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Transition of Rural Household Economy in a
Village of Southern Anhui Province of China
1927–1992

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PhD in Economic and Social History

The University of Edinburgh

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Declaration

This is to certify that that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed: Jian Gao

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This research was finished with help from many hands. The idea of such a study was initiated eight years ago, when I was still writing my Master's dissertation. I thank the Jenny Balston Scholarship; it helped me make up my mind to start this painful but very fruitful journey. My supervisors Dr. Felix Boecking and Professor David Greasley were the best guides and instructors that I could imagine. I have been always grateful for their patience. Without their pushing and encouragement, I may have given up long time ago.

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Abstract

Based on primary sources pertaining to the village of Zhaitan, this thesis studied the economic transition of households in a village in the south of Anhui Province as they went through the revolutions, political movements and reforms of the twentieth century. The transition was divided into four periods, corresponding to four of the chapters of this text. The first period was from 1927 to 1949, on which I depicted the household economy in a village that had not yet experienced intervention by the powers of the state; the second period was from 1949 to 1962, during which the Land Reform and the cooperative movement were the most significant revolutions in the rural area. The third period was 1963–1978, when the commune system was adjusted in response to the failure of the Great Leap Forward and was continued stably from then on. The last period was the reform period which ran from late-1978 until 1992. During this period, the collective system was abandoned and state control on the rural economy was gradually loosened.

In the course of transition of the household economy in Zhaitan, I focused on the conflict between the growing population and the limited resources of the village. Before the 1949, the solution was to go into businesses outside the village; in the 30 years after 1949, under the framework of the collective system and the control of the state command, the peasants managed to develop labour-intensive production to meet the needs of the growing population; in the reform period after 1978, with the overall withdrawal of state intervention in rural areas, the tension was finally released through the market and the development of industry.

The experience of Zhaitan reveals that the change of land ownership did not make a difference to the economic condition of most households if the land area was much less than what was needed. It also shows that the collective system of agriculture, however, could promote agricultural production, and thus brought about positive effects on the condition of each household through centralised management of the labour force and the land. Last, but not least, the overall boost to rural household economy is reliant on the development of the industry to complete the transfer of rural workforce from the agriculture.

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Unit Conversion

1 *mu* = 0.164 acre

1 *jin* = 16 *liang* = 500 g

1 *sheng* = 1 *jin*

Chapter 1

Introduction

Through the story of Zhaitan village in the south of Anhui Province in China, this thesis focuses on revealing the changes undergone by the rural household economy under the social and political upheavals in the twentieth century. Using data and information collected during fieldwork in Zhaitan, it details the economic condition of rural households in different periods and evaluates the influence of external intervention on the local economy. In the thesis, I demonstrate that the collective system improved the infrastructure of agriculture and agricultural production through the massive mobilisation of labour. It solved the problem of food shortages that had existed for hundreds of years in the village and brought overall growth to agriculture. But the major economic difficulty in this village was the tension between the growing population and the limited arable land, and the collective system was unable to solve this problem on its own, especially given the strict restrictions to the migration of the rural workforce and the control of the command economy. This conflict had largely been solved through the reforms beginning in 1978. However, my research does not attribute the improvement of the family economy after 1978 to the Household Responsibility System. My finding is that it was the reform of the governmental compulsory purchase system and the resumption of the rural market that offered peasants more autonomy in decisions concerning household economic arrangements, and it was the development of rural industry that facilitated the transfer of the workforce from agriculture to non-agricultural sectors, thus lessening the population pressure on the agriculture.

Research Context

Chinese rural development has been a critical issue in the context of twentieth-century Chinese studies. This is largely because of the nature of Chinese economy and society. Until recently, rural residents have accounted for a major proportion of the population throughout Chinese history,¹ and the agricultural sector was the largest part of the national economy

¹ According to the Statistical Communiqué on the 2011 National Economic and Social Development, by the end of 2011, the urban population exceeded the rural population for the first time accounting for

before the large scale industrialisation initiated by the Chinese Communist Government in the mid-1950s.²

On the other hand, the twentieth century is a significant period in Chinese history for the tremendous revolutions and changes that took place in the economy, society and politics. The first half of the century witnessed the chaos brought by state changes and wars, but beside the disruption by the war,³ it was generally a time when rural society had not yet experienced much state intervention. In the 1930s, although the Shanghai-based industrialisation had started to influence rural areas, particularly through the provision of a large amount of employment opportunities to rural people,⁴ the economy in most rural areas still showed substantial continuation from the past.

From the early 1950s, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, a variety of revolutions and movements, including the Land Reform, Cooperative Movement, People's Commune Movement, and the Cultural Revolution, were launched by the authority not only to recover and develop the national economy, but also to eliminate the old and original social stratification and construct a new social order. These movements thoroughly changed the social structure by classifying and reorganising people, and transformed the

51.3 of the total. See National Bureau of Statistics of China, 'Statistical Communiqué on the 2011 National Economic and Social Development,' http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/NewsEvents/201202/t20120222_26575.html, accessed 31 December, 2013.

² In 1952 when the national economy had just started to recover from the long-lasting war, the share of the agricultural sector in GDP was 50.5%, and 87.54% of population lived in rural areas. See National Bureau of Statistics of China, 'Composition of Gross Domestic Product,' <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/statisticaldata/yearlydata/YB2000e/C02E.htm>, accessed 31 December 2013, and 'Population and Its Composition,' <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/statisticaldata/yearlydata/YB1996e/C3-1e.htm>, accessed 31 December 2013.

