the suburban areas of Beijing which were undoubtedly better-off compared to the average level in rural China, only three in every ten rusticated youngsters lived in new houses.³⁵ In rural Hechuan, although another 200 RMB was added to the subsidy for every sent-down youth after the National Conference in 1973,³⁶ the percentage of the rusticated youngsters

32 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 189.

33 Lu Zhiqian, 128.

34 Zhongguo guowuyuan zhiqing ban 中国国务院知青办 [Office of Sent-down Youth of the State Council of the PRC], “下乡插队知识青年住房情况” *Xiaxiang chadui zhishiqingnian zhufang qingkuang* (Housing Conditions of *Chadui* Sent-down Youth), quoted from Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 294-95.

35 Beijing zhi bianweihui 北京志编委会 [Editorial Committee of *The Gazetteer of Beijing*] ed., 北京志·综合经济管理卷·劳动志 *Beijing zhi · zonghe · jingji guanli juan · laodong zhi* (*Gazetteer of Beijing, Volume on Economy and Management, Gazetteer of Labour*) (Beijing: Beijing Chubanshe, 1999), 48.

36 Zhonggong Hechuan xianwei 中共合川县委 [Hechuan County Committee of the CCP], “关于认真做好知识青年上山下乡工作的安排意见 (草稿)” *Guanyu renzhen*

enjoying new residences together with those living in houses borrowed from peasants just reached 54.7.³⁷

Budget shortages were always a major block in the process of providing dependable shelter for the rusticated youth. As officially calculated at that time, there was normally at least a 100 RMB gap between the subsidy and the expenditure on house building for each youngster,³⁸ which indicated that the villages accepting the sent-down youth needed to make up the financial gap by themselves. Undoubtedly the extra financial burden influenced production teams' willingness to help improve the housing quality of the new comers, in addition to some opinions popular among peasants in which these young people were just regarded as passers-by rather than permanent residents.³⁹ In the meantime, since the subsidies were normally claimed and managed by the production team based on the number of sent-down youth it would accommodate, a serious lack of supervision and accounting further worsened the situation. In Hechuan County, cases of diversion from and misuse of the budget on sent-down youth's housing were frequently mentioned in reports. In addition, many similar cases occurred in which a considerable part of the subsidy was embezzled by some leaders of the production teams for private interest. Sometimes the money was also unexpectedly used to promote the collective economy in villages, as Michel Bonnin found in his research.⁴⁰ In Hechuan there were some interesting

zuohao zhishiqingnian shangshanxiaxiang gongzuo de anpai yijian (caogao) (Advice on the Arrangement of Sent-down Youth Work, draft), 17 October 1973, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 13-1973-15-0116.

37 Lu Zhiqian, 177.

38 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 296.

39 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 294.

40 Bonnin, 240.

stories as well. For instance, nearly 600 RMB of the subsidy for sent-down youth became investment for a brick factory by one production team in Dongdu Commune of Hechuan. In another production team, only half of the subsidy was spent to build thatched cottages for sent-down youth (not brick houses as officially required). The rest of the money was used to buy pork from outside, which was divided up among all the peasants in the team (each person got 0.25 kilogram of pork on average).⁴¹ These cunning rural cadres managed to cope with official policies and benefitted local residents. But these actions kept the issue of urban youngsters' accommodation from being solved smoothly. Building thatched cottages for the rusticated youth instead of brick houses, which were much more expensive, seemed to be a popular tactic. Unfortunately, in Sanmiao Commune in Hechuan ten out of the 36 thatched cottages constructed for sent-down youngsters had collapsed by 1975 due to their low quality.⁴²

The serious deficiency of housing inevitably caused great troubles for the sent-down youth's rural life. Many of them had to frequently change places of living, known as *dayouji* (打游击 fighting as a guerrilla) in Chinese. Some of them even had to be sheltered by temples, ancestral halls, or barns.⁴³ In Hechuan, by 1975 there were surprisingly 874 young people still commuting between their urban homes (in the county seat or township) and the villages where they were assigned. Every day they

41 Lu Zhiqian, 179.

42 "Guanyu Sanmiao gongshe zhiqing anzhi jingfei qingli qingkuang de baogao" 关于三庙公社知青安置经费清理情况的报告 (Report on the Clearance of Accommodation Fees of the Sent-down Youth in Sanmiao Commune), 9 May 1975, Hechuan archives, archive no: 13-1975-15-0220.

43 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 294.

had to get up very early and rush to the fields. After finishing a day's work, they needed to go back home again.⁴⁴ In most cases they had to commute on foot. This solution only suited those who settled quite near to the county seat or the town of their home, which was a comparatively satisfying arrangement at that time. Those commuters were 7.2 per cent of the total number of the sent-down youth in rural Hechuan in 1975.⁴⁵ In another commune, several youngsters chose to live in a different village which was next to the one they were assigned to, and walked several kilometres to work in the fields every day.⁴⁶ This kind of situation was not unique in Hechuan. The case in Kaixian County, located in East Sichuan, seemed to be even more awkward. In a commune there almost one-quarter of the rusticated youth still lived at home and went to the fields each working day.⁴⁷

After the famous letter from Li Qinglin to Mao Zedong reporting sent-down youth's difficulties in late 1972,⁴⁸ together with the National Conference on Sent-down Youth in 1973, a series of policies were amended aiming to improve young people's living condition in rural areas. In Sichuan, the provincial authority planned to allocate 10 million RMB from September 1973, and the sent-down youth's housing issue was one of the main problems to be solved.⁴⁹ But in fact, the total expenditure

44 "Jiaqiang dangde lingdao, zuohao zhiqing gongzuo: gequshe dui xiexiang zhishi qingnian anzhi gongzuo pubian jinxing jiancha" 加强党的领导，做好知青工作：各区社对下乡知识青年安置工作普遍进行检查 (Strengthen the Leadership of the Party, Do a Better Job on Sent-down Youth: General Inspection of the Arrangement of the Sent-down Youth in Each Commune), 21 August 1975, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 13-1975-15-0218.

45 "Jiaqiang dang de lingdao," archive no: 13-1975-15-0218.

46 Lu Zhiquan, 231.

47 Sun Chengmin, *Sichuan Zhiqing*, vol. 2, 269.

48 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 359-64. Li Qinglin was the father of a sent-down youth in Fujian Province.

49 Gu Hongzhang, *Shangshanxiexiang*, 120.

on building houses alone for the sent-down youth in Sichuan amounted to 40 million RMB.⁵⁰ In Hechuan, the proportion of urban youth with new and fixed accommodation in the countryside had increased to 80 per cent in a number of communes by 1975.⁵¹

This improvement seemed to still not satisfy sent-down youth's demand on housing, especially as large numbers of young people had reached the marriageable age after spending a few years in rural areas. From 1974, policies from the central level did not encourage late marriage any longer, but turned to advocating that sent-down youngsters find their spouses in rural areas, since it was seen as an effective way to put down roots in the countryside.⁵² During this period a series of model couples, representing marriages between rusticated youngsters and local peasants, became nationally known through propaganda. However, marriage between sent-down youth was a much more common option among the rusticated youngsters. As a result, the new families formed by rusticated youngsters generated more need for accommodation, not to mention the babies coming soon. In 1977, the marriage rate of sent-down youth in the whole country reached 10 per cent, which was the highest level during those years.⁵³ The situation in Hechuan was not exceptional. By 1978 there were 1,274 sent-down youth out of 13,009 in total who had got married.⁵⁴

50 Sun Chengmin, *Sichuan Zhiqing*, vol. 2, 359.

51 "Jiaqing dang de lingdao," archive no: 13-1975-15-0218.

52 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 507.

53 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 510.

54 "Guanyu jieju yihun zhiqing kunnan buzhu de qingkuang he yijian" 关于解决已婚知青困难补助的情况和意见 (The Situation and Advice about Solving the Difficulties of Married Sent-down Youth), 3 June 1978. Hechuan Archives, archive no: 13-1977-15-0438.

Nearly half of them needed to enlarge or rebuild their houses because of the birth of babies.⁵⁵ Even so, they were the luckier ones compared with others whose marriages were impossible due to the lack of suitable shelter. It was admitted that there were thousands of pairs of lovers under this kind of plight in rural Yibin, on the southern margins of Sichuan.⁵⁶

During the same period, the authorities recommended and promoted the setting up of sent-down youth centres (知青点 *zhiqingdian*) in production teams. These could accommodate several young people together in the same village, instead of placing them individually.⁵⁷ Based on the public news, by the mid-1974 more than ten thousand new centres had been established in rural Sichuan, sheltering the majority of the sent-down youth.⁵⁸ However, there might still be a considerable gap between the reported news and the local realities. In terms of some sample statistics in Hechuan by 1976, the proportion of those youngsters moving into youth centres only reached 11 per cent.⁵⁹ In other words, most of the rusticated young people in Hechuan lived separately in villages throughout the Cultural Revolution era. The persistence of the housing issue actually foreshadowed further difficulties the youngsters would confront in their rural experiences.

55 “Guanyu jiejie yihun,” archive no: 13-1977-15-0438.

56 Sun Chengmin, *Sichuan Zhiqing*, vol. 2, 269.

57 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 407-08.

58 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 410.

59 “Guanyu Dongdu, Tanzi, Yanjing gongshe xiexiang zhishiqingnian shenghuo ziji qingkuang de diaocha baogao” 关于东渡、滩子、盐井公社下乡知识青年生活自给情况的调查报告 (Report on the Self-sufficient Situation of the Sent-down Youth in Dongdu, Tanzi, and Yanjing Communes), 4 August 1976, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 13-1976-15-0331.

In the meantime, Sichuan officials from 1974 decided to rebuild the youth farms which had been abandoned at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, as a new way to accommodate the sent-down youngsters collectively.⁶⁰ With official support, the number of youth farms in Sichuan rebounded and increased quickly. But most of them were located in mountainous and less populated regions, rather than the populous countryside in the middle of the Sichuan Basin. By 1975 about 42 thousand sent-down youth were living on those farms, which was still a very small fraction of the total rusticated youth in Sichuan.⁶¹

This situation in Sichuan was in line with Bonnin's point that the housing issue remained the most essential problem for sent-down youth, and finally became a major factor leading to the ending of this movement.⁶² As a basic and everyday need for human beings, housing was also a very complicated issue which most youngsters could not tackle by themselves. Whether or not they lived in dependable accommodation differentiated young people's personal experiences and real feelings in rural Hechuan throughout the Sent-down Youth Movement.

(b) How to feed themselves was another problem

Apart from the issue of housing, food and cooking were notable questions in examining the material life of sent-down youth.

60 Sun Chengmin, *Sichuan Zhiqing*, vol. 2, 416.

61 Sichuansheng zhiqing bangongshi 四川省知青办公室 [Office of the Sent-down Youth of Sichuan Province], “下乡知识青年集体安置情况统计表” *Xiexiang zhishiqingnian jiti anzhi qingkuang tongjibiao* (Statistical Table of the Collective Accommodation of Sent-down Youth), 28 October 1976, quoted from Sun Chengmin, *Sichuan Zhiqing*, vol. 2, 421.

62 Bonnin, 247.

When evaluating the economic life of those young people in rural areas during the Cultural Revolution, *zijilü* (自给率 the rate of self-sufficiency) was a term quite frequently used in official reports from the centre and local levels. To be self-sufficient (*ziji* 自给) in the countryside was actually one of the core objectives set officially for the sent-down youth. As the popular slogan went at that time: “We who have two hands, should not live an idle life in the cities” (我们也有两只手，不在城里吃闲饭 *women ye you liang zhi shou, bu zai chengli chi xianfan*).⁶³ However, most youngsters’ experiences after their actual settlement in the countryside proved that this goal was too difficult to be achieved for the majority of the sent-down youth throughout the Cultural Revolution era.

Compared to those in *shengchan jianshe bingtuan*, this problem appeared to be much tougher for the *chadui* sent-down youth who were distributed in a scattered way in rural China and had become members of production teams. Based on a national survey in early 1973, approximately 34 per cent of all the urban youngsters in production teams could be considered self-sufficient, especially in terms of daily food. As for the others, those who needed help from their families took up a percentage of 35, yet the rest of them (31%) could not support themselves at all.⁶⁴ According to the policy, normally sent-down youth’s rations of grain and oil would be continued only for one year after they moved to the countryside,⁶⁵ which meant they

63 “Women yeyou liangzhishou, buzai chengli chixianfan” 我们也有两只手，不在城里吃闲饭 (We who have two hands, should not live an idle life in cities), *Renmin ribao*, 22 December 1968.

64 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 287-88.

65 Zhongguo guojia liangshibu 中国国家粮食部 [National Department of Grain of PRC], “关于城市下乡青年粮油供应工作的几项规定” *Guanyu chengshi xiexiang qingnian liangyou gongying gongzuo de jixiang guiding* (Several Regulations about

really could not live an idle life any longer, but instead would receive rations mainly based on their work in the collective farming.

Theoretically speaking, the situation should have substantially improved as many actions had been taken officially after the 1973 National Conference. In October that year, aiming to at least fill the gap of youngsters' basic food needs, Sichuan Province set a subsidy of 100 RMB for each rusticated youth who had settled in the countryside before the end of 1972 but still could not live a self-sufficient rural life. The total amount of allowance in Sichuan reached 19 million RMB, covering more than 40 per cent of all the sent-down youth in rural Sichuan.⁶⁶ The rusticated youngsters in Hechuan were benefitted from this welfare measure by November 1973.⁶⁷

The money undoubtedly provided immediate help to those in trouble. But the endeavour did not produce a long-term solution to the problem. Through a sample investigation in August 1976, the proportion of the sent-down youth who could not really feed themselves in rural Hechuan was still as high as 68 per cent.⁶⁸ In this sense, supporting oneself, at least earning one's own rice, remained an essential issue in Sichuan sent-down youngsters' everyday life throughout the Cultural Revolution decade. However, as acknowledged by the local authorities in Hechuan, the living standards of sent-down youth in rural Hechuan did not obviously change before 1978, when this movement finally came to its end.⁶⁹

the Grain and Oil Supplies of Urban Sent-down Youth), Beijing, 20 March 1964. (These regulations applied throughout the Cultural Revolution).

66 Sun Chengmin, *Sichuan Zhiqing*, vol. 2, 354.

67 "Guanyu renzhen zuohao," archive no: 13-1973-15-0116.

68 "Guanyu Dongdu, Tanzi," archive no: 13-1976-15-0331.