³ For some examples of the direct disruptions suffered by peasants from the Sino-Japanese war, see Su Min 苏民, 'Xin Guixi Tongzhixia de Anhui Liangzheng,' 新桂系统治下的安徽粮政 (Grain Administration of Anhui Province under the Rule of the New Gui Clique); and Fei Zepu 费泽普, 'Xin Guixi Tianfu Zhengshi Zayi,' 新桂系田赋折实杂议 (The Farm Tax Levied in Kind of the New Gui Clique), in *Anhui Wenshi Ziliao* 安徽文史资料, ed. Zhongguo Renmin Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi Anhuisheng Weiyuanhui Wenshi Ziliao Yanjiu Weiyuanhui 中国人民政治协商会议安徽省委员会文史资料研究委员会, (internal data) 14 (1983): 128–137; 137–142.

⁴ See Fei Xiaotong 费孝通, *Jiangcun Jingji* 江村经济 (Peasant Life in China), trans. Dai Kejing (Nanjing: Jiangsu Renmin Chubanshe, 1986), 196–200. For more detailed discussion, see Debin Ma, 'Economic Growth in the Lower Yangzi Region of China in 1911–1937: A Quantitative and Historical Analysis,' *The Journal of Economic History*, 68, 2 (2008): 355–392; James Kai-Sing Kung, Nansheng Bai and Yiu-Fai Lee, 'Human Capital, Migration, and a 'Vent' for Surplus Rural Labor in 1930s China: the Case of the Lower Yangzi,' *Economic History Review*, 64, S1(2011): 117–141.

national economy. As the main location and object of most of these events, the rural economy and its residents were hugely affected, especially in the 1950s and 1960s.

The collective era ended within a few years after 1978, followed by a reform era. The Chinese economy had experienced rapid growth over 30 years as a result of the reforms, which ranged from micro-management of basic economic units, such as factory workshops and rural households, to the macro-economic management of central government. Again, the reform started largely in rural areas, although it later extended far beyond them .

For this reason, the survival of a single village amidst the turbulence of the twentieth century is an interesting topic. As far as my research is concerned, I firstly frame it within the period 1927–1992 and then set the object of my study as an inland village hemmed in by mountains. The starting point of the research is set at 1927 for mainly practical reasons. As the research involved in many details of rural life, I need the primary sources to be as accurate as possible; in this respect, the written materials are better than the oral materials. In the village I studied, the archives have only preserved economic data since the 1920s. This restricts research on the period before the 1920s. On the other hand, the Nationalist Government of Nanjing was established in 1927. The government based in the south of the Yangzi region brought a relatively peaceful ten years to this area. This allowed the village to generally maintain its economic tradition without sudden disruptions. This peace was broken by the subsequent Sino–Japanese War and the civil war between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party, but the disruption of war also provided an opportunity to observe how the original economic and social state of the village was interrupted and how the village responded to this pressure.

The second period covers 1949–1978, i.e. the Land Reform and collective period. This is a unique period full of political movements and ambitious experiments, and my research is intended to provide more details on this unusual period in history. In 1978, the reforms began and had tremendous influence on the development of the Chinese economy. My research aims at revealing how such reforms affected Zhaitan village and transformed the household economy there. The research ends in 1992, partly because the written materials on Zhaitan after this point are not as sufficient as in the previous period, and partly because things in the

latest have changed very fast over the 20 years and it takes time for a historian to review the significance of these changes for ordinary people and families.

Against this background, a remarkable amount of research has been done on each specific stage and almost every aspect of rural life. Most studies either focus on particular villages at certain periods or throw light on the general progress of the nation over time. Both types provide enormous amounts of information to increase understanding of the Chinese countryside at different points and its developments over time. However, for a country with huge variations in geography and climate, it is always risky to claim that we have already obtained sufficient knowledge and gained a full understanding of rural society.

For example, in the studies on rural society at the grass-roots level, the market, particularly the standard market, was regarded as a crucial institution in shaping and connecting rural communities.⁵ In Skinner's research, the standard market played both economic and social roles. It was firstly a space for surrounding rural residents to regularly exchange goods; secondly, in the course of regular market activities, it formed a public space for social activities. Rural residents communicated the information and organised large joint projects through the standard market; these connections sometimes broke the limitations of traditional patrilineal kinship. However, this mode seemed not to be applicable in the mountainous area of south Anhui Province.

In this region, it is hardly possible to say that there was a similar market system in existence, nor that these markets played a significant role in the local economy and social life. Research on this region has recognised the prosperity of trade in the area since the Ming Dynasty, which helped to develop a number of mountain towns. However, these towns were usually located beside rivers and largely functioned as distribution points for goods. They

⁵ G. William Skinner, 'Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China, Parts I, II and III' *Journal of Asian Studies* 24, 1 (1964): 3-43; 24, 2 (1965): 195-228; 24, 3 (1965): 363-399. In Skinner's influential research, the rural society was connected and organised through a marketing system. Certain numbers of rural communities or villages formed a standard market area, and standard markets were connected to a few intermediate markets, which in turn linked to several central market systems. Based on these central markets, China was divided in macro regions. In the hierarchy of markets, the 'standard market' was usually the periodic market, which was the starting point for the upward flow of produce and industrial products to the higher markets and also the end point for the downward flow of consumer products to farmers. The periodic market town, which was termed as a standard market town by Skinner, was the centre of local society, which was not only the economic centre for commodity exchange but also the centre of social activities for farmers. Within the standard market community, the integration of culture and custom could dissolve the traditional boundary of patrilineal kinship.

never developed into market centres, and the marketing system was solely 'export directed'.⁶ Local residents did not go to such towns regularly for trading. Local goods were directly transported to these ports and transferred outside of the mountains for sale, while local people's needs for goods were usually met by groceries sold in the village; these goods were also imported directly from the external world. There was not an interlinked marketing system within the region. In fact, in the village I studied, local people were quite unfamiliar with the conception of *Shichang* (市场, market) or *Jishi* (集市, fair). After I explained, they told me that the only market they used to go was the *Wuzi Jiaoliu Dahui* (物资交流大会, a fair for exchanging goods) in the neighbouring county, which was held once a year on 3 March.