69 Lu Zhiquan, 264.

A series of factors contributed to this long-lasting difficulty. Many of the problems in Sichuan were not distinctive from those nationally, such as the lower work points sent-down youth could get from their labour in farm work (compared with the local peasants), as well as their lower skills in agricultural work.⁷⁰ As a result, “most of the young people realised that even if they worked as hard as they possibly could, they would never be able to survive decently by their own means”.⁷¹

This kind of situation trapping the rusticated youngsters was actually the same predicament which Chinese peasants were facing at that time. As I discuss in Chapter Three, in rural China when the mode of collective farming dominated, relatively few peasants could enjoy a really satisfying life through their hard work. In order to motivate the new comers in the countryside, the National Conference in 1973 required that all the sent-down youth be allocated and cultivate private plots, as one more way to help them live by their own hands.⁷² An old man who migrated to rural Hechuan as a sent-down youth recalled that in the mid-1970s each of them was allocated one *fen* (分)⁷³ of land on average.⁷⁴ The private plots provided more possibilities for improving the young people’s dining experiences, although no grain was allowed to be grown there. As Bonnin mentions in his study, some sent-down youth chose to lease their private plots to local peasants, then shared a proportion of the products

70 Bonnin, 250.

71 Bonnin, 248.

72 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 292.

73 *Fen* is a Chinese unit of measurement for land, and one *fen* equals one tenth of a *mu*, approximately 66 square meters.

74 Discussion with a former sent-down youth in Hechuan, male, Hechuan, 29 December 2019.

after harvest.⁷⁵ This kind of leasehold probably exceeded the legal boundary at that time. No evidence suggests that this kind of underground lease between the rusticated youngsters and local peasants occurred in rural Hechuan, but many young people there did work hard in their private plots, in order to put some more dishes on their dining tables. As the former sent-down youth mentioned above recollected, at that time almost all the vegetables he ate were produced from his own plots. While many peers with financial support from parents could often buy vegetables and other foodstuffs from the town during market days, as the oldest child with younger brothers and sisters in the family, he had to work for himself if he wanted to improve his living standard.⁷⁶

Poultry and even pig raising by sent-down youth was encouraged at the same time. This sort of task was easier for those living together in sent-down youth centres. According to a Hechuan woman who started her sent-down career from 1974 and was lucky to live in a youth centre, she successfully persuaded her three roommates to raise chickens with the knowledge newly learned from peasants. After several failures, during the next two years they did not need to buy eggs from the markets any longer, and some delicious dishes cooked with chicken became the *pièce de résistance* at their centre, which even attracted peers from neighbouring villages.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, another rusticated youth living singly was not so fortunate when she tried to raise a

75 Bonnin, 250.

76 Discussion with a former sent-down youth in Hechuan, male, Hechuan, 29 December 2019.

77 Discussion with a former sent-down youth in Hechuan, male, Hechuan, 28 December 2019.

pig. As recorded in an official report, after several months' attempt, she finally gave up due to the lack of time and energy and had to sell the pig cheaply before it had grown fat enough.⁷⁸

For most rusticated youngsters, only substantial support from their own family could improve the situation. But in return this support aggravated the financial burden on their family members. Even by 1977, one year after the end of the Cultural Revolution, those who needed to make up their grain contribution with cash in Lize Commune in Hechuan still were 42.3 per cent of the total sent-down youth, according to a sample investigation in 1978.⁷⁹ According to the policies of collective farming in a production team, by the end of a year if the members could not meet the average grain ration through their work points, they needed to fill the gap with cash. If there was not enough cash either, it would be recorded as debts owed to the production team. Yet the production level and living standard of this commune was above the average in the countryside of Hechuan. For most youngsters without any extra income at that time, the cash payment of the debt to the production team could only come from their own families. For someone whose parents were also in trouble (either economically, politically, or both), the situation would become really unsolvable. In the same commune, 101 rusticated young people had had their debts inevitably piling up for many years and never paid them.⁸⁰ Probably few of these debts could be paid

78 Lu Zhiqian, 263.

79 “Guanyu xiexiang zhishi qingnian shenghuo ziji qingkuang de diaocha baogao” 关于下乡知识青年生活自给情况的调查报告 (Report on the Self-support situations of the Sent-down Youth), 10 April 1978, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 13-1978-15-0440.

80 “Guanyu zhiqing...shenghuo ziji,” archive no: 13-1978-15-0440.

back throughout this period as there was no obvious improvement in most sent-down youngsters' economic conditions by the end of this movement in the end of the 1970s.

Being sent to the countryside by Mao Zedong under his instruction to contribute to the vast rural areas, the fact that such a big proportion of the rusticated young people struggled and failed to feed themselves by their own hands, not to mention the irreparable waste of their time, suggested a massive failure of this movement.

4. Finding some pleasure amidst bitterness

(a) The pursuit of delicious food never faded away

Being seriously limited in so many aspects, it is not difficult to imagine the food on sent-down youth's dining tables. Notwithstanding, lots of those youngsters in Sichuan still maintained their enthusiasm for food and cuisine. Since most of them were Sichuan natives, probably the local culture and interest in different kinds of delicacies every day, as mentioned in previous chapters, were still part of the dining experiences of Sichuan sent-down youth during their rural career.

Except those commuting between the production teams and their homes, who paid a high price in time and energy for a relatively better dining experience at home, undoubtedly the majority of Sichuan rusticated youngsters' daily food was far from satisfactory in general, as a consequence of all the limited conditions mentioned above. However, it seemed that in many cases the youth in rural Sichuan could still have some pleasure amidst so much bitterness, as the cooking and dining practices recalled in a number of memoirs by Sichuan sent-down youth attest.

In the new environment, perhaps the first thing most young people from urban areas needed to adapt themselves to was the unfamiliar foodstuffs as well as some distinct ways of cooking, although, as mentioned earlier, most of the urban youth in Sichuan did not have their rural life outside of their home province.

Normally those youngsters relocating to hilly regions were viewed as having an even harder experience. But in return those youth had more chances to try some specialties in their daily meals. For example, potatoes were a staple food in the mountainous areas of Northern Sichuan. The people there preferred to eat potatoes together with pickle soup. A sent-down youth from Chongqing City was soon impressed by this style of eating. Learning from local peasants, he mastered and began to enjoy different kinds of cuisine using potatoes, including baking, frying and soup-making. Every vacation, he would bring some dried potato chips back home, which was quite welcomed among his family members. Similarly, many new comers were attracted by dishes with sweet potatoes or buckwheat, both of which were also produced in the mountainous regions of rural Sichuan. Applying different kinds of cooking methods, these ingredients produced different tastes and textures.⁸¹ Nowadays, these kinds of simple foods are often recommended as healthy. Yet for many rusticated youngsters, these interesting and unfamiliar foods filled their bellies during those difficult years.

81 Zhu Peiqiang 竺培强, “遥想当年的粗杂粮” Yaoxiang dangnian de cuzaliang (Recalling the Coarse Food during those Years), 四川烹饪 (*Sichuan pengren*), 2005 (03): 32-33.

In addition to these unfamiliar kinds of staple food, these urban youngsters encountered unknown dishes made of wild game and even insects. Someone later told his experience when a group of youth visited a local peasants' home for dinner. For the first time they saw silkworms as a dish on the table. Being warmly persuaded by the host, these youngsters at first hesitated to try, but soon began to enjoy the taste of fried silkworms, which goes well with alcohol.⁸² In fact, such a rare cuisine has maintained long-time popularity in Sichuan, partly because of the local tradition of rearing silkworms as a family side-line. This unforgettable sent-down experience incidentally triggered these young people's appetite for wild game. Later during the whole summer, as recalled by the same former sent-down youth, all the grasshoppers they caught while working in fields would become their appetisers in the evening. Just putting the grasshoppers in pot, dry-fry for several minutes, then stirring them around a few times, would produce a special fragrance mixing the smell of grass and oil.⁸³

Those settled on the youth farms founded in Sichuan after 1974, living their lives more collectively, appeared to be more capable of food seeking from nature. Several decades later, the experiences of group hunting in the mountains were still cherished in their memory, even though normally the kill was limited due to their lack of skill. In the end, these young people even hunted the local peasants' poultry and even

82 Xiaozhou 晓舟, “干煸夏三虫—知青美食纪略之四 (蚕蛹)” *Ganbian xiasanchong—zhiqing meishi jilue zhisi (canyong)* (Dry Fried Summer Insects: Records of the Tasty Food of the Sent-down Youth, Silkworms), *四川农业科技 (Sichuan Nongye keji)*, 2000 (03): 40-41.

83 Xiaozhou 晓舟, “干煸夏三虫—知青美食纪略之五 (油蚂蚱)” (Dry Fried the Summer Insects: Records of the Tasty Food of the Sent-down Youth, locusts), *四川农业科技 (Sichuan Nongye keji)*, 2000 (08): 39-40.

dogs.⁸⁴ At that time, stealing something to eat was often tacitly approved in view of the food shortages. According to Bonnin, the cases of stealing between sent-down youth and local peasants could be attributed to the sense of loss and suffering, which led to the desire to get something as compensation.⁸⁵ There are no data on the scale and frequency of such thefts. Whether by hunting or stealing, groups of sent-down youth often competed over food. As described in the same memoir, a dog stolen from neighbouring peasants was stolen again by another group of sent-down youth, and became a pot of dog soup before the next morning.⁸⁶ As the Chinese old saying goes: “the mantis stalks the cicada, unaware of the oriole behind” (螳螂捕蝉，黄雀在后 *tanglangbuchan, huangquezaihou*).

For the young people who moved into rural Hechuan, their good fortune mainly relied on the three tributaries of Yangtze River converging in the county. As a former sent-down youth recalled, since the Jialing River flows through the village he settled in, fishing in the river became a regular after-work activity among many young people, including rusticated youth and local youngsters. The method of fishing was not angling on the bank, but casting nets from a boat to catch fish, which was learnt from the local peasants. Once mastered the skill, this sent-down youth and his peers could get five to ten kilograms of live fish each time, including different kinds of carp. Then they could have a big dinner of fish dishes cooked in various styles. This

84 Hu Zhigang 虎志刚, “难忘当年知青的打猎” *Nanwang dangnian zhiqing de dalie* (Memorable Experiences of Hunting during those Sent-down Years), *四川烹饪* (*Sichuan pengren*), 2001 (11): 11.

85 Bonnin, 282.

86 Hu Zhigang, 11.

was a way of *dayaji*: as explained in Chapters above, *dayaji* in the Sichuan dialect means to have a big meal with some meat dishes not so easy to enjoy in normal times. As the informant recalled: “We didn’t have as many options for seasoning the fish as today, but even though we just used the very basic condiments we had, such as salt, vinegar, and soy sauce, the taste and texture were really good. Probably it was because the fish was purely natural and wild at that time, in contrast with the farmed fish now bought from the market”.⁸⁷ For another Hechuan youngster migrating to a village some distance from the river, fishing was not so regular in his rusticated career. But one of his memorable dining experiences during those years related to a big flood in his village. The flood brought innumerable fish to the fields. For a whole day after the floodwater had receded, all villagers were busy, not in farming, but in collecting the flapping fish instead. Since there was no fridge, the next urgent task was to eat all their catch as soon as possible. Although the flood caused considerable damage to the agricultural production, their stomachs were unprecedentedly filled in a few days that followed. But lots of fish still became rotten due to the hot weather. To the old man, this was a great pity in his memory about his life as a sent-down youth.⁸⁸

Not all the youngsters had the chance to enjoy meat either through hunting, stealing, or fishing. Most rusticated young men and women had no other choice but to wait for their production team to occasionally distribute some pork, usually as a bonus during some festivals. One time after killing the only two chickens they raised,

87 Discussion with a former sent-down youth in rural Hechuan, male, Hechuan, 14 November 2019.

88 Discussion with a former sent-down youth in rural Hechuan, male, Hechuan, 15 November 2019.

several sent-down youth in rural Hechuan could not wait to make diced chicken with chilli pepper (*lazi jiding* 辣子鸡丁). With the chilli pepper they grew in their private plots, they ate all the delicious chicken up in just one meal.⁸⁹ Normally chilli peppers alone cannot be made into a dish in Sichuan cuisine. It plays a significant role in seasoning material especially suitable for dishes with meat. Using the valuable private plots to plant chilli peppers was probably due to these youngsters' wait and hope for eating meat, as their simple but enjoyable way of *dayaji*.

No matter whether through good fortune, hard work, or patient waiting, undoubtedly the pursuit of delicious food and enjoyment persisted. It was also a way for the sent-down youngsters to find some pleasure amidst the suffering and bitterness (in Chinese 苦中作乐 *kuzhongzuole*).

While most urban youth adapted themselves to rural eating habits, the urban and modern style of cooking brought by the rusticated youngsters in many cases also interested the local peasants, and even opened a new world of delicacies for them. A former sent-down youth in rural Hechuan still remembered that every time when coming back to the village from his family home in the county seat, he would be welcomed among villagers, mainly because of the pastries and candies he brought back. His father worked in the Candy Company of Hechuan County during those years, making it easy for him to get all sorts of sweet things which were rationed and only buyable with specific coupons. In the beginning, he would just give the pastries and candies to the couple and their children with whom he was billeted. Soon after,

⁸⁹ Discussion with a former sent-down youth in rural Hechuan, female, Hechuan, 25 November 2019.

many villagers even those unacquainted with the youth would drop by, hoping to get some sweet treats, normally in exchange for money or side-line products such as eggs and vegetables. The young man unexpectedly received many foodstuffs necessary for daily dining, just at the cost of some snack foods. Later he learned that his tasty sweets had even become a kind of popular gift circulating among the families in the village where he lived.⁹⁰ One more interesting story is told by another Sichuan former sent-down youth whose pressure cooker brought to the village provoked people's curiosity. One weekend when he came back home, several leaders of the commune borrowed the novel thing to stew pig's feet, which was a typical dish for *dayaji* in the countryside. Unfortunately, since they did not know how to use a pressure cooker, they could not enjoy the delicious pig's feet once cooked. Finally, they were hurt by the high-pressure steam and hot water when wrongly opening the cover of the pot.⁹¹

In a nutshell, through a process of mutual influences, both sent-down youth and local peasants in rural Sichuan had chances to explore something interesting (either in traditional or novel ways) on their dining tables, as a way to find some pleasure amidst the bitterness when people's lives in the countryside were still poor during the Cultural Revolution.