In addition, in terms of social communication it seemed that the community was still subject to the boundary of lineages in this region. In this mountainous region, people resided in valleys or lower land based on kinship, and people seemed to be accustomed to relying on the lineage organisation to deal with difficulties and conflicts. Public affairs were discussed and decided by the leadership of the lineage. The traditional large projects such as water control were also usually limited within the village, i.e. the lineage, as most villages were built in the vicinity of an exclusive *Shuikou* (水口, source of water, which could be a spring, well or stream, and which was usually separated and exclusively owned by one village). Hence, villages tended to build and maintain their water systems, such as irrigation channels and domestic water ditches, separately. The only exception was in the People's Commune period. When traditional lineage boundaries were broken up and villages were reorganised based on the commune system, bigger projects such as large reservoirs were constructed in the mountains with the cooperation of several nearby villages. But in any case, these social links and organisations have nothing to do with markets.

The differences in marketing system amongst various regions⁷ remind us again of the diversity of the landscape and the wide gap between regional developments⁸ in China. Thus,

⁶ Harriet T. Zurndorfer, *Change and Continuation in Chinese Local History: The Development of Hui-Chou Prefecture, 800 to 1800* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 127-128.

⁷ For a more detailed comparison of towns and markets between this mountainous region and the plain area in Yangzi Delta refer to Tang Lixing, 'Chayi yu Hudong: Mingqing Shiqi Suzhou yu Huizhou de Shizhen,' 差异与互动: 明清时期苏州与徽州的市镇 (Difference and Interactivity: The Townships of Suzhou and Huizhou in Ming and Qing Dynasties), *Shehui Kexue* 社会科学 1 (2004): 86-95.

it may be necessary to remain cautious of generalising any particular knowledge or experience to other places. On this condition, a study focusing on local history will contribute to our understanding of China through local experience.

Studies on Chinese Villages

Previous studies on rural China in the twentieth century have concerned a wide variety of topics. From the economic point of view, the roles of market, capital, incentive to work, organisation and management of production have been discussed based on different regional research. The research of Ramon H. Myers on peasants in North China indicated that the market played an important role in improving the economic condition of peasants in the period 1890–1949.⁹ Edward Friedman also mentioned the function of the market in relieving the poverty of farmers in his research on Wugong Village of Hebei Province before 1949.¹⁰ This idea was shared by Jack M. Potter in his work on a village in Hong Kong in the first half of the twentieth century, where he argued that the economic development in the frame of capitalism had positive effects on the rural economy.¹¹

These research projects are consistent with the argument that peasants in a traditional agricultural society will arrange their economic activities efficiently as long as they were given free access to the market. Under this conclusion, there was a presumption that before the Communist Party or the power of the state intruded into rural society, the rural economy had maintained a relatively free and uninterrupted condition in which peasants were able to be self-motivated and find the best solution to organise production factors in order to maximise the family income. From this point of view, the collectivisation movement and a series of institutional arrangements of the Communist government from the 1950s to the 1970s were taken as economically inefficient and a setback to rural development. There is some research

⁸ Skinner has demonstrated that the economic circle of different macro-regions in the pre-industrial period was not synchronised. The rise in one region usually corresponded with the fall of another region. This was not only linked to the geographic issues, but also closely connected with politics such as the alternation of dynasties. See G. William Skinner, 'Presidential Address: The Structure of Chinese History,' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 44, 2 (1985): 271–292.

⁹ Ramon H. Myers, *The Chinese Peasant Economy: Agricultural Development in Hopei and Shantung, 1890–1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

¹⁰ Edward Friedman, *et al.*, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

¹¹ Jack M. Potter, *Capitalism and the Chinese Peasant: Social and Economic Change in a Hong Kong Village* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1968).

on collective production that supports this assumption. Lin Yifu's study concentrated on the failure of the collective system in rural areas before 1978, and he argued that the failure came about because the system deprived peasants of the right to withdraw from the collective and thus led to their widespread demotivation. He further claimed the reform from the production-team system to the household responsibility system was the most important contributor to the growth in output that occurred in the years 1978–1984.¹²

My research demonstrates, however, that the collective system was not as inefficient as these research projects showed, particularly in the case of the village I studied. In a situation where the rural economy was short of technological and financial support, the collective system could intensively mobilise the labour force to improve the infrastructure of agriculture and concentrate on labour-consuming crops and sidelines to improve the economy. It solved the problem of food shortages, which had existed for a long time in the history of the village, and brought overall agricultural growth. But due to tight restrictions on the migration of the rural workforce and the control exerted by the compulsory purchase system in the collective period, the collective system was not able to relieve the growing tension between the increasing population and the available land. The dissolution of this tension depended on the development of industry and the loosening of state control over the rural economy. In this regard, it is in conformity with Philip C.C. Huang's research. In his research on the development of the rural economy in the Lower Yangzi Delta, Huang argued that, due to the huge amount of surplus labour in rural China, access to and prosperity of the market did not help to solve the difficulties face by rural households, which merely led to the involution of the household economy. It was the development of Township and Village Enterprises in this area that finally helped local peasants to tackle their predicament.¹³

On the other hand, the study of rural society followed the same line of thought, i.e. concentrating on the original state of rural society and how it changed under external intervention, especially around 1949. Chinese rural society prior to the early twentieth century

¹²Justin Yifu Lin, 'Collectivisation and China's Agricultural Crisis in 1959–1961,' *Journal of Political Economy*, 98, 6 (1990): 1228–1252, and 'Rural Reforms and Agricultural Growth in China,' *The American Economic Review*, 82 1 (1992): 34–51.