(b) Cultural activities as another source of pleasure

90 Discussion with a former sent-down youth in rural Hechuan, male, Hechuan, 17 November 2019.

91 Shu Fan 舒烦, “流金岁月之都是压力锅惹的祸” *Liujinsuiyue zhi doushi yaliguo rede huo* (A Golden Age: The Pressure Cooker was to Blame), 重庆行政·公共人物 (*Chongqing xingzheng · gonggong renwu*), 2012 (11): 112.

Alongside the simplicity and shortages in material experiences, the situation of Sichuan sent-down youth's cultural and entertainment life was far from satisfactory. As Bonnin precisely summarises, "they were culturally starved".⁹² As explored in the previous chapter, the politicised context dominated Chinese people's cultural life throughout the Cultural Revolution, and the group of rusticated youngsters was not an exception, no matter where they settled. Fortunately, even from those cultural activities that were organised for them in collective form, many sent-down youth could still find considerable pleasure for themselves. Additionally, some individual and unofficial space still existed and could facilitate some extra parts of young people's leisure life as they liked. In the specific cultural environment of Sichuan, local people's enthusiasm for folk art forms, as mentioned previously, provided further possibilities for the cultural activities of sent-down youth during their rural life. In this process, young people passed their leisure time and relieved their tiredness after work, while some of them explored and developed their personal interests, and even paved the way for later careers.

As Clark suggests, even in activities officially organised, many youngsters still "found an outlet by participating in performance troupes and other cultural activities".⁹³ The recollection by a professor at Tsinghua University who was rusticated to rural Sichuan during the Cultural Revolution may be representative for many of his peers. As he recalled, his most desired thing at that time was the rehearsal

92 Bonnin, 262.

93 Paul Clark, *Youth Culture in China: from Red Guards to Netizens*, (New York: Cambridge University Press. 2012), 10.

for performances of the propaganda team. It not only allowed the young people to be free from regular labour, but at the same time could also be recorded as work points, which was likely the most attractive factor for sent-down youth.⁹⁴ In comparison, the specific content and the actual quality of performing were probably much less important. Yet for some other young people, to mount a high quality and well-received performance was still their goal. As described by a former sent-down youth who settled in eastern Sichuan who had several peers with basic instrumental skills and a desire to show something fresh to the audiences. They chose extracts from the *Shajiabang* Symphony as their item for a joint performance to be held in their commune. As there was no other team playing the same item, they believed that the lack of comparison made them less embarrassed by their level of skills. To study the music of the symphony, they waited in front of the radio but only had two chances to listen to it as a whole. Despite this, their live show was well-received, perhaps mainly due to its freshness to local residents. Later they were even invited to give touring performances around nearby communes, which was indeed a rare and valuable experience for those rusticated youngsters.⁹⁵

As Clark argues, under some situations, the cultural activities carried out by the sent-down youth might easily shift to an unofficial or even underground form.⁹⁶ The diary of a former sent-down youth who settled in a village in Hechuan recorded in

94 Zhang Weiping 张卫平, “我的知青生活” *Wode zhiqing shenghuo* (My Life as a Sent-down Youth), *法制资讯 (Fazhi Zixun)*, 2013 (11): 15-16.

95 Wang Zuyuan 王祖远, “知青交响乐沙家浜” *Zhiqing jiaoxiangyue Shajiabang* (A Sent-down Youth Symphony, *Shajiabang*), *龙门阵 (Longmenzhen)*, 2007 (12): 48-50.

96 Clark, *Youth Culture*, 10.

detail his experiences of taking part in the cultural activities during his rural life. Able to play both the *erhu* (二胡) and accordion, he became popular soon after arriving in the village. Each time when there was organised performance, he was one of the core members. Apart from the public performances which was mainly in official and revolutionary style, another kind of activities appeared in his diary, especially during nights in the slack season. This was his private playing in peasants' home courtyards. With a number of local peasants and other sent-down youth as audiences, it was just like a small-scale concert. In this case, the play of *erhu* was more welcomed, and a number of classic melodies in traditional style were enjoyed. More notably, through this process, several boys from the local rural families nurtured their own interest in music, and even became his apprentices, learning to play the *erhu*.⁹⁷ According to my own memory, years ago I heard a similar story from a local cadre working in the Cultural Centre of Hechuan, who was also a rusticated youngster in rural Hechuan during the early 1970s. Receiving good comments from local villagers because of his talent in music and contribution to peasants' cultural life, he was lucky enough to be recommended to study at Hechuan Normal School.⁹⁸ This chance provided another kind of possibility for his later career, to become a folk artist in Hechuan.

The switch from official contexts to private or even underground ones could also be found in the recollection from the aforementioned professor at Tsinghua

97 Diaries of a former sent-down youth with artistic skills in rural Hechuan, found in the Old Book Market of Hechuan, 27 December 2019.

98 During the Cultural Revolution, when the entrance examination for middle and higher education was suspended, to be recommended as worker-peasant-soldier students (*gongnongbing xueyuan*) was the only lawful chance for youngsters to continue their schooling.

University. When he gained experience as a storyteller in the countryside, instead of those revolutionary tales being repeated in public situations, he preferred to tell unapproved spy stories privately, such as *A Pair of Embroidered Shoes* (一双绣花鞋 *Yishuang Xiuhuaxie*) which spread across the nation in these years through manuscript copies and word of mouth.⁹⁹ In addition to performances and story-telling, singing and reading were also important elements in the sent-down youth's cultural life, especially in individual situations. Based on Fan Wenfa's recollection about the singing experiences of sent-down youth in Northeast China, starting from the songs widely sung in public situations such as *Yuluge* (语录歌 *Songs of Chairman Mao's Sayings*) and those from the Model Operas, their singing interest gradually changed to the so-called yellow (pornographic) songs: those songs were called "pornographic" simply because they were non-revolutionary and bourgeois in lyrical content and musical style.¹⁰⁰ During the Cultural Revolution, all songs without an explicitly revolutionary theme were very likely to be banned and labeled as yellow songs. One renowned example was *The Song of Nanjing Sent-down Youth* (南京知青之歌 *Nanjing Zhiqing zhi Ge*) which was created by a rusticated youngster from Nanjing City. Although officially banned, the expression of sent-down youth's real feelings in this song still made it broadly circulated all over the country.¹⁰¹ In rural Hechuan, a sent-down youth used up a whole notebook recording lyrics and melodies he or she

99 Zhang Weiping, 15-16.

100 Fan Wenfa 范文发, 白山黑水: 一个上海知青的尘封日记 *Baishan heishui: yige Shanghai zhiqing de chenfeng riji* (*White Mountain and Black Water: A Shanghai Sent-down Youth's Diaries*) (Zhuhai: Zhuhai Chubanshe, 1998), 40.

101 Yang Jian 杨健, "《南京知青之歌》案的来龙去脉" *Nanjing zhiqing zhi ge an de lailongqumai* (*The Process of the Case of the Song of the Nanjing Sent-down Youth*), 春秋 (*Chunqiu*), 2003 (02): 27-29.

liked, most of which came from the movies popular during those years.¹⁰² The notebook did not include any so-called yellow songs, probably due to a fear of being discovered and criticised. But a 1970 official report in Hechuan about the work of the sent-down youth mentioned that—“reactionary culture, in the forms of yellow songs and fictions, even including fortune-telling, has strong temptation for our young people.”¹⁰³ This situation seems to have continued in subsequent years. Years later, a teacher in my secondary school shared his rusticated experiences with us during class. In 1973 he settled in Hechuan. He recalled that the sound of his peers’ singing (usually of those banned songs and movie songs) always accompanied their work in the fields. At the same time, young men and women like him could also choose to read manuscript novels during their leisure time. This activity was actually an open secret among groups of sent-down youngsters. As recalled by my teacher, in these years what left him with the deepest impression was *The Second Handshake* (第二次握手 *Dierci Woshou*), a famous novel widely spread in manuscript copies during the Cultural Revolution. This special kind of literature circulating through handwritten forms was popular in the special context of the Cultural Revolution. But the number of manuscript copies in circulation was so limited that normally an individual could only borrow and keep a copy for a short time. Yet for many rusticated youth in rural Hechuan it was already quite a lucky thing. In comparison, it was even more difficult

102 A Hechuan sent-down youth’s notebook which was full of lyrics and melodies, found in the Old-book Market of Hechuan, 30 December 2019.

103 Sichuansheng Hechuanxian gemingweiyuanhui 四川省合川县革命委员会 [The Revolutionary Committee of Hechuan County, Sichuan Province], “关于知识青年下乡工作大检查的情况报告” *Guanyu zhishiqingnian xiexiang gongzuo dajiancha de qingkuang baogao* (A Report of the Big Inspection of Work on Sent-down Youth), 1 August 1970, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 13-1970-15-0085.

to access the publications of either Chinese or Western literary classics. During the first stage of the Cultural Revolution, the large-scale banning and even burning of most books without revolutionary themes accounted for the limited availability. Comparatively speaking, those who migrated farther distances and met more peers from different places were more likely to enjoy more luck. One youth moving from Chongqing to the mountainous areas on the northern margins of Sichuan had quite a few friends bringing with them a number of banned novels. In order to access what he wanted to read, he was willing to exchange something he owned, including the furniture he had newly learned to make as an apprentice carpenter. Insisting on reading throughout his rural life not only built his interest in literature, but also laid the foundation for his entrance into a desirable university once the College Entrance Examination (高考 *gaokao*) was restored in 1977.¹⁰⁴

Even for those without a strong interest in music or reading, there were always other ways for them to kill their after-work hours. Different kinds of card games, especially poker, never lost their popularity among groups of youth. Other forms of so-called reactionary culture like fortune-telling, as admitted in the aforementioned official report, tempted the sent-down youngsters in rural Hechuan. Such activities would take place between rusticated youngsters and local peasants (usually those of the same age). In comparison with the cultural activities in officially organised forms, private or underground entertainment was much more likely to help these new comers become acquainted and make friends with villagers there.

104 Discussion with a former sent-down youth from Chongqing city to Northern Sichuan, male, Chongqing, 24 December 2019.

Admittedly, like their material life during the Cultural Revolution era, Sichuan sent-down youth's cultural life throughout that ten-year era was far from affluent. But there was still some limited but valuable space for them to explore, as another way to find some pleasure amidst the suffering. Apart from the participation of public and organised performances, much more opportunities could be found in those unofficial or even underground situations. Through private concerts in peasants' backyards, individual telling of spy stories, or underground singing and reading, the rusticated youngsters in rural Sichuan could at least have some memorable experiences either relaxing for themselves, developing personal interests, or even laying the foundation for a promising career in their later life.

5. A special type of sent-down youth in rural Hechuan

Last but not least, this section will discuss a special group of sent-down youth in rural Hechuan, who, as mentioned above, through the means of *toukao*, settled in communes near to their home city or home county seat.

Different from most other sent-down youth who were officially organised and distributed to distant places in rural China, this type of sent-down youngsters normally contacted the village by themselves or their families and managed to settle in it as they wished. During this process, private relationships (私人关系 *siren guanxi*), including both kinship and friendship, worked in an informal but effective way. Moreover, these young people's later experiences after relocating to the rural areas as well differed a lot from their peers who migrated into a totally unfamiliar

village. Both perspectives suggested that these *toukao* sent-down youth was a noticeably distinct group of rusticated youngsters throughout the Cultural Revolution. Hechuan offers us an opportunity for further exploration of their experiences. We can also observe the urban-rural interactions during the Cultural Revolution, from a less official and more private angle.

By the mid-1970s, the total number of *toukao* rusticated youth from Chongqing to rural Hechuan had almost reached 3,000, which was the largest number among the eight counties around Chongqing City.¹⁰⁵ *Toukao* was encouraged by both the central level of the CCP and Sichuan provincial authorities, calling on youth to re-settle in their home village if the conditions permitted. In Hechuan, based on the official notice, the urban youth who could *toukao* to a village were in principle limited to those with direct or close relatives there.¹⁰⁶ However, based on a survey of 917 sent-down youth moving to Hechuan nominally by the way of *toukao*, over 46 per cent of them did not have any actual relative in rural Hechuan.¹⁰⁷ What worked for their relocation was probably a private relationship which was not so apparent but more influential.

In Chaoyang Commune of Hechuan, which was nearest to Beibei District of Chongqing City, 77 young people arrived by the way of *toukao*. It was more than four

105 Lu Zhiqian, 227.

106 Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun zhu Hechuanxian budui zhizuo lingdao xiaozu 中国人民解放军驻合川县部队支左领导小组 [The Leftist Leaders Group of the People's Liberation Army in Hechuan County], “毕业生分配安置组召开知识青年下乡上山工作座谈会议纪要” Biyesheng fenpei anzhi zu zhaokai zhishiqingnian xiexiangshangshan gongzuo zuotan huiyi jiyao (Recording of the Meeting on the work of the Sent-down Youth),” 26 March 1969. Hechuan Archives, archive no: 13-1969-15-0043.

107 “Guanyu zhiqing...dajiancha,” archive no: 13-1970-15-0085.

times larger than the quota of ordinary sent-down youth distributed to the same commune. Most of the *toukao* arrivals were concentrated in the richer production teams near the central town of the commune.¹⁰⁸ To obtain the precious and limited chances of acceptance for their children, many young people's parents made full use of their family and social resource. Through building a good relationship with the villages their offspring would move to, some inducements could ease their sons and daughters' way. With coupons provided by several youth's parents, a production team in that commune was able to purchase a series of rationed and even scarce goods, including steel, threshing machines, and piglets.¹⁰⁹ Admittedly, a large part of the benefits brought with the incoming sent-down youth was enjoyed by rural cadres and their families. They were even often invited to pay a visit to Beibei, the suburban district famous for its scenery, tourism and hot springs in Chongqing City. During the process, as later reported officially, all the costs such as accommodation, transportation, catering, and even spa visits were covered by the youngsters' parents.¹¹⁰ In contrast with some views popular in the countryside regarding the sent-down youth as an extra burden, based on an official survey, peasants in this commune privately regarded these young people from Chongqing as a treat like lard, an analogy vividly indicating their feeling which combined both envy and desire to have a piece of the pie.¹¹¹

108 "Guanyu guagou luohu xiexiang zhishiqingnian de qingkuang diaocha" 关于挂钩落户下乡知识青年的情况调查 (Report on the *Toukao* Sent-down Youth), 31 July 1970, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 13-1970-15-0084.

109 "Guanyu guagou luohu," archive no: 13-1970-15-0084.

110 "Guanyu zhiqing...dajiancha," archive no: 13-1970-15-0085.

111 "Guanyu guagou luohu," archive no: 13-1970-15-0084.