¹³ Philip C. C Huang, *Changjiang Sanjiaozhou Xiaonong Jiating yu Xiangcun Fazhan* 长江三角洲小农家庭与乡村发展 (The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350–1988) (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1992).

was believed to have an original hierarchy and its own networks which originated from the routine activities of people and were usually operated by local elites rather than official authorities. These local elites worked as a mediator between the state and rural society and played a dominant role in local affairs.¹⁴ According to Duara's research, a complicated network, which was termed a 'cultural nexus'¹⁵ constituted by hierarchy organisation and networks of informal relations, formed the cornerstone of village leadership. The local authorities and leaders in rural society derived from this nexus, and the state also relied on the nexus to ensure its governance. It was in the early twentieth century, with the requirement of state making, that the old cultural nexus in villages was given up and replaced with agents.

In addition, the lineage organisation was regarded as another important power at the rural grassroots. Traditional lineage organisations usually protected their members, provided relief in disaster situations, and coordinated public affairs in the village. This link, however, was considered by the Communist Party to be the remains of the feudal regime and thus was broken after 1949. Anita Chan, Jonathan Unger and Richard W. Madsen¹⁶ gave an example of how traditional lineage in a village in Guangdong Province had been reorganised by the work team of CCP after 1949 and how a new power system was developed through a series of political movements in the village. But in their case study, because of the frequent political struggles, villagers soon lost faith in the new leadership and the new authorities in the village were quickly undermined. Hence after the dissolution of the collective system, while the traditional lineage links had disappeared, the political organisations established after 1949 were loosened as well. However, there are also some different stories. Han Min found that, in a village of northern Anhui Province, the identity of lineage was revived after the reform in 1978;¹⁷ and the research of Potters showed that, in spite of the furious revolution and the frequent political campaigns, the deep kinship structure in some villages near to Hong Kong

¹⁴ Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China, 1900–1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

¹⁵ Duara, *Culture, Power and the State*.

¹⁶ Anita Chan, *et al.*, *Chen Village under Mao and Deng*, Expanded and updated edition (Berkeley ; Oxford: University of California Press, 1992).

¹⁷ Han Min 韩敏, *Huiying Gemin yu Biange: Wanbei Licun de Shehui Bianqian yu Yanxu* 回应与变革: 皖北李村的社会变迁与延续 (A Response to Revolution and Reform: Transition and Continuity in Li Village in Northern Anhui Province), trans. Lu Yilong and Xu Xinyu (Nanjing: Jiangsu Renmin Chubanshe, 2007).

and Guangzhou was still maintained.¹⁸ These different conclusions again prove the variety of rural society of China and the necessity for specific research on different regions and communities.

Despite the wide distribution of villages studied by researchers, little attention has been paid to social and economic change in the Huizhou region over the last century, although this region played an important role in Chinese economic history. There are a number of studies on this region dealing with the Ming and Qing Dynasties,¹⁹ when the merchants of the area were influential and earned a great reputation for their hometown; however there are very few research projects that throw light on the changes in this region in the twentieth century. By accident, in 2008, I came across a book compiled by the villager committee of Zhaitan in Jixi County, previously a county of the Huizhou Prefecture. The book is like a modern gazetteer of the village and mentions many primary sources from 1920s preserved in the village archives. This aroused my interest, as I was thinking of doing a research project on village history near to my hometown, but suffering for the want of materials. The existence of these village archives made the project possible, particularly for research concentrating on the rural economy through the twentieth century. This thesis is the result of this study.

Huizhou Prefecture

Well known as the territory of old *Huizhou Fu* (徽州府, Huizhou Prefecture) or *Xin'an* (新安, another name for this region, after its major river, *Xin'an Jiang*) Prefecture, Huizhou region used to consist of six counties in the south of Anhui Province, including Jixi County. In the geography of China, it belongs to the Zhejiang-Anhui Low Mountains and Hills, which covers northwestern Zhejiang Province, southern Anhui Province, and northern Jiangxi Province.²⁰ According to Skinner's division of macroregions, Huizhou is just on the

¹⁸ Sulamith Heins Potter and Jack M. Potter, *China's Peasants: the Anthropology of a Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹⁹ In Western scholarship, an example of comprehensive research on the economy and society of Huizhou region is Zurndorfer's *Change and Continuation in Chinese Local History*, 1989. For relatively recent research, see Zhou Shaoquan 周绍泉, ed., *95 Guoji Huixue Xueshu Taolunhui Lunwenji* 国际徽学学术讨论会论文集 (The Proceedings of 1995 International Conference on Huizhou Study) (Hefei: Anhui Daxue Chubanshe, 1997), and *98 Guoji Huixue Xueshu Taolunhui Lunwenji* 国际徽学学术讨论会论文集 (The Proceedings of 1998 International Conference on Huizhou study) (Hefei: Anhui Daxue Chubanshe, 2000).

²⁰ Zhao Songqiao, *Physical Geography of China* (Beijing: Science Press, 1986), 133.

southwest end of the Lower Yangzi Region (Map 1²¹ and Map 2).²² From a geographical point of view, this region is unusual in two regards.

Map 1. Macroregions of China



²¹ “Socioeconomic Macroregions of China” (c) G. William Skinner, Mark Henderson, Lex Berman. Cambridge: Center for Geographic Analysis, Harvard University, 2013.

²² G. William Skinner, ‘Regional Urbanization in Nineteenth Century China,’ in *The City in Late Imperial China*, ed. G. William Skinner (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1977), 215.

Map 2. Huizhou Prefecture in Qing Dynasty²³



First, in relation to the mountainous landscape, it bred a distinctive language, architecture, ethics, livelihood and social networks. As far as agriculture is concerned, the hilly landscape of Huizhou Region created two problems: a shortage of arable land, and difficulty in gaining access to stable irrigation. If we look down on the region from the air, it is easy to see that the region is divided by wide or narrow, long or short rivers. As most hills are too high to farm, only the scattered valleys and small patches of basins in the mountains can grow crops and also provide a residence for people. Thus local residents have spared no effort in making full use of every tiny piece of land. Almost every piece of land close to a water source, i.e. a stream, river or spring, has been transformed into rice paddy. Where there is difficulty getting access to water, vegetables and upland crops are planted. In this area, it is not surprising to find a single tiny paddy in a narrow valley near a stream, far from any

²³ This map is produced by Xiang Lu.

residence. However, in spite of all such efforts, with modern agricultural technology unavailable, it was almost impossible to support the population through farming alone. Therefore, although agriculture has been primary, it has never been the only way of making a living in this region.

On the other hand, the relatively separated and enclosed living environment also cultivates a culture of lineage. According to Shiba Yoshinobu, the development of Huizhou corresponds to several migration movements in Chinese history, particularly in the late Han dynasty, late Jin dynasty and late Tang dynasty.²⁴ Most movements were to avoid wars and conflicts in the furious succession of dynasties. To resist the risks and dangers posed by high mountains and indigenous people, these early migrants, usually moving with large families, tended to stay together with their family members, and thus developed close familial relationships. Based on this link of lineage, a series of activities aimed at the consolidation of its members was gradually formed, such as building the ancestry hall, compiling the family tree, making internal rules to regulate the behaviour of members, and holding ceremonies to worship common ancestors. From the sixteenth century, most lineage activities were organised and managed under the leadership of the ancestry hall.²⁵ The ancestry hall was not only a place for worshipping ancestors and discussing lineage businesses, but played a role in the daily life of its members. Before 1949, ancestry halls usually owned considerable amounts of land and property, which was farmed by and under the care of tenants. The rent paid by these tenants was not only used to pay for the maintenance of the hall building and to cover the cost of worship ceremonies, but also to support public affairs and philanthropy. For example, in the case of famine or a disaster, the ancestry hall often provided relief to ordinary members in association with its wealthy members.

Second, unlike other mountainous areas in China, Huizhou is adjacent to the most developed area of China, the Yangzi Delta. By following the waterways in the mountains, although it was often dangerous, people could get access to the populous and wealthy plain

²⁴ Shiba Yoshinobu, *Songdai Jiangnan Jingjishi Yanjiu* 宋代江南经济史研究 (Research on the Economic History of Jiangnan in Song Dynasty), trans. Fangjian (Nanjing: Jiangsu Renmin Chubanshe, 2001), 408–415.

²⁵ Ye Xian'en 叶显恩, 'Huizhou he Zhujiang Sanjiaozhou Zongfazhi Bijiao Yanjiu,' 徽州和珠江三角洲宗法制比较研究 (A Comparative Study on the Lineage System in Huizhou and Zhujiang Delta), in *95 Guoji Huixue Xueshu Taolunhui Lunwenji*, 1–20.

area of Jiangnan. Through the dense water net along the Xin'an River, which originates from Xiuning County, flowing eastward across She County to current Hangzhou area and being incorporated into Qiantang River and then out to the East Sea, it was possible to reach the most commercialised region in Zhejiang Province within a few days. In the northwest part, through the Hui River, travelling by boat from Jixi county to the western Jinde County and Jing County, people could get into Qingyi Jiang and then reach the city of Wuhu on the bank of Yangzi River. Through this route, all of the towns and cities along the Yangzi River could be accessed.

Before the 1930s, when modern transportation had not yet been established in Huizhou area, the above water networks were the main way for local people to communicate with the external world. Products of the region such as timber, paper, ink and ink stone were transported to the markets outside by the rivers; necessities such as grain and oil were also imported by them. Most significantly, it provided people with a way out of the mountains so that they could get involved in businesses outside. For most ordinary families, sending adolescent children to the cities and towns outside to learn how to do business was a promising way of relieving their economic difficulties. These people formed one of the most influential merchant groups in Chinese history, whose influence peaked in the late Ming and Qing Dynasty, especially through the salt trade. Since the mid-nineteenth century, although the major group of Hui Merchants has generally declined, small traders and storekeepers still spread over the middle and lower reaches of the Yangzi River.

Zhaitan Village

Zhaitan Village is in the western end of Ji Xi County, 38 kilometres away from the county town, adjacent to Jingde County in the north and She County in the south. The whole county is divided into two parts by the Yu Ling mountain. The north part is called *Ling Bei* (岭北, north of Yu Ling) while the south is called *Ling Nan* (岭南, south of Yu Ling). Zhaitan Village lies in the north part. The division of the country into two parts is not only a geographical issue, but also concerns differences in economic condition. Though both are surrounded by high mountains, the northern part has a relatively large basin. This is reflected in the village name *Zhaitan* (宅坦), which means 'residing in a flat field'. Compared with the

southern part, the basin had a great advantage, providing more arable land and better irrigation. Thus, in economic terms, the condition of the north was better than that of the south until the recent decades.