It seemed that these parents' endeavour was not in vain. These youngster's priorities not only worked in the process of their settlement (they occupied the places originally arranged for ordinary sent-down youth), but even continued to play an influential role throughout their life in the countryside. One female rusticated youngster was worried and cried, since she had no suitable place to live at Chaoyang Commune, while in the same production team two other sent-down youth who arrived through *toukao* had already moved straight into their new houses.¹¹²

For this type of rusticated youth and the host villages, the relationship between these two sides was reciprocal. Similar situations also existed in other communes which accepted *toukao* urban youngsters. For instance, the lack of broadcasting equipment in Gongnong Commune in Hechuan was smoothly solved by some staff in the Chongqing Transport and Electrical Appliance Company after the commune accepted nine young men and women from this company.¹¹³ This process was a mutually beneficial interaction between the urban unit and rural commune. It might also be deemed as an unofficial and spontaneous version of *changshe guagou* (厂社挂钩 linking factories or other units with communes, as a way to allocate sent-down youth from urban to rural areas). Yet the official model of *changshe guagou*, known as *Zhuzhou Jingyan* (株洲经验 the experience from Zhuzhou, Hunan Province) had not been promoted across the whole country until 1974. From then on, units in urban

112 "Guanyu guagou luohu," archive no: 13-1970-15-0084.

113 "Guanyu guagou luohu," archive no: 13-1970-15-0084.

areas were strongly encouraged to build formal partnerships with rural communes, where children from the former units would be sent.¹¹⁴

As in the situations mentioned above, the use of *toukao* could not just reduce the resistance to mobilisation among youngsters and their parents, but more importantly, provide some basic guarantee for the urban youth's life in the countryside. In result, similar to the national trend followed the official *changshe guagou*, large numbers of sent-down youth concentrated around the villages with better economic and transport conditions, especially those in suburban areas. In Hechuan, while the majority of the youth from Chongqing City flooded into those nearer and richer villages as discussed here, the local youngsters from Hechuan County had to be distributed to remoter and poorer areas instead. According to an official report, a considerable number of them even refused to accept the arrangement due to a feeling of unfairness.¹¹⁵ This resulted in lots of new complaints and difficulties for the Sent-down Youth Movement from the view of ordinary people.

From a top-down perspective, the practice of *toukao* and *changshe guagou* implicitly indicated a significant modification in the basic principles and guidelines of youth rustication. In Hechuan, the better the village, the more urban immigrants would arrive, while the worse a village, the fewer could be attracted. This was opposite to the original aim of this movement which was to relocate the urban youngsters to the neediest places and let them contribute there. More seriously, in the aforementioned case of *toukao*, the more attractive the village was, the more

114 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 391.

115 Lu Zhiquan, 229.

resources and benefits it could get from urban areas in return, and vice versa. Based on the case study of Hechuan, it is safe to assume a similar picture when the model of *changshe guagou* was promoted across the nation.

As an inevitable result, either from a bottom-up or top-down point of view, the Sent-down Youth Movement during the Cultural Revolution finally found itself in a paradoxical predicament. According to Liu Xiaomeng, the preeminent Chinese historian of the rustication movement, the more the policy-makers endeavoured to adapt to the realities, the farther the movement deviated away from its original intentions.¹¹⁶

For the youngsters' part, such as those in Hechuan County and nearby areas, whether they benefitted from certain policies or made tactical use of some relationship became the decisive factors shaping each individual's experiences in rural areas. Different people's recollections about their sent-down career show this. How could the young woman who was so worried about lack of housing share the same feeling with her two peers who moved straight into their new houses?

In consequence, it is always limited when looking back on people's everyday experiences during the Sent-down Youth Movement only in a simplistic or nostalgic way. In general conditions of scarcity, toughness and deficiency were undoubtedly the key words to describe most rusticated youngsters' rural experiences. But many rusticated young people in the countryside of Sichuan could always seek some

116 Liu Xiaomeng, *Dachao*, 445.

pleasure amidst the bitterness either in their material or cultural lives. Between those becoming members of production teams and others settling into youth farms, between those residing in scattered forms and others living in the youth centres, between those obeying the official arrangement to the village of relocation and others migrating through the way of *toukao*, just in rural Sichuan alone there were so many gaps which cannot be ignored when reexamining the sent-down youth's everyday experiences. Any comment regarding the rural life of sent-down youngsters as impassioned years needs questioning. The nostalgia, which nowadays seems to pervade both the public media controlled by the CCP and private memoirs recollected by individuals, needs interrogation.

Section Two: The Everyday Life of Third-Front Workers in Sichuan during the Cultural Revolution

As mentioned in Chapter Three, in the two years before the commencement of the Cultural Revolution, over 100,000 immigrants flooded into Sichuan as the launch of the Third-Front Project. Although exact statistics are hard to find, probably in total hundreds of thousands of workers and their family members migrated to Sichuan with the relocation of the Third-Front factories from coastal and other eastern cities. Since more than 350 enterprises and institutions settled in Sichuan Province as Third-Front projects from the mid-1960s onward,¹¹⁷ whose personnel ranged from several hundred

117 Xu Tao 徐涛, “四川三线建设略论” Sichuan *Sanxian* jianshe lüelun (Brief Discussion of the Third-Front Construction in Sichuan), 前沿 (*Qianyan*), No. 304, 2012 (02): 38-40.

to several thousand workers. Compared to the youngsters involved in the Sent-down Youth Movement in the same province, these workers formed another large and significant migrating group in Sichuan during the Cultural Revolution era. Additionally, once the Third-Front factories started their production after the settlement, the continuous recruitment resulted in more and more staff hired among local residents. Here both the immigrant workers and the local ones in the Third-Front factories will be collectively called *Sanxian* workers, although the focus of my research is on those migrants, in addition to the workers' family members many of whom lived together in the factories. In short, I will call all these individuals *Sanxian* people in the rest of this section.

During the whole process of their relocation and settlement, it was widely noted that if the Third-Front Project was not completed successfully, Mao Zedong could not sleep well, which always motivated the *Sanxian* workers to finish their task as energetically as possible. In fact, Mao's words were specifically about the construction of Panzhihua, a new city which was planned in the Southwest margin of Sichuan as an important base for the Third-Front Project.¹¹⁸ Another very popular saying among all the *Sanxian* people was that “to devote your youth, then to devote your whole life, and finally to devote your offspring (献了青春献终身，献了终身献子孙 *xianle qingchun xian zhongshen, xianle zhongsheng xian zisun*)”, strongly encouraging *Sanxian* workers and their families to take root in the hinterland.

118 Mao Zedong 毛泽东, 在中央工作会议上的讲话 *Zai zhongyang gongzuo huiyi shang de jianghua* (The Speech at the Central Meeting of the CCP), Beijing, 6 June 1964.

However, to devote themselves, first they needed to manage to live their lives in a new place which was quite different from their hometowns. In this sense, the plight that *Sanxian* people experienced was to a certain degree similar to what the sent-down youth confronted during the same period.

In this section, in addition to materials about the two Third-Front factories settled in Hechuan, information about the other Third-Front factories in Sichuan will be noted for a deeper exploration on the *Sanxian* people's Sichuan life in every day.

The migrating process of *Sanxian* workers and their families, their eating and shopping experiences after settling down, their cultural life, as well as their relationships and interactions with local peasants, all embodied the privileges that those Third-Front factories enjoyed during the Cultural Revolution era.

1. The background of *Sanxian* workers in Sichuan

From the mid-1960s, the Third-Front Projects had been under construction and in operation in the hinterland areas of China. Amongst the 13 provinces chosen as destinations of this industrial relocation movement which lasted one and a half-decade, Sichuan Province was one of the prioritised options. Throughout the Third and Fourth Five-year Plan (between 1965 and 1975), the national investment on capital construction for Third-Front Projects in each of those provinces was 12.6 billion RMB on average, while the budget for Sichuan was 26.9 billion.¹¹⁹ Decided by Mao Zedong, and mainly based on fears about vulnerabilities should war break out,¹²⁰

119 DDSC (*shang*), 435-36.

120 Sun Dongsheng 孙东升, “我国经济建设战略布局的大转变—三线建设决策形

arsenals and factories in related industries played a major role in the whole process, in addition to a number of supporting and even civilian industries moved during the same period. Nationwide, 130 factories with 24,000 workers moved out of Shanghai to the hinterland.¹²¹

In January 1965 the first Third-Front factory entered Hechuan from Nanjing City, Jiangsu Province. With a military production focus, it was among the earliest group of enterprises moving to Sichuan during this movement. The advance team chose the site of the former Hechuan Steel Mill at Qingping Commune, which is at the foot of Huaying Mountain, about 50 kilometres to the east of the county seat. Completing the construction of the industrial plants in ten months, it began operation and was named the Lingchuan Machinery Factory (the character 川 *chuan* is the same as that in the name of Sichuan). The second Third-Front Project, also a machinery factory with a military focus, settled in Hechuan the next year, coming from Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province. Also located in the hilly region under the Huaying Mountain, it was named the Huachuan Machinery Factory.

In fact, the Huaying Mountain, which ranges more than 300 kilometres in the middle of the Sichuan Basin, at the same time provided ideal shelters for a number of other Third-Front enterprises in the context of war preparedness. Only in Guang'an

成述略” Woguo jingji jianshe zhanlüe buju de dazhuanbian—*Sanxian jianshe juece xingcheng shulüe* (A Significant Transition of the National Economic and Political Strategies: the Formation of the Decision for the Third-Front Construction), 党的文献 (*Dang de wenxian*), 1995 (03): 42-48.

121 Sun Huairan 孙怀仁, 上海社会主义经济建设发展简史 (1949-1985) *Shanghai shehuizhuyi jingji jianshe fazhan jianzhi (1949-1985) (Brief History of Socialist Economic Construction in Shanghai)* (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1990), 470.

County close to the north of Hechuan, there were another two settled in. The even more mountainous topography along the margins of the Sichuan Basin from the north to the south accommodated a lot of more Third-Front works.

In order to prepare for war, all these factories were scattered in remote and hilly places. In most cases, their arrival and development resulted in relatively independent communities, neither belonging to the urban nor rural areas of Sichuan. An extraordinary instance was Panzhihua on the southwest margin of the Sichuan Basin, a completely new city built by Third-Front workers on wasteland.

In a space isolated from the local villages around them, these factories enjoyed an independent and privileged status administratively. As Jeremy Brown indicates, factories like this were enclaves where “urban administrative status clashed with their rural physical space”.¹²² People working there held an official identity similar to that of urban residents. Inside the plants, the life of workers and their families was to a large part collectivised and highly structured, with an internal canteen, store, hospital, post office and almost all the other affiliated facilities for daily needs. A feeling of cultural superiority to the locals further strengthened the isolation of *Sanxian* workers’ lives.¹²³ However, mutual links between *Sanxian* people and the outside world, especially with the countryside and peasants around them were important. Through everyday interactions, both sides gradually influenced each other. The exploration

122 Brown, 169-70.

123 Ding Yan and Wang Hui 丁艳, 王辉, “移民外来文化的土著化过程—以西南三线厂的厂文化为例” *Yimin wailai wenhua de tuzhuhua guocheng—yi Xinan Sanxian chang de changwenhua weili* (The Localisation of Immigrant Culture: the Example of the Third-Front Factories in Southwest China), *人文地理 (Renwen dili)*, vol. 18, No. 6, 2003 (12): 82-84.

here can also provide a perspective on the relationship between Chinese urban and rural areas during the Cultural Revolution.

2. The migrating process of *Sanxian* workers

Before discussing the specific content of *Sanxian* workers' daily life in Sichuan, some more attention can be paid to these incoming people's process of moving, settling and adapting into local areas, whose experiences were quite representative among the migrating groups in the Cultural Revolution decade.

There was a politicised mobilisation when the Third-Front Movement was launched. But the decision was still not easy to make for many individual workers and their families regarding the relocation to hinterland areas. On the one hand, repetitive meetings were held among workers aiming to dissolve the hesitation, which seemed to be effective.¹²⁴ On the other hand, promises about welfare benefits were given to those who accepted the mobilisation, which probably proved more persuasive. As recorded in official reports, those material incentives included no change in salary, to arrange jobs or (urban) household identity, or to be assigned larger houses.¹²⁵

Admittedly none of these seem to be consistent with the ideological theme of that era.

124 Hu Yuehan 胡悦晗, “三线建设初期的工厂筹建—以国营 4504 厂为例 (1969-1971)” *Sanxian jianshe chuqi de gongchang choujian—yi guoying 4504 chang weili* (Preparation of Factories in the Early Period of the Third-Front Construction: the Example of 4504 Factory), in Zhang Yong, 325-42.

125 Shanghai fu Chongqing fangwentuan 上海赴重庆访问团 [The Delegation from Shanghai to Chongqing] “关于赴重庆访问的工作报告” *Guanyu fu Chongqing fangwen de gongzuo baogao* (Report about Visiting Chongqing), 16 March 1966, Shanghai Municipal Archives, archive no: A38-1-353-143.

Once determined, workers would be organised to set off in groups as soon as possible, according to the requirements of war preparedness. For those who decided to depart with family members, as mentioned in many memoirs, normally their factories would manage the whole process of house-moving, in which ticket booking, trip planning, and even the shipping of furniture was all included.¹²⁶ Some old parents chose to go with their sons and daughters-in-law. In this case the coffin they had prepared was transported also. This kind of considerate and unified arrangement seemed to be helpful in speeding up *Sanxian* workers' departure. In Shanghai, by 1966 the number of workers' families migrating together to the hinterland increased by nearly 40 per cent compared with a year earlier.¹²⁷ But inharmonious situations happened during this process. The leader of a factory in Shanghai suggested workers not bring furniture on departure, perhaps in order to reduce the cost of shipping. As estimated by him, due to the plentiful wood resource in Sichuan, it would be even cheaper to buy new furniture upon arrival. Notwithstanding, workers discovered this was not true when settled down, which caused inconvenience and dissatisfaction, as indicated in a report after these migrating workers had settled down in Sichuan.¹²⁸

Due to the basin terrain surrounded by big mountains, by the mid-1960s, there were only two railroads connecting Sichuan with other provinces (one was the Baocheng Railway to Shanxi Province to the north, the other was the Chuanqian Railway to Guizhou Province to the south). As a result, taking a ship up the Yangtze

126 Zhang Yong, 39, 65, and 199.

127 "Chongqing fangwen," archive no: A38-1-353-143.

128 "Chongqing fangwen," archive no: A38-1-353-143.