Map 3. Zhaitan Village in Lower Yangzi Area²⁶



This is not to say that the land in the northern part is truly sufficient for its people, as the basin is shared by many villages. Take Zhaitan as an example, in spite of the 7,800 *mu* land and hills in total, the village only has 800 *mu* arable land. With a population of over 1,500, each person on average only cultivates less than 0.5 *mu* of land. Steep and far from the village, the majority of the hills of the village generally remain undeveloped. Before 1949, these hills had been the property of the ancestry hall and were usually enclosed for growing trees. During the collective period, the hillsides near to the village were transformed into terraces for farming. In the 1970s, some of the hills were reclaimed as tea tree plantations, but from the 1990s, these plantation and terraces were gradually abandoned, partly because of the policy of *Tuigeng Huanlin* (退耕还林, return the farmland to the forestry),²⁷ and partly because the economic benefit was minimal.²⁸

²⁶ Source: Google map.

²⁷ The policy was carried out from 1999 and aimed at improving the ecology in rural area. According to the regulations released in 2003, land that is at risk of soil erosion, desertification or low and unstable production should be returned to forest. See *Tuigeng Huanlin Tiaoli* 退耕还林条例

There is no river within the territory of the village. Villagers used to obtain drinking water from two wells, both over 1,000 years old. Both wells were called *Longjing* (龙井, Dragon Well), and the southern Longjing is believed to be the origin of the village. In addition to the wells, ponds have been the major water sources for irrigation and domestic use. There are over 170 ponds in Zhaitan, which between them are able to irrigate 80 per cent of the total land. Some of the ponds are time-honoured as well. Take the *Muqian Tang* (慕前塘, pond for admiring forefathers) as an example: it was listed in the county gazetteer compiled in Jiaqing Period,²⁹ 200 years ago, and was said to have been the result of cooperation between nine sub-branches of one branch of the whole family. This suggests that Zhaitan has a long history of cooperation on water systems, possibly starting from the birth of village.

The example of *Muqian Tang* also highlights the fact that Zhaitan is a lineage village. Hu is the surname of the majority of male villagers. In 2000, out of the 501 households of Zhaitan administrative village,³⁰ 423 households were surnamed Hu. According to my fieldwork, during which I visited all of the natural villages in this area—except for the Dong and Ye families, which form two natural villages on the fringe of Zhaitan—other families are scattered among households surnamed Hu. Apart from those who immigrated after 1949, these families are said to be the descendants of people who worked for the ancestry hall. Their position was lower than that of the Hu family, and they had a separate ancestry hall on the southern edge of the village in which they could worship their ancestors together.³¹ As for the Hu family, although there is no certain evidence about the particular time that the family arrived, it is certain that by the mid-fifteenth century the family had already been developed to a considerable scale. According to its family tree, the Hu family was divided into 5

(Regulations on Conversions of Farmland to Forests), issued 14 December 2002, http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2003/content_62531.htm, accessed 31 December 2013.

²⁸ Though this region has been well known for tea production, villagers in Zhaitan told me that their hills are not suitable for growing tea. The quality of their tea could not compete with a village nearby, Jinshan, which is located in a hill west to Zhaitan and whose tea plantations are on higher mountains covered by mists. For this reason, after the demise of the collective system, the villagers of Zhaitan gradually abandoned their tea plantations.

²⁹ See 'Jiaqing Jixi Xiangzhi,' 嘉庆绩溪县志 (Gazetteer of Jixi County of Jiaqing Period), in *Zhongguo Difangzhi Jicheng* 中国地方志集成 (Nanjing: Zhongguo Guji Chubanshe, 1998), 383.

³⁰ The administrative village is usually composed of several natural villages. In this thesis, except specified, Zhaitan or Zhaitan Village only indicates the natural village of Zhaitan.

³¹ This information was obtained from elderly members of the Hu family, who told me that before the 'liberation' (1949) these aliens could not eat at the same table as people from Hu family since the former were regarded as lower.

branches at that time, and each branch started to build their own ancestry hall. In the seventeenth century, it seems that the family had developed further, both in population and economically. In 1622, the family started to raise money to build a general ancestral hall for all of the family members. The building was a grand wooden structure with three courtyards and 100 pillars; it occupied over 7,000 square metres, including the annexe.³² Before 1949, this ancestry hall, Qinxun Tang (亲逊堂), constituted the actual leadership of Zhaitan. The meeting minutes and account books of Qinxun Tang show that it was involved in arranging worship, communicating with the government and officials, and providing relief and allowances to members who were in difficulty. In addition, it was also a place to punish members who had violated the rules.

Sources and Methodology

The evidence in the thesis comes from two sources: one is archival documents, and the other is the informants living in and outside of Zhaitan Village. The former provides the majority of the data and information relative to the research, while the latter provides specific stories to supplement the written records and further clarification on the obscure presentation of some of the manuscripts. All of the primary sources were collected during fieldwork in China in the years 2010, 2011 and 2013.

The economic data for south Anhui Province before 1949, and documents about the Land Reform in this area in early 1950s, were collected from Xuancheng City Archives, Jixi County Archives and Anhui Provincial Library in September and November of 2010, and September of 2011. Most of the other data and information was collected from Zhaitan Village Archives. In October of 2010, August and September of 2011, and March of 2013 I spent four months in the village, searching for primary sources in the village archives and visiting local residents to cross-check the manuscripts and to better understand the local community.