River was still the only choice for large numbers of *Sanxian* workers to enter Sichuan, especially those migrating from the eastern and coastal areas. After enjoying the beautiful scenery of the Three Gorges (三峡 *Sanxia*), their ships would arrive at Chongqing Port. But normally this was not the destination, and most of them needed to continue travelling on to other parts of Sichuan Province. Such a long journey across half China left deep and fresh impressions on these migrants, especially for children who travelled with their parents. A retired *Sanxian* worker vividly retold his interesting journey of migration via Beijing, Wuhan and Chongqing. In 1970 when he was only a child, together with the factory his parents moved the whole family to Sichuan from Liaoning Province (in Northeast China).¹²⁹ Similar to many other children migrating in the Third-Front Movement, he had a sense of curiosity and eagerly looked forward to the new life in Sichuan, which was in contrast with the parents who had to worry about all the daily necessities in the process of settling down.

3. Food supplies and dining issues

Based on the instructions on the Third-Front Movement, especially from Mao's words, the urgency to prepare for possible warfare was always prioritised.¹³⁰ Hence the completion of production task was nominally viewed as more important even than fulfilling the needs of basic life, just as the slogan quite popular during those years,

129 He Minquan 何民权, “西南三线子弟” *Xinan Sanxian zidi* (Offspring of the Third-Front in the Southwest China), in Zhang Yong, 197-207.

130 Mao Zedong 毛泽东, 要以可能挨打为出发点来部署我们的工作 *Yao yi keneng aida wei chufadian lai bushu women de gongzuo* (We should arrange our work based on possible invasion) (September 1963) in *Zhonggong yu Sanxian*, ed. Chen Donglin, 39.

“Production first, living conditions second.” (先生产, 后生活 *xian shengchan, hou shenghuo*). However, in local areas for many cadres in the Third-Front factories, solving the everyday food problem was still stressed as essential to stabilise the workers’ mood when settling down in a completely new environment.¹³¹ To achieve this goal, two issues were probably as urgent as the war preparation.

The first issue was to satisfy the supply of foodstuffs. In terms of the national policy regarding the grain rations for *Sanxian* workers, when the standard in the factories’ original places was higher than that in the new sites (which in fact was the common situation among most Third-Front enterprises moving from the coastal to hinterland areas), the higher standard would be maintained for a period of time (normally half a year).¹³² Although modifications based on the local policies were unavoidable later, in some cases *Sanxian* workers could still receive special treatment in the supply of staple food. In the Huachuan Machinery Factory, according to the grain rations approved by the Hechuan government, 25 out of the 70 job types there received slightly higher rations than the local standard.¹³³ For example, the grain ration of a packer of small pieces was normally between 14.5 and 15.5 kilograms monthly based on the regulations of Sichuan Province.¹³⁴ While in the Huachuan

131 Niu Jiliang and Liu Yang 牛季良, 刘洋, “回忆电子工业三线建设” *Huiyi dianzi gongye Sanxian jianshe* (Recalling the Third-Front Construction of the Electronic Industry), *百年潮 (Bainianchao)*. 2014 (08): 66-68.

132 Zhongguo guowuyuan 中国国务院 [State Council of the PRC], “全国搬迁工作会议纪要, 草稿” *Quanguo banqian gongzuo huiyi jiyao* (Recording of the National Meeting on Relocation, drafted version), Beijing, 2 September 1965.

133 Hechuanxian shengchan zhidao zu 合川县生产指导组 [Guiding Group of Production of Hechuan County], “关于华川机械厂粮食工种定量的批复” *Guanyu Huachuan jixiechang liangshi gongzhong dingliang de pifu* (Approval of the Grain Ration in Huachuan Machinery Factory), 6 April 1971, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 13-1971-6-305, 20.

134 SCLY, 277 and 279.

Factory, a worker doing the same job could get two more kilograms per month. Even the ration of a gardener there was also one kilogram higher than the local standard. Such preferential policies for *Sanxian* workers seemed to persist throughout the 1970s. Instructions from the Central Government, to keep the rations no less than that in the prefecture-level city where the Third-Front plants were located were still highlighted in the early 1980s.¹³⁵

Compared with the supply of grain which was strictly regulated by government policies, supplies of many non-staple foods, including meat, vegetables and fruits, the resources of the Third-Front factories themselves, as well as their collaboration with local government, communes, and peasants, played much more active and effective roles. The organisational and structured advantages in those factories were also fully made use of during the process. Resources and manpower were devoted to large-scale procurement and transportation of meat, normally including but not limited to pork. A former driver in the Lingchuan Machinery Factory in his 1970s work notes often mentioned the task of pork delivery, the majority of which did not come from Hechuan County, but was bought and transported from nearby cities, such as Chongqing and Nanchong.¹³⁶ These deliveries were to satisfy the extra rations enjoyed by the factory staff. But this was not the only way for some plants with larger scale and richer resources. In the early 1970s, according to a former worker's memoir, a Third-Front factory in Guangyuan Prefecture (in the northern mountainous region of

135 Chen Donglin, *Zhonggong yu Sanxian*, 283.

136 Work notes of a former driver in Lingchuan Machinery Factory, found in the Old-book Market of Hechuan, Hechuan, 8 July 2019.

the Sichuan Basin) tried to raise pigs with its own workers, and even invested two million RMB building a slaughterhouse, aiming to provide the staff with pork more directly. Each year this factory would also purchase four to five tonnes of canned pork from a cannery in Bazhong County about 200 kilometres away, and even three to five tonnes of sea-fish from coastal areas. Besides all the endeavours to ensure the meat supply, thousands of kilograms of different fruits, including mandarins, apples, and bananas were bought by the factory at the same time.¹³⁷ In those years this was very enviable, since until the early 1980s many urban residents in China were not familiar with various kinds of fruits, except those grown locally, as a result of the limitation on the planting, marketing, and long-distance transport.

The demand for vegetables, one more kind of necessity on *Sanxian* workers' dining-tables, was not satisfied through either the factories' self-farming or transporting from outside. Instead, peasants in many production teams around the factories were assigned to shift their work focus from grain to vegetable cultivation. In Hechuan, from 1965 to 1970, 310 and 250 *mu* of farmland were appropriated for vegetable production for the Lingchuan and Huachuan factories respectively. In return, peasants there were exempt from grain tax, which was replaced by the vegetables they produced, based on relevant policies.¹³⁸ This shift not only basically meet the need of workers, but at the same time also benefitted local peasants, although it was not the major object when this policy was issued. As an old peasant

137 Zheng Jingdong 郑敬东, “参与抢建 821 工程” *Canyu qiangjian 821 gongcheng* (Participating in the Quick Construction of 821), in Zhang Yong, 153-62.
138 HCSY, 170

living next to the Shuangxi Machinery Plant in the south of Hechuan and near the southern margin of the Sichuan Basin recalled: “As members of a vegetable production team, we could get tickets for grain and oil which really made us feel more privileged than peasants in other ordinary teams”.¹³⁹ Peasants around the Third-Front factory in Mianyang Prefecture in the north of the Sichuan Basin probably had an even better experience, since their vegetable farming was guided by technicians and used subsidised chemical fertiliser. Moreover, two kilograms of grain and four *chi* (尺)¹⁴⁰ of cloth were bonuses for the peasants there, aiming to motivate them in vegetable cultivation.¹⁴¹

With reliable sources of foodstuffs, canteens were opened in the Third-Front factories. This was a pressing matter, especially when large numbers of immigrant workers had not brought their families with them during the first few years in Sichuan. In June 1968, less than one year after the Huachuan Factory began production in Hechuan, two local army veterans were hired as cooks.¹⁴² The recruitment of cooks in Hechuan would unavoidably introduce the dining culture in local areas to *Sanxian* workers from outside. (The situation of the aforementioned

139 Zhang Yong 张勇, “山沟中的‘小社会’—重庆双溪机械厂考察札记” *Shangou zhong de ‘xiaoshehui’—Chongqing Shuangxi jixiechang kaocha zhaji* (A Small Society in a Valley: an Exploration of Shuangxi Machinery Plant),” in Zhang Yong, 265-66.

140 *Chi* is a Chinese traditional unit of measurement. Three *chi* approximately equal to one metre.

141 Mianyangshi shangyeju 绵阳市商业局 [Bureau of Commerce of Mianyang City] ed., 绵阳市商业志 *Mianyangshi shangye zhi* (*Gazetteer of Commerce of Mianyang City*) (internal materials, 1995), 279.

142 “Guanyu Lize, Jianshan gongshe Xiang Xianwei, Liu Jingfu qu Huachuan jixiechang zuo chuishi gongzuo de tongzhi” 关于利泽, 尖山公社向先维, 刘景富去华川机械厂作炊事工作的通知 (Notice of Xiang Xianwei and Liu Jingfu from Lize and Jianshan Communes Doing Cooking Jobs in Huachuan Factory), 20 June 1968, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 108-1968-1-0160.

Panzhihua was a little different, when immigrants came to a really uncultivated and almost unpopulated land where Sichuan culture was not evident, workers had no choice but to make meals for themselves, and the eating habits brought from outside remained popular there.)

Another factor further stimulating the introduction of local dining culture in the new factories was the expansion of new workers hired from Hechuan and nearby regions. Between just 1964 and 1965, 4,996 peasants from rural Hechuan were recruited to support the construction of Third-Front projects,¹⁴³ although rarely could they become formal staff of those factories at that stage. Then under the slogan of Combination of Factories and Communes, no more than two months after the formal start-up of the Lingchuan Machinery Plant in late 1965, Hechuan authorities allowed peasants in villages around it to take temporary jobs in the factory.¹⁴⁴ At the same time, groups of graduates from tertiary institutions, especially those born in Sichuan, would receive privileged access to formal work in the Third-Front factories. From the early 1970s onward, the recruitment was extended to fortunate sent-down youth who had finished their service in the countryside. As recorded in the archives, in 1971 a rusticated young man who had laboured more than one year in Tongxi Commune in the west part of Hechuan was hired by the Huachuan Plant.¹⁴⁵ Later on, benefitting

143 HCLR, 27.

144 Zhonggong Hechuan xianwei 中共合川县委 [Hechuan County Committee of the CCP], “关于合川清平、川心公社划给陵川厂领导、厂社结合的情况报告” Guanyu Hechuan Qingping, Tianxin gongshe huagei Lingchuanchang lingdao, chang she jiehe de qingkuang baogao (Report about Two Communes Governed by the Lingchuan Factory and Factory-Commune Combination), 17 February 1966, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 13-1-901.

145 “Guanyu Huachuan jixiechang xiada zhaoshou zhigong zinü de tongzhi” 关于华川机械厂下达招收职工子女的通知 (Notice about Hiring the Offspring of Workers in Huachuan Factory), 5 October 1971, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 115-1971-1-

from the policy in which workers' offspring or some other family members (in case of special difficulties) were specially considered, more and more local people entered the Third-Front factories. In the Huachuan Factory, 21 new workers were hired at one time in 1977, all of whose family members belonged to the factory and the majority of them were residents in Hechuan.¹⁴⁶

The expansion of local people in personnel (both in workshops and kitchens) unavoidably exerted strong influence on the living environment of the factory, especially including dining issues. As an old man in Hechuan who began to work in the Huachuan Factory in 1972 remembered, the dishes in the canteen were mainly in the Sichuan style and flavour, almost the same as the homemade food he was used to.¹⁴⁷ But what would happen when the new-comers with different eating habits confronted the featured Sichuan dishes? “In the beginning, they didn't dare to take the spicy food in our canteen, not to mention those with *huajiao*, the aforementioned special Sichuan pepper, which can make one's mouth feel numb. If someone tried to learn from us and eat a little *huajiao*, their lips would be stinging quite a while”.¹⁴⁸ A former worker in a Third-Front plant in Pengxian County, in the northwest of the Sichuan Basin, in his memoir, vividly remembers these interesting episodes which

0160, serial no: 110.

146 Hechuanxian laodong renshi ju 合川县劳动人事局 [Bureau of Labour and Personnel of Hechuan County], “关于同意华川机械厂招录困难职工的函” Guanyu tongyi Huachuan jixiechang zhaolu kunnan zhigong de han (Letter Approving the Recruitment of the Offspring of Workers with Difficulties), December 22, 1977, Archive of Hechuan District, archive no: 0081-0001-1977.

147 Discussion with a man in Hechuan who began to work in Huachuan Factory in 1972, male, Hechuan, 22 July 2019

148 Yang Tingfa 杨廷发, “从下乡知青到三线职工” Cong xiixiang zhiqing dao Sanxian zhigong (From a Sent-down Youth to a Third-Front Worker), in Zhang Yong, 50-60.

took place between migrant and local workers in the canteen. Although unaccustomed at first, gradually many new-comers and their children got used to the eating habits of Sichuan and even began to enjoy the special flavours in Sichuan dishes. As recalled by an old man who moved from Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, to work in a machinery factory at the foot of the Gele Mountain, on the west of Chongqing, when he just arrived with his wife, they kept making dishes in their hometown taste (which is normally not spicy at all). But a couple of years later they would also use some chilli in home cooking. As for their offspring, the typical Chongqing flavours with enough spice had become the favourite in daily eating.¹⁴⁹ Compared with the immigrants from East China (such as Shanghai and Zhejiang), workers relocated from northern China usually felt more envious of the rich choices of foodstuffs in Sichuan as well as the enthusiasm people had for eating. “I found that Sichuan dishes are much more complex than those in my hometown, and almost every family here can make quite a big dinner.” Another former worker in the Third-Front plant in Pengxian County explained his astonishment in comparison with the dining experiences in his northern hometown.¹⁵⁰ Even those from Shanghai, normally viewed as worldly people also enjoyed the stewed meatballs in chilli sauce and fried pork liver provided in this canteen, according to another recollection from the same factory.¹⁵¹

149 Han Aquan 韩阿泉, “他乡是故乡” *Taxiang shi guxiang* (A Strange Place is My Hometown), in Zhang Yong ed., 70-76.

150 Wang Shiming 王世铭, “三线企业的厂办教育” *Sanxian qiye de changban jiaoyu* (The Education of Third-Front Factories), in Zhang Yong ed., 40.

151 Ni Tongzheng 倪同正, “锦江厂, 一个三线企业的传说” *Jinjiangchang, yige Sanxian qiye de chuanshuo* (Jinjiang Factory, the Story of a Third-Front Factory), *国家人文历史* (*Guojia renwen lishi*), 2014 (18): 68-73.