The Zhaitan village archives preserve materials spanning from late sixteenth century to the present. Though a good deal of the collection is genealogy books, the archives particularly

³² See Hu Zhaobi 胡昭璧 *et al.*, ed., *Longjing Chunqiu* 龙井春秋 (The Spring and Autumn of the Dragon Well), unpublished book (2000), 93.

store a large amount of manuscripts from the twentieth century. Among them, the collection concerning the collective period from 1955 to 1978 is a highlight. It encompasses a wide range of information on demography, collective accounting, production plan and arrangement, work points and the income of individual families, and the meeting minutes of the collective leadership. Some of the data is complete and continuous over the years. The collections after the Reform of 1978 can be divided into two phases: the years of 1978–1992, and the phase after 1992. The former concerns the whole process of the Reform, beginning in 1978, including the minutes of meetings of the new village management and statistics concerning agriculture and other economic sectors over the years. However, the content of second phase is much less than that of the former period. There are only scattered materials on birth control and village affairs in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century, which were recorded incompletely and intermittently. This seems to contradict the common-sense assumption that the most recent recordings should be the most complete and abundant since they are nearest to the present. The explanation for this might be that from 1949, the management and statistical work of the village was taken over by the village cadres, following the instructions and directives from the government. In the collective period, due to the planned economy and the strict controls over rural society, the cadres had to make careful recordings of every aspect of rural economy and life. With the relaxation of controls on the villages and peasants in the 1990s, the workload of village cadres was reduced as well, and the lessening of records for Zhaitan reflects this change of duty of village cadres.

In addition to the documents of the PRC period, the village archives also preserve considerable manuscripts from the early twentieth century. Serving as the chief management of Zhaitan, the Ancestry Hall left considerable records of their activities from the 1920s to the 1940s, particularly the account books and minutes of meetings on lineage management. The former details the financial condition, i.e. income and expenditure, of Ancestry Hall in the years 1924–1949, which helps the researcher to analyse the output and rent of land and the price of various necessities in different years. The latter records the routine management of the ancestry hall and discussions about public affairs between 1933 and 1947, which helps improve understanding of the operation of the lineage community and the contemporary situation of village. It also contains original documents about land transactions and tax

payments in the 1940s, which provides evidence of the burden carried by individual households at the time.³³

As far as the Zhaitan Village Archives are concerned, the collections relating to the twentieth century are unusual and remarkable. Although Huizhou area is well known for its abundant collection of historical documents,³⁴ the documents from recent periods, in particular the latest century, are rarely mentioned and noticed. This is probably because statistics and official documents from the twentieth century are much easier to obtain compared with previous periods, and thus historians do not have to rely on materials from the grass-roots to conduct their research. However, for researchers who are interested in the details of rural life and its development, these materials provide straightforward information. On the other hand, however, since the manuscripts provide detailed and sometimes very specific information, communication with local residents has provided me with a deep understanding of a broad range of aspects of rural life and local society.

My first visit to Zhaitan was in September 2010, when I stayed for one month. Through an introduction from one of my cousins who works in the City Government of Xuancheng, I met the head of Zhaitan Village, Hu Weiping, for the first time in Jixi County Archives and obtained his permission to visit Zhaitan and stay to conduct my research. Due to the

³³ These materials were discovered and presented first by the present head of Zhaitan Village, Hu Weiping, in 1999. Hu is the first head of Zhaitan to be elected directly by all the villagers, in 1999. He is considered as an educated person in the local area because of his ability to write and communicate with governmental staff. As a shrewd person, he saw the opportunity that would be brought with this historical collection. He managed to apply for support from the county archives to file the materials and to set up the village archives to store them. At the same time, he organised a committee to compile a book to advertise Zhaitan with the information extracted from the archives. The book was circulated to the social science academia in East China and attracted attention from different universities in China and even overseas. With the visits of researchers and students, Zhaitan has become the base of several universities for students' summer fieldwork. This brings the village and Mr. Hu reputation and honours which in turn have been transferred into a kind of capital. Set as one of the examples of New Rural Construction (新农村建设, *Xin Nongcun Jianshe*) of Anhui Province, Zhaitan has enjoyed privileges in obtaining funding for village construction recently since then.

³⁴ It was in the 1950s that the Huizhou Documents (徽州文书, *Huizhou Wenshu*) were exposed on a large scale for the first time and were noticed by academia. During the Land Reform, tens of thousands of manuscripts concerning the contracts of transactions, the deeds of land and other original certificates were discovered in the houses of local residents, especially the landlords and merchants, as well as the ancestry halls. These documents spanned nearly 1,000 years from the Song Dynasty to the Nationalist Government period, but the collections of Ming and Qing Dynasties have been particularly highlighted by social and economic historians. About the discovery and use of Huizhou Documents, see Bian Li 卞利, 'Huixue de Xingcheng he Fazhan,' 徽学的形成和发展 (The Formation and Development of Hui Studies), Forward to *Mingqing Shehui Yanjiu* 明清社会研究 (A Study on the Society of Ming and Qing Dynasties) (Hefei: Anhui Daxue Chubanshe, 2004), 1-26.

circulation of *Longjing Chunqiu*, Zhaitan was a place of some note in academia, particularly in the field of social science in Eastern China, and Hu Weiping was obviously practised in receiving students like me. As I was with my husband, who was also doing research on the countryside, a room was arranged for us in an inn in the township of Shangzhuang, one mile away from Zhaitan.³⁵ Hu Weiping also designated his brother Hu Weihai, a former village cadre, as our guide and interpreter. During this fieldwork, besides research in the village archives, I was also taken to some local families to conduct interviews. This first experience of interviewing taught me two lessons. First, it is necessary to get as closely involved as possible with the local community. Living outside of the village was a major disadvantage. It restricted my contact with villagers and made me always an outsider to local life. As a result, the information that I could obtain was usually simplified and subject to the questions I asked. But life in the countryside is quite complicated: to a stranger without relevant knowledge and experience, if the only information he receives is responses to questions he has asked, which have been designed in advance, his knowledge must be very limited and he will not be able to gain any information beyond the scope of his questions. For example, without living with peasants, it would be hard to know how peasants allocate their workforce and maintain their social networks, and why they make these decisions. And one would not really understand why the labour force made such a difference to the economic condition of families in a pre-modern agricultural society if he has never witnessed how peasants worked in their fields.

Second, it is important to master local culture and customs. Language was another major difficulty during my stay in the village. The dialect in Huizhou region is very different from that of the surrounding area. Despite slight intra-regional variations, people within the

³⁵ At the beginning, I planned to stay in a family within the village so that I could get to know local people as soon as possible. However, we were informed that it was not convenient for us to stay with a family. Later I realised that it might have been because of an old superstition prevalent in this area which says that accommodating a couple will bring bad fortune to the host family unless the couple sleeps separately in the house. I consulted some local people about this belief and found that in some area, not only strangers, even the married daughter and the son-in-law are not allowed to stay in one room in the parents' house. At first I thought it might be connected with the traditional attitude to sex, but according to a paper by Ye Xian'en, it might arise from the strict lineage system in Huizhou Area. He said that at the beginning, the early migrant families in Huizhou area built the villages based on the principle of 'one lineage, one village'. Thus, all of them tended to be single lineage villages. Aliens were not allowed to be accommodated within the village. And the married daughter and her husband, as they were not considered to be members of the wife's family, therefore, were not allowed to stay in one room in the wife's family. Further reading, please see Ye Xian'en, 'Huizhou he Zhujiang Sanjiaozhou Zongfazhi Bijiao Yanjiu,' 1-20.

region can generally understand each other, but for outsiders, it is not at all intelligible. The younger generation, of course, speak Mandarin, but most old people, particularly those over 70 years old with no experience of communicating with the external world, speak only the dialect. For this reason, conversations could only be conducted in the presence of an interpreter. This, firstly, further restricted my contact with local people, and secondly put me at a disadvantage in the interview. A general concern was whether the interpreter would translate the words of interviewees to me faithfully. It often happened that after the interpreter had translated my questions to the interviewee, they talked and discussed for long time, and I could not enter the conversation until they stopped. When I turned to the interpreter and enquired about the content of their conversation, I was only given a very short answer. In addition, I found that my interpreter sometimes deliberately concealed information that he thought was inappropriate for me to know. As a former cadre trained by the Communist Party, he was a man of integrity, but that did not prevent him from being cautious at the same time.

For the above reasons, my communication with local people during the first fieldwork was limited. But this fieldwork helped to establish a connection with the village and particular families, which facilitated the work afterwards. Learning from the experience of 2010, in August 2011 when I went back to Zhaitan for the second fieldwork, I went alone in order to make sure that I could stay in the village. I visited the wife of my former guide Hu Weihai, who passed away in the spring of 2011, as soon as I arrived in the village. I was welcomed and immediately invited to stay with her. Thus, I entered into the village and had full access to the families in Zhaitan. Mrs. Hu then took over the position of her late husband and became my guide and interpreter from then on.

During my second stay, I managed to reach a different stratum of rural life. I helped Mrs. Hu with handwork at home, such as producing toys and artificial flowers, which was a popular source of extra income amongst local families, worked on her farm, and tried to get along with her neighbours. In this way, I earned her trust and quickly became close to her. With her help, I entered into her relationships within Zhaitan and other villages, and became acquainted with many other villagers. Then I was invited to family dinners, local celebration banquets and the secret worship at the local Christian family church. I was even requested by an old woman to help her draft an application for subsidies from the county government,

which I did, and also accompanied her to the county civil administration bureau to meet the official and submit the application. All of the work and contacts provided me with valuable experience and knowledge about agricultural production and rural life. And the visits to neighbouring villages and the southern part of Jixi County also helped me to fit Zhaitan into a larger picture of landscape and economy.

The lessons learned from the previous interviews also prompted me to use a more flexible method to conduct interviews in the countryside. I mainly relied on casual conversations to collect information, rather than conducting formal interviews, since many people were not used to being interviewed and were not confident in their presentation. These conversations usually occurred in routine visits in the evening or on some occasional meetings. When I did carry out formal interviews, I largely used a notebook instead of a recorder to record their responses, because I found the latter usually made the interviewee nervous and cautious. Only on a few occasions, when I had to record more details and the interviewee was confident enough to make a presentation—for example, when I interviewed the local entrepreneurs—I used the recorder with their permission.

The first and second fieldworks provide the majority of the information used in this thesis. In March 2013, after finishing most of the first draft of the thesis, I visited Zhaitan for a third time to cross-check the information recorded in the archival materials and look for more details of the collective organisation in 1960s and 1970s. This research lasted for one month and focused on conducting interviews.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis has six chapters. Besides the first introductory chapter, and the concluding chapter, the main text is made up of four chapters based on three stages: the Nationalist Government period of 1927–1949, the collective period of 1949–1978 and the reform period of post–1978.

After the first, introductory chapter, the second chapter outlines the general condition of the household economy in Zhaitan before 1949 and at the same time highlights the effects that the external world exerted on the economy through the experience of philanthropic activity in the village in 1940s.

The third chapter details the progress of collectivisation in the 1950s. The movement had been embryonic during the Land Reform, was initiated in the Cooperative Movement and climaxed in the People's Commune Movement, but then was ended up with the tragedy of the Great Famine. I evaluate the consequences, particularly the economic results, of these movements from the perspectives of both the household and the collective. I find that although the collective productivity has been criticised as low-efficiency for wasting labour and its unreasonable labour rewards system, the collective scheme might have been necessary for a village like Zhaitan, given the fact that agricultural technology was still underdeveloped and agrarian capital was scarce. The collective system is able to centralise resources, particularly to mobilise the massive labour force to quickly improve the production of crops.

The fourth chapter involves the second stage of the collective period, 1963–1978. After a short amendment to the aggressive Great Leap Forward, from 1962 until 1978 the Commune system was implemented in a relatively moderate way. A three-tier management system was established and remained generally unchanged in spite