4. Shopping as a way to keep in touch with the outside world

In addition to canteens, stores which were specially operated for those Third-Front factories also played an important role in *Sanxian* workers' everyday life. In this process, the organisational and structured factors also mattered. As records show, in 1966 and 1971 two general stores were opened respectively at the Lingchuan and Huachuan Plants in Hechuan. Given that those migrant workers came from big cities, in order to meet their higher level of consumption and stronger tastes in goods, the stores changed their purchase channel from the county seat of Hechuan to Beibei District, a suburb of Chongqing City. In 1973 a purchasing station was built in Beibei to regularly service this valuable channel of commodities, especially high-grade non-staple foods, such as different kinds of canned food, which at the time was regarded as of higher quality.¹⁵²

Besides the difference in goods supply, compared with other, usually smaller, local factories, the shops in the Third-Front plants were much more active. According to the factory's specific situation, as described in the gazetteer, several more points of sale were operating at the entrances of workshops and crossroads with a large flow of workers. Sales of non-staple foods kept running both in early mornings and late evenings, so as to make sure workers had something to eat when they worked extra hours. During summertime, soft drinks were supplied by mobile sales groups even in workers' dormitories.¹⁵³ Stores in the Third-Front factories also participated in the supply of foodstuffs in their canteens, through cooperation with neighbouring

152 HCSY, 168-69.

153 HCSY, 169-70.

villages. This again demonstrated the organisational strength of these factories. To meet workers' needs for fresh fish, the store in the Lingchuan Factory contacted nearby communes and production teams, totally purchasing more than 0.5 million kilograms of pond fish from them during those years.¹⁵⁴

Being separated from both urban and rural areas, for *Sanxian* workers and their families, most of the time shopping at the stores in the factories was the only choice. The data of the stores' annual sales can also provide us with a picture of the actual level of their daily consumption. In 1966, the first whole year when the store ran its business in the Lingchuan Factory, the total annual sales were 0.539 million RMB. The next year the number climbed to 0.6676 million, despite the social unrest across the nation that year.¹⁵⁵ The next three years' sales data are unavailable, but in 1971, the annual sales of two stores directly governed by the commercial bureau of Hechuan County (one was the store in the Lingchuan Factory, and the other was a store newly founded in a coal mine) had reached 1.8998 million RMB. From 1973 onward the recently opened store in the Huachuan Factory had been included in the statistics, and the sales of stores in all three plants (the two Third-Front factories and the mine) sustained a growing trend annually from 2.1243 million to 2.542 million RMB by 1976.¹⁵⁶ Undoubtedly *Sanxian* workers and their families contributed quite a lot to this noticeable and continuous growth.

154 HCSY, 169-70.

155 HCSY, 171.

156 HCSY, 171.

Even so, perhaps these data did not completely reveal many *Sanxian* workers' desires and potential in consumption, especially for those migrating from big cities or coastal areas. As the aforementioned Shanghai worker in a Third-Front factory recalled, although satisfied with the dishes in the canteen, it was still difficult to buy a number of non-staple foods and industrial products, including malted milk, Dacron shirts and leather shoes, all of which had still to be purchased from Shanghai.¹⁵⁷ In this aspect, workers who had also moved out of Shanghai, but served in the Small Third-Front Construction (小三线建设 *Xiao sanxian jianshe*)¹⁵⁸ enjoyed more convenience than their peers who moved to remoter areas. Benefitting from its relatively short distance to Shanghai, the Small Third-Front plants in the southern part of Anhui Province managed to run an agency specifically for commodities purchase in and delivery from Shanghai. This guaranteed the supply of high-grade goods, including White Rabbit candies and soda drinks. As a former worker there recalled, all these products were usually not available in rural Anhui and even became status symbols.¹⁵⁹ In comparison, the relative shortage of such desirable items in daily consumption was probably a notable disappointment for many *Sanxian* workers settling in Sichuan, which is farther from Shanghai, although many of them had satisfactory experiences when dining there.

157 Ni Tongzheng, 68-73.

158 In the time of Third-Front projects in the Chinese hinterland coastal provinces were also required to move some industries to the inner parts of their own or nearby provinces. Due to the comparatively smaller scale, this was called the Small Third-Front Construction Movement. The southern part of Anhui province, which is near to Shanghai city, was a major base for the relocation of Shanghai factories during this process.

159 Xu Guoli 徐国利, “我记忆中的皖南上海小三线” *Wo jiyi zhong de Wannan Shanghai xiaosanxian* (The Small Third-Front from Shanghai in Southern Anhui in My Memory), 世纪 (*Shiji*), 2013 (06): 22-25.

Both dining and shopping, being indispensable parts of *Sanxian* workers' everyday life, were also important paths for them to interact with people outside the factories. Being relatively isolated from the local communities, the workers and their families did not have many chances to step out of their own factories. Most of what they enjoyed and desired in daily dining and purchasing came from either the countryside nearby or the distant cities in the coastal or eastern parts of China. Shopping and eating were the major links between people in the Third-Front factories and the outside world. The privileged resource and organisational advantages in each of the Third-Front factories played a decisive role in these links, deciding whether *Sanxian* workers' numerous material desires could be achieved or not. In consequence, while *Sanxian* workers and their families generally lived their lives at a higher standard than local residents in Sichuan, considerable gaps unavoidably existed among workers in the Third-Front factories located in different parts of the Sichuan Basin. As for the two plants which settled in Hechuan, probably the workers there had their daily lives at the average level, compared with the daily experiences of other *Sanxian* people in the province.

5. Sports and movies: What to do in leisure time

From an everyday perspective, besides these dining and shopping issues, some more noticeable content during the *Sanxian* workers' after-work hours was the cultural and entertainment activities. Compared with matters of eating and buying, the activities of people's cultural life were usually even more structured and organised. Some

entertainment in private forms, such as various card games, remained popular among individual workers. As recalled by a retired worker, a pack of poker cards which he brought from Shanghai made him quite popular among his colleagues, especially new local recruits, who had not yet got acquainted with the varieties of card-playing.¹⁶⁰ Most cultural activities, however, took collective form, such as sports and movie-going. These activities functioned as another bridge connecting the isolated Third-Front plants with the outside world.

Sports were the most representative and characteristic leisure activities which were officially promoted and funded by the Third-Front factories.

Table 1: Stadiums built in the Third-Front factories in Hechuan

The name of stadium	Time of completion	Size	Area	Seats for spectators
Illuminated Basketball Court of Lingchuan Factory	1966	51 metres long, and 40 metres wide	2,100 square metres	3,000
Outdoor Swimming Pool of Lingchuan Factory	1968	50 metres long, 25 metres wide, and 1.2 to 4.5 metres deep	110 square metres	400 (with lighting equipment)
Table Tennis Room of Lingchuan Factory	1975	30 metres long, 12 metres wide, and 4.5 metres high	530 square metres	Unknown

¹⁶⁰ Discussion with a former worker of Huachuan Factory in Hechuan during the Cultural Revolution, male, Hechuan, 6 October 2019.

Illuminated Basketball Court of Huachuan Factory	1976	50 metres long, 34 metres wide	1,500 square metres	800
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(Information from Hechuanxian jianshe zhi bianzhuan weiyuanhui 合川县建设志编撰委员会 [Editorial Committee of *Gazetteer of Construction of Hechuan County*] ed. 合川县建设志 *Hechuanxian jianshe zhi* (*Gazetteer of Construction of Hechuan County*) (internal materials, 1988, 148.)

In the Third-Front factories in Hechuan, for different kinds of sports, a series of stadiums meeting professional standards were built. An illuminated court with 3,000 seats was firstly completed and put into use by the Lingchuan Factory in 1966, the same year when the production line in this plant started work. It was the largest floodlit court in the whole of Hechuan County until the early 1980s. An outdoor swimming pool in the same factory was built in 1968. It was Hechuan's first outdoor swimming pool which could be used for formal competitions. The professional-quality table tennis arena of the Lingchuan Factory became available in 1975. The Huachuan Machinery Factory had its own illuminated court in 1976. More specific data about these projects can be found in Table 1 above. All these facilities located in the factories certainly stimulated workers' enthusiasm and made it much easier for them to do sports. With an illuminated court, workers need not play basketball in darkness, since they usually did not have free time during the daytime in work days.

With these venues, professional training and competition in the Third-Front factories became possible. From the early 1970s both teams and classes in swimming,

basketball, track and field, as well as table tennis, had been established for *Sanxian* workers of Hechuan. Workers chose to participate according to their individual interest and potential. Among different kinds of sports, swimming and other types of water sports, such as water polo, seemed to enjoy greater popularity. One stimulus was Mao Zedong's much publicised swim in the Yangtze River in July 1966. According to a summary made by 1976, there had been 287 water sports meets held in the Lingchuan Factory since its settlement in 1966.¹⁶¹ This was on average 29 times each year. Considering that the weather is most suitable for swimming in the three-month summer time, this amounted to one meet very three days. Based on regular training and factory-level matches, from 1972 amateur athletes from the Lingchuan Factory attended competitions at the prefecture, provincial and national levels.¹⁶² A Workers Sports Association was formally founded in this factory. Based on its rules issued in 1975, the match organisation, management, and rewards were all regulated in detail.¹⁶³

In addition to these professional and organised sports activities, workers also creatively made use of the local conditions. As described in a notice of the factory, in the countryside around the plant, ball games could be played on peasants' grain-

161 Lingchuan jixiechang tixie 陵川机械厂体协 [Sports Association of Lingchuan Factory], “陵川机械厂群众性游泳活动情况汇报” Lingchuan jixiechang qunzhongxing youyong huodong qingkuang huibao (A Report about the mass swimming in Lingchuan Factory), 4 February 1976, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 33-1977-1-0043.

162 Lingchuan jixiechang tixie, “办好业余体校, 开展业余训练” Banhao yeyu tixiao, kaizhan yeyu xunlian (Develop amateur sport schools, organise amateur training), 22 July 1976, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 33-1975-1-0035.

163 Lingchuan jixiechang tixie, “职工体育协会组织条例” Zhigong tiyu xiehui zuzhi tiaoli (The Rules of workers' Sports Association), 21 June 1975, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 33-1975-1-0034.

threshing grounds. Streams and rivers could substitute for swimming pools. The hills and mountains nearby were a good place for hiking. Even the waste in workshops could be turned into equipment for sports, such as horizontal and parallel bars, as well as dumbbells, ropes for tug-of-war, and even tables for table tennis.¹⁶⁴ All these creations actually broke through the limitations of facilities for sports, and further expanded the number of participants. It was estimated that over 70 per cent of the workers in the Lingchuan Factory regularly took part in sports activities. In 1972, 76 per cent of those amateur athletes were awarded certificates as Advanced Individuals (先进个人 *Xianjin geren*).¹⁶⁵ One of the major objectives in these organised sports activities, especially from the factory managers' viewpoint, to mobilise workers and in turn to promote production, was well achieved.

Sports activities in the Third-Front plants also played a significant role in their interactions with the outside world. Located in the Huaying Mountain, and without very convenient transportation to other factories around, a Third-Front factory named Huaguang founded its own men's and women's basketball teams. Through basketball diplomacy, which was quite popular at that time, the factory hoped to create good relations with many other factories and units. As recalled by a former worker, between 1971 and 1975 basketball players selected from the workers had three major off-job training sessions each year, each normally lasting one month. From April

164 Lingchuan jixiechang tixie, “积极开展职工体育活动，更好地为革命、生产服务” Jiji kaizhan zhigong tiyu huodong, genghaode wei geming, shengchan fuwu (Actively develop workers' sports, serve the revolution and production), Hechuan Archives, archive no: 33-1975-1-0038.

165 Lingchuan jixiechang tixie, “Jiji kaizhan,” archive no: 33-1975-1-0038.

1972-friendly matches took place regularly either in their own plant or at other units nearby.¹⁶⁶ For many workers, winning was less important than getting chances to visit new places and communicate with new people. In Hechuan, a young man in the Lingchuan Factory also joined the basketball team in the 1970s. Today he still cherishes his memories of travelling around with his teammates for matches during weekends. This freed him from the monotonous work. He even clearly remembers a match in Chongqing City. As a youngster who had grown up in the countryside of Hechuan, it was his first visit to a big city. He has long forgotten the result of the match that day, but the sight-seeing experience at those places of interest and landmarks in Chongqing City is still a strong memory.¹⁶⁷

Movie-watching accounted for another large proportion of *Sanxian* workers' leisure experiences. These activities were also highly organised. It at the same time provided opportunities for people's interactions in and outside of the Third-Front plants.

In the first few years after the settlement of those plants, movies were normally screened in outdoor spaces, which was not very different from the open-air projections in rural areas normally given by mobile teams. Yet in comparison, the Third-Front plants with structured resources and organisational strength could enjoy a much more stable supply of film copies. For some sought-after movies, as often

166 Yang Xiaohong 杨晓虹, “军工负命建三线, 扎根华蓥志愈坚—我的三线人生” *Jungong fuming jian Sanxian, zhagen huaying zhi yujian—wode Sanxian rensheng* (My Third-Front Life: the Military Industry took rooted in the Huaying Mountain), in Zhang Yong, 215.

167 Discussion with a former worker in Lingchuan Factory who in the 1970s participated the basketball team and attended matches in nearby places, male, Hechuan, 8 January 2019.

mentioned in memoirs, special staff and special vehicles would be sent to bring in the copy.¹⁶⁸ As a result, many peasants around the factory were usually attracted, in addition to the workers and their families. Peasants normally arrived at night with flaming torches (or electric torches), forming a long and spectacular scene of a torchlight parade both before and after the screening. The advantages of screening in those Third-Front plants became more obvious when indoor venues had been established for movie watching. Between the early and mid-1970s, cinemas and theatres opened in the Lingchuan and Huachuan Factory. No longer affected by bad weather, the peasants now needed to buy tickets to enter and take a seat. Even so, as mentioned in the memoirs of some former *Sanxian* workers, when their factory made use of their canteen to project movies (later in the newly constructed workers' club) and began to sell tickets to people from outside, peasants from nearby villages continued their visits and often made up over half of the crowd on weekends and holidays.¹⁶⁹

The films projected at the Third-Front plants during that ten-year era normally did not differ from those in other places nationwide at the same time. But a notable distinction during the open-air or indoor projections in Third-Front plants was that different groups of people gathered together, which brought the possibility of communication between them. Normally speaking, the majority of audiences for a movie screening in a unit or commune were mainly acquaintances working or living in the same place, and the process of movie watching was like an internal carnival. In

168 Zheng Jingdong, "Canyu 821," in Zhang Yong, 153-62.

169 Zheng Jingdong, "Canyu 821," in Zhang Yong, 153-62.

contrast, in the Third-Front plants, as more and more outsiders (including peasants from neighbouring villages and residents living in towns near the factory) crowded in for movies, the process of screening more and more became a get-together (联欢会 *lianhuanhui*) of an open type, especially when the films being projected were horribly familiar after years of screenings.

For *Sanxian* workers and their family members, being placed in the gap between urban and rural areas and normally spending their lives within the factory compound, it was not a bad thing to meet and talk with people from outside. Once a *Sanxian* worker (especially those migrants from outside) and a local peasant became acquainted enough, through ways of reciprocal interaction, there would be mutual benefits, given *Sanxian* workers' large demand and potential of consumption on different agricultural products.

Sanxian workers' children, especially those relocated from other provinces, enjoyed getting acquainted local children and making friends with them. Without this opportunity, many children of the immigrant workers might have grown up in a “fake” Sichuan. As recalled by the son of the aforementioned worker and basketball team member in the Lingchuan Factory, born and living in the areas of the Third-Front plant, he rarely stepped out by himself, nor did he talk with any Sichuan local resident, until he got to know several children from neighbouring villages at the movies. Together with them, he played all over the hills and streams nearby, and learned to speak the Sichuan dialect. “It is my really interesting childhood memory. What I learned from them, including the way they spoke, the games they played, and

the knowledge about local plants and animals, many of which were unique in Sichuan, was totally fresh to me.”¹⁷⁰

6. Impacts on peasants’ lives

When discussing the life experiences of the *Sanxian* workers, the peasants living around the factory should not be overlooked. So far in this section we have mentioned many times what they had done for the workers. At the same time, besides the opportunities of movie watching, what else did the Third-Front plants bring to them? Those living in the villages next to the Third-Front factories were privileged peasants in comparison with other rural residents. Given the extremely low proportion of them in the whole rural population (in total less than five per cent of the peasants in Hechuan had this good fortune), I did not include their experiences in my exploration about peasants’ everyday life in Chapter Four. But what did they experience during this period when the Third-Front factories suddenly settled next to them and became an influential neighbour? These peasants provide a special perspective on Chinese urban-rural relationship in those years.

Under the official slogan of Combination of Factories and Communes as mentioned above, the interaction between the Third-Front factories and the countryside was an organised process too. In February 1966, almost as soon as the completion of the Lingchuan Factory’s settlement in Hechuan, two communes nearby were administratively put under the leadership of the factory, based on an essential

170 Discussion with the son of a former worker and basketball team member in Lingchuan Factory who was born in the factory in the 1970s, male, Hechuan, 8 January 2019.

policy issued locally to promote the above slogan.¹⁷¹ With 141 production teams and a population of more than 14 thousand, the two communes became responsible for providing workers, vegetables, fruits and other agricultural products for the adjacent Third-Front factory. In return, the factory provided the peasants with a series of public services which were usually inaccessible for rural residents at that time, including tap-water, electricity and healthcare, in addition to cultural activities such as movie screenings, as mentioned above. As for the Huachuan Factory, a very similar policy published nine months later.¹⁷² In the field of healthcare, besides making the factory's hospital open to peasants, classes for training barefoot doctors (赤脚医生 *chijiao yisheng*) were held in the Huachuan Factory. Additionally, professional doctors were regularly sent to the countryside to visit patients.¹⁷³ In Jiangyou County in Mianyang Prefecture in the northern part of Sichuan, based on a report from the county-level authorities, the Third-Front plant in the county chose to co-found clinics in the countryside with neighbouring communes. This factory even helped establish several night schools, aiming to improve peasants' level of literacy.¹⁷⁴ At the same time, Guang'an County to the north of Hechuan saw some more experiments in this

171 "Guanyu Qingping, Chuanxin," archive no: 13-1-901.

172 "Huachuan jiexie chang guanyu chang she jiehe de qingshi baogao" 华川机械厂关于厂社结合的请示报告 (Draft Instructions about the Factory-Commune Merging at the Huachuan Factory), 29 November 1966, Hechuan Archives, archive no: 13-1-925.

173 "Yanjingqu, Tanzi gongshe, huachuanchang zhigong yiyuan 6.26 zuotanhui jiyao" 盐井区, 滩子公社, 华川厂职工医院 6.26 座谈会纪要 (Record of the 26 June Meeting of Yanjing District, Tanzi Commune, and the Workers' Hospital of the Huachuan Factory), Hechuan Archives, archive no: 0081-0001-1976.

174 Zhonggong jiangyou xianwei gongye jiaotong zhengzhibu 中共江油县委工业交通部 [Bureau of Industry, Transport, and Politics of the Jiangyou County Committee of the CCP], "关于县境内各工矿支援农业生产情况的报告" Guanyu xianjing nei ge gongkuang zhiyuan nongye shengchan qingkuang de baogao (Report on Factories and Mines Supporting Agricultural Production), Mianyang Archives, archive no: 74-1-15.

process. To connect the Third-Front plant on the Huaying Mountain with local villages, as recalled by a former worker, no wall was built around the factory. Instead, the peasants living around were mobilised and organised to guard the factory,¹⁷⁵ which was indeed a pioneering move nationwide at that time.

Although the specific forms of the combination were not the same, one of the major goals was to raise the income levels and life standards of the peasants living around the Third-Front factories. In 1965, hundreds of peasants from Qingyi Commune in Mianyang Prefecture participated in the capital construction for Third-Front projects. As a result, the whole commune earned 34,000 RMB.¹⁷⁶ In Jiangyou County, from 1969 to 1970, peasants from those production teams around Third-Front factories had over 50 per cent higher income than other peasants in the same county.¹⁷⁷ The extra money was very precious for rural people under the planned economy and without a stable wage unlike workers. As a Hechuan resident, born in a big family with five brothers and sisters in a village near the Lingchuang Factory, remembered: in the mid-1970s it was almost impossible for her to go to secondary school. But her parents made extra money through temporary work in the Lingchuan Factory and later sent her to school.¹⁷⁸

175 Lin Ling (organised by Wang Lin) 林凌 (王林整理), “我所经历的三线建设” *Wo suo jingli de Sanxian jianshe* (The Third-Front Construction that I Experienced), in *Sanxian jianshe...xibu kaifa*, Chen Donglin, 552-62.

176 “651 gongcheng gongnong jiehe xianghu zhiyuan de qingkuang he xia yi bu dasuan” 651 工程工农结合相互支援的情况和下一步打算 (Mutual Support between Industry and Agriculture in Project 651 and Plans for the Next Step), Mianyang Archives, archive no:74-1-11.

177 Zhengxie jiangyoushi weiyuanhui 政协江油市委员会 [Jiangyou City Committee of the CPPCC] ed., 江油三线建设 *Jiangyou Sanxian jianshe* (*Third-Front Construction in Jiangyou*) (internal materials, 2010), 35.

178 Discussion with a local resident from a village near Lingchuang Factory, female, 59 years old, Hechuan, 11 July 2019.

Apart from these official influences from the Third-Front plants, there had always been private interaction between workers and local peasants. Sitting together for a movie was only one of the many occasions when they would meet. In consequence, the *Sanxian* people (especially immigrant workers) left many individual impressions, deep or shallow, in the daily life of rural people around those factories.

While most new-comers were influenced by Sichuan residents in the habits of daily diet, in a number of other aspects, especially in the case of some fashionable items and popular trends, local peasants were overwhelmingly affected by those migrant workers. As mentioned by the aforementioned child born in the Lingchuan Factory who made good friends with local peasant children, one time he received some candies from his father's workmates who had just come back from visiting families in Nanjing City. He shared these candies with his new friends in the neighbouring villages, which unexpectedly made him really popular among almost all the rural children.¹⁷⁹

Compared with children, young peasant men and women had even stronger enthusiasm to admire and follow what *Sanxian* people enjoyed in their daily life. The industrial products, especially those from Shanghai as discussed above, became enviable items not just in the factory but also in the villages nearby. It was a similar story in the fashion of people's dress. Around 1968, Shanghai workers who moved to Jiangyou County liked wearing trousers which were much tighter than usual. This

179 Discussion with the son of an ex-worker and basketball team member in Lingchuan Factory who was born in the factory in the 1970s, Hechuan, 8 January 2019.

latest style could easily show one's slim shape. As described by a researcher, young people in the villages around them soon mimicked this style, leading a popular trend across the whole county.¹⁸⁰ Given the specific social and political atmosphere in the late 1960s, this seems contrary to our normal imagining about that time, since the tight trousers seem not revolutionary at all. However, it is still understandable if taking into account the traditional admiration of fashions which persists among local people of Sichuan, as mentioned in previous chapters.

Admittedly, the interaction between *Sanxian* workers and local residents did not always produce a win-win result. In the Third-Front factory in Pengxian County, a big conflict happened when peasants entered the plant to collect waste from the toilets and carry it home to use as fertiliser. As recalled by a retired worker, while peasants regarded it as a matter of course, some workers, especially those from Shanghai, really disliked the foul smell exuded during the process.¹⁸¹ Similar unhappy situations existed in Hechuan too. As recollected by the aforementioned man born in the Lingchuan Factory, it was an extreme dilemma for him when the children inside the plant tried to prevent outsiders from doing the same thing in their factory. "Some children, especially those older ones, really tussled with each other, but the only thing I could do was hide somewhere."¹⁸² In the Shuangxi Plant on the south of Hechuan, a

180 Cui Yinan and Zhao Yang 崔一楠, 赵洋, "嵌入与互助: 三线建设中工农关系的微观审视" Qianru yu huzhu: Sanxian jianshe zhong gongnong guanxi de weiguan shenshi (Implanting and mutual helping: exploring the worker-peasant relationship in the Third-Front Construction from a micro angle), in Zhang Yong, 343-51.

181 Yang Tingfa, "Cong xiaxiang dao Sanxian," in Zhang Yong, 50-60.

182 Discussion with the son of an ex-worker and basketball team member in the Lingchuan Factory who was born in the factory in the 1970s, Hechuan, 8 January 2019.

strange but effective method was invented to tackle this issue. Peasants should show a special pass in order to enter the factory and collect the toilet waste officially.¹⁸³

These kinds of tensions persisted throughout the years when Third-Front factories were located in the countryside. After most of these factories chose to migrate again and resettled in cities, many peasants cherished the time when the factories sat next to their villages. As an old man living near the former site of the Shuangxi Plant lamented: “Now our good life has gone with the Third-Front factories, and many things have become inconvenient again without such a big plant next to us”.¹⁸⁴

In a nutshell, living and working separately both from urban and rural areas during the Cultural Revolution, having satisfying food, shopping for desirable goods, enjoying cultural activities in leisure time, and interacting with local peasants, were memorable aspects of *Sanxian* workers’ experiences in Sichuan. These were also significant paths for *Sanxian* workers to keep connected with the outside world. In most cases, things would not have been available at all without the privileged resources and organisational advantages the Third-Front factories enjoyed during the era of the Cultural Revolution. This to a large extent shaped a distinctive and irreproducible experience for both *Sanxian* people and the neighbouring villagers in Sichuan.

183 Zhang Yong, “Shangou zhong de ‘xiaoshehui’,” in Zhang Yong, 265-73.

184 Zhang Yong, “Shangou zhong de ‘xiaoshehui’,” in Zhang Yong, 265-73.

Epilogue

As the last revolution of Mao Zedong, the Cultural Revolution ended in principle on Mao's death. In practice none of the goals that Mao had promised to the Chinese people when he launched the movement in 1966 was really achieved. Instead, for people at the grassroots, tiredness and boredom prevailed after ten years in the politicised environment. In October 1976, the arrest of the Gang of Four (including Jiangqing, Mao's wife) was in fact a coup. It signified a deviation from Mao's line in the last ten years, although according to the official narrative the Cultural Revolution was still *successfully* finished. In December 1978, the Third Plenary Session of 11th Committee of the CCP declared the commencement of a new era.

Deng Xiaoping and a number of his colleagues who returned to office during this period no longer insisted on the focus on class struggle which had politicised the whole society since the 1950s. From then on, a series of policies under the flag of Reform and Opening-up (改革开放 Gaige kaifang), although never targeting the political system and never shaking the status of the CCP as the only ruling party, were gradually promoted in rural and urban China. This transformation generated dramatic and lasting influences in Chinese people's everyday experiences, which turned out to be very different from those during the Cultural Revolution era.

As a result of the reform, from the end of the 1970s onward, many policies driven by the planned economy system and the collective farming mode, most of which played the dominant role in people's life for decades, were totally cancelled nationwide, including Sichuan. From the perspective of the CCP, these drastic

changes indicated a fresh way of top-down management. Yet in comparison, if viewed from the bottom-up perspective and on a longer timescale, as the situation in Sichuan, it was not so much a really new trend in people's daily experiences as a re-emergence, a revival, a reactivation, and a redevelopment of the traditions that had taken root locally in recent or ancient history.

Significant transformations firstly happened in the rural areas, when each household began to sign contracts with the state, known as fixing the farm output for each household, instead of working collectively for the production team. It fundamentally subverted the way of production in the countryside. In rural Hechuan, this reform was legally initiated from the winter of 1978 and was generalised in the whole county within two years. Actually, it was by no means a fresh thing for many peasants in Hechuan. As mentioned in Chapter Three, in Longshi Commune, similar kinds of farmland distribution started from the first half of the 1960s and persisted in the Cultural Revolution, although never being fully legitimised. At the end of the 1970s, it was probably not a coincidence that, based on relevant records, the official distribution of farmland in Hechuan was firstly completed by peasants in the same commune, when most other communes had just started the reform. The earlier practices in a secret form probably helped them a lot in this process. By 1982, collective farming had totally disappeared from the countryside of Hechuan, leaving the communes in name only.¹ Soon the titles of communes and production teams were discarded too.

¹ Ye Changlin, 65-72.

Without collective farming, there was no reason to limit peasants' family sidelines any longer. As effective responses to the top-down transformations, in the next few years numbers of promising results took place in rural Hechuan, most of which had traditional bases and local characteristics as I mentioned above. One of the most noticeable instances was the pig-raising industry. As the most advantageous peasants' sideline with official endorsement throughout the Cultural Revolution, it achieved extraordinary improvements once the political interference was gone (such as the policy that each rural household could only raise two pigs and sell one of them freely). In 1979, the total pigs raised by Hechuan peasants had more than doubled on 1977. This increasing trend was maintained annually and in the next five years another 30 per cent of improvement was realised in rural Hechuan. During the Cultural Revolution, the statistics fluctuated and in 1976 it was almost the same as that of ten years before.² As two other competitive industries mentioned previously, from the late 1970s onward highly similar progress happened in the output of sericulture and fishery in Hechuan.³ In addition, the production of numbers of economic crops and poultry rearing, being criticised as the tail of capitalism during the Cultural Revolution era, experienced explosive growth in Hechuan at the end of the 1970s. Yet all the astounding improvements were in fact continuities and developments of local traditions, if compared to the situation in ancient Sichuan,

2 HCXZ, 387.

3 HCXZ, 380 and 388.

especially the aforementioned popular money-making ways of rural families in the Qing Dynasty.

Since there was no more political restriction on peasants' private sidelines, there was no reason to suppress the free markets any longer. Located at the confluence of three rivers, as in ancient times, the county seat of Hechuan again enjoyed the advantage as a commodity distribution and exchange centre not only for the countryside of Hechuan but even for nearby counties. Undoubtedly, the majority of the products were from peasants' private harvests. In the county seat, by the end of the 1970s there used to be only one market where peasants could sell their products with official permission. After restrictions on free trading were lifted, this market soon became inadequate to serve peasants' expanding need. In 1985, officials in Hechuan had to plan a new market which was five times larger than the old one. Due to the high construction cost, this new market was not completed until the mid-1990s. By then the market was double the originally planned size and accommodated more than 6,000 sellers including peasants, retailers, and jobbers.⁴ Their businesses covered almost anything one would want to buy from a farmers' market and most of the goods was produced locally.

In addition to the situations in agricultural production and free markets, continuities of local traditions in Hechuan could also be seen in the industrial practices privately owned and run by rural people. Most of such attempt had no space

⁴ Zhou Yun 周云, "合州市场建设发展纪略" Hezhou shichang jianshe fazhan jilüe (Record of the Construction and Development of the Hezhou Market), in WSZL, vol. 22 (2008): 89-92.

under the collectivised and politicised context during the Cultural Revolution. The glass industry in Qingping Town in the northeast part of Hechuan was an example. Benefitting from the plentiful and various mineral resource, in the late 1930s modern industry began to develop there, especially including glasswork factories. Under the planned economy after 1949, however none of these small enterprises was in the national plan. Instead, based on the plan, most of the workers and technicians moved to the countryside and engaged in collective farming. In 1978 a glass factory owned by the commune reappeared in the town. 1985 witnessed the re-emergence of a private enterprise focusing on glasswork. By 1991, over 300 factories (private and township-owned) were running their businesses in the town, providing job opportunities for more than 4,000 people most of whom were peasants.⁵ In this remarkable progress, a number of skilled workers with previous experience in glass and other manufacturing fields played a significant role. Qingping Town was not unique in Hechuan County. During the same period, food processing, silk making and cement manufacturing industries made promising achievements in different towns of Hechuan, most of which had a dependable local basis in technology and resources that were suspended for several decades.

With so many peasants privately and actively involved in so much by-work, like family sidelines, free trading, and industrial production, the grain yield, as the core task in collective farming, might be a problem. However, such concern was

⁵ Wu Xianrui and Zhou Hongjing 吴先锐, 周洪景, “迅速发展清平镇乡镇企业” Xunsu fazhan de Qingpingzhen xiangzhen qiye (Quickly Develop the Enterprises of Qingping Town), in *WSZL*, vol. 16 (2000): 78-87.

unfounded. The total output of grain in Hechuan kept improving annually after the Cultural Revolution, and by 1984 it had reached 130 per cent compared with that in 1976.⁶ In this sense, we may wonder what actually obstructed the improvement of agricultural productivity, the so-called capitalist tails or collective farming itself.

Hechuan peasants' income levels also rose dramatically. In 1982 there were 32 rural households in Hechuan meeting the criterion of *wanyuanhu* (万元户 households with the annual income no less than ten thousand RMB).⁷ Given the fact that few people dared to show off their wealth at that time, the statistics officially collected by no means reflected the whole picture. These *wanyuanhu* made their first money either through raising pigs, planting vegetables and fruits, fish farming, or nurturing saplings. With official recognition, more peasants were motivated and no longer felt afraid of becoming rich. The next year witnessed an almost tenfold expansion in the number of *wanyuanhu* in rural Hechuan, not to mention that some people might still prefer to keep a low profile when reporting their actual income.⁸ Data from banks during the same period provided perhaps more concrete information about peasants' income and saving. In the aforementioned financial institutions servicing Hechuan peasants at that time, the Credit Cooperatives and the Agricultural Bank of Hechuan County, savings kept increasing continuously and were 40 times larger in 1986 compared with that a decade before.⁹

6 HCXZ, 371.

7 Qiu Shuhang 邱书航, "合川农村早期的万元户" Hechuan nongcun zaoqi de wanyuanhu (Early *Wanyuanhu* in Rural Hechuan), in WSZL, vol. 22 (2008): 56-59.

8 Qiu Shuhang, 56-59.

9 HCNJ, 193 and 196.

At the same time, obvious changes also occurred in the daily experiences of the county-seat residents in Hechuan. Job opportunities resulting from the economic reform first benefitted the urban youngsters who had just finished their sent-down life and returned to their homes. To have a financially independent life, the state- or collective-owned factories and units were no longer the only choice for them. The rise of the private economy in diverse fields accommodated more and more urban dwellers, which was unimaginable during the planned and collectivised era. Yet a large part of these businesses had their roots in the local traditions of Sichuan. Favoured by Hechuan residents living in the Sichuan-style as discussed previously, a number of commercial activities flourished once again from the 1980s onward, such as catering and retail businesses.

After returning to the county seat of Hechuan, a former rusticated youngster became a kitchen apprentice in the restaurant which was famous for its chicken wontons. From the 1980s, for most collective-owned enterprises, individuals were allowed to sign a contract with the state and to be responsible for one's own profits and losses. He became the manager and ran this restaurant for more than 20 years. Without investment from the state, undoubtedly it was local people's lasting enthusiasm for the special tastes in his restaurant that contributed to this long-term success. Similar achievements could also be found in other catering businesses serving special food in Hechuan, like the dishes of rice noodles and mutton as mentioned previously. In most of these restaurants, the same chef cooked in the same

way from the 1980s to the 21st century, maintaining popularity among Hechuan residents from generation to generation.

Besides enjoying tasty food, people in Hechuan (including both urban and rural residents) continued their interest in shopping, which was usually keeping pace with the changing fashions at that time. Between 1979 and 1980, the sales of radios experienced a threefold expansion in Hechuan. This tendency went on in the next two years until 1982 when televisions started to be more and more common in residents' homes. In 1984, the number of televisions sold in Hechuan for the first time surpassed that of radios in the same year. By 1985, the sales of televisions in the whole county was 22 times larger than four years earlier.¹⁰ As for most of the other durable and luxury goods discussed in my thesis, like sewing machines and wrist watches, similar growth occurred too. Washing machines and refrigerators entered Hechuan people's daily lives at the same time, as the increasing data demonstrated. Dramatic changes also took place in the businesses of many commodities which seemed to be not very popular before. The sales of wool began to expand drastically after 1978, and in five years the annual amount of wool purchased by Hechuan residents grew five times. It was almost the same situation in the sales of leather shoes from the late 1970s onward.¹¹ The transforming social atmosphere surely encouraged people to wear something different and fashionable. As a remainder of the planned economy system in the 1980s, although specific tickets were still needed when buying many of these

10 HCXZ, 496.

11 HCXZ, 496.

products, the rationing policy appeared to no longer restrict Hechuan people's zeal in purchasing and enjoying what they dreamed about every day.

In addition to all the enjoyment in material life, residents' cultural activities during the same period were also tremendously enriched. Getting rid of the politicised environment, plus the fact that the popular culture in modern style had not become popular in the county, in the 1980s the revival of diverse kinds of local culture unsurprisingly characterised Hechuan people's leisure life. Many of them as mentioned before had not been uprooted in the Cultural Revolution. From 1983, a large-scale arts festival participated in by peasants was held in the county seat every two years. Most participants were amateurs from rural Hechuan. In their performances, the original works in traditional form with full of Sichuan flavour (as mentioned previously, including but not limited to Sichuan Operas) always took up a major part of the programmes and received a good reception. When this festival was held for the sixth time in 1994, audiences reached 200,000, almost one-sixth of the population in the whole county at that time.¹² Apart from the biennial performances at the county-level, there was a mushrooming of amateur troupes among people at the grassroots, especially those in the countryside. By 1983 in rural Hechuan 23 peasants' troupes were officially recognized. Not only rural residents in Hechuan but even people from nearby counties could often enjoy the touring performances given by them. As recalled by a former organiser in one of these troupes, their shows were mainly original works of *quju* (as mentioned previously, a kind of local opera derived

12 Xie Bochun 谢伯淳, “合川农村艺术节纪略” Hechuan nongcun yishujie jilüe (Record of the Rural Arts Festival of Hechuan), in WSZL, vol. 12 (1995): 116-22.

from ballad singing). In less than three years they travelled more than one thousand kilometres in and around Hechuan County.¹³

All these developments mentioned here, on the one hand, were inconsistent or even contradictory with the mainstream of people's life during the Cultural Revolution. On the other hand, in the era after the Cultural Revolution, many of the details in Hechuan residents' daily experiences showed strong continuities with earlier times. Most of them originated from the traditions which had been active in Sichuan since the ancient or modern times. In this sense, my argument is what happened to Sichuan people's life during the unprecedented politicised decade under Maoism seemed to be a side trip (or even an accident) in the history of Sichuan as a whole. Yet from a top-down perspective, this process was not accidental at all, but an official experiment forcefully promoted. This experiment proved a failure, resulting in large numbers of unexpected experiences in grassroots people's daily experiences throughout a decade or more. Regarding the changes from the late 1970s onward, it was not so much a radical shift in the local society of Sichuan as a return to and an extension of the traditions in the basin. This is one more point that I can argue based on my thesis. Admittedly, this argument sounds different from the narrative of the CCP in which all the progress after 1978 is attributed to the Reform and Opening-up policy, thus legitimising its continuous rule over the country from then on. Based on

13 Yu Wending 余文鼎, “云门镇业余曲剧团追记” Yunmenzhen yeyu qujutuan zhuiji (Recalling the Amateur *Quju* Troupe of Yunmen Town), in WSZL, vol 12 (1995): 123-26.

my thesis, the Cultural Revolution in Hechuan is best considered as a kind of side trip or even accident in the broader modern development of the area.

Viewed from the bottom up, in addition to the changes in residents' daily life from the 1980s to recent years, the shifts in people's attitudes toward their experiences during the ten-year era are noteworthy. They represent a lasting legacy of the Cultural Revolution.

In the following couple of decades, when people recollect the 1980s in China, either in official propaganda or mass media, *spring* is a word often used. The word implied that what Chinese residents experienced before the 1980s, specifically including the Cultural Revolution era, was like a *winter*. Clearly, few people would be willing to go back to that winter.

However, especially in recent years there have been some slight but meaningful changes in this trend. These transformations even influenced the political and social atmosphere in China today. It has become more and more difficult to find any rethinking or criticism of the Cultural Revolution in the official statements of the CCP. On the other hand, as most people who experienced the Cultural Revolution are now over 60 years-old and have begun their retired life, there is an increasing tendency to recall their youth, including their experiences during the Cultural Revolution, with nostalgia rather than negativity. This phenomenon is understandable since the youthful years are memorable in most old people's recollection. In addition to the ambiguous attitude from official media, the popular trend of nostalgic

recollections in society became truly controversial and problematic. This situation is more pressing when its influence is amplified through the Internet whose users are mainly younger people without personal experiences or reliable knowledge of the Cultural Revolution. In the compulsory education of China, the Cultural Revolution is never a key point in teaching or examinations. In many private memoirs on social media (Wechat 微信 and Weibo 微博 for example, which are the most popular social networking platforms in China), people tend to pay less attention to the bitterness in life during the Cultural Revolution. In their recollection, the years from the 1960s to the 1970s are often described as a golden age of innocence when individuals enthusiastically devoted themselves to collective work without selfish motives.

This beautified and distorted description, which undoubtedly does not reflect the truth, leads to a more crucial question. If life at that time was so ideal, why wouldn't China go back and make yesterday once more?

Behind this misleading trend is the legacy of the Cultural Revolution which remains influential even today. In China, things become more complicated when serious public discussion about this topic is always restricted by the CCP. Nonetheless, history is not a doll to be dressed up as you like, even if the official narrative is absent in exploring the historical realities. Observations of people at the grassroots can probably provide more dependable information in researching people's authentic experiences during that ten-year era.

Bearing in mind what is presented in the previous chapters, nostalgia may not be the only factor behind this trend. In fact, those who enjoyed a comparatively privileged life during the Cultural Revolution usually make up the majority of people who are glad to share their experiences and feelings. In the process of my research, those old residents who appeared more talkative in discussions normally were county-seat dwellers, former workers in the Third-Front factories, and peasants living near the county seat or factories. As analysed previously, these kinds of people enjoyed certain privileges throughout the Cultural Revolution decade. Even among the rusticated youth, some had a much easier experience than their peers. Those privileges were at the expense of large numbers of other people, including most ordinary peasants, who were unable to improve their lives significantly. Once the Cultural Revolution prohibitions were gone and along with the general rise in residents' living standards, there was a remarkable shrinking of all the aforementioned privileges. In Hechuan, most state- and collective-owned enterprises went bankrupt in the 1990s, as a result of their inability to adapt to the market-oriented economy. No longer supported by the defence plans of the state, the lives of the workers in the Third-Front factories also became much less privileged. Having their lives bound to those units, which were the leftovers of the planned and collective economy, these workers became a disadvantaged group in society. What a huge difference compared with their experiences during the Cultural Revolution.

From this perspective, it is reasonable to argue that what some people cherish from 1966 to 1976 is in fact a time when they enjoyed considerable privileges. Yet,

many other older residents are not keen to talk about their experiences in the Cultural Revolution. At a time of supposed communist ideals, it was undoubtedly embarrassing that considerable gaps persisted between privileged and underprivileged groups of people's lives. This contrast between ideals and realities further suggests the significance of rethinking about the legacies of the Cultural Revolution. This is one of the main purposes of my thesis. As an old Chinese saying goes: past experience, if not forgotten, is a guide for the future (前事不忘，后事之师 *qianshibuwang, houshizhishi*). Without a sober reexamination and thorough reflection about the mistakes in that ten-year era, what happened to China and made many people suffer could reappear.

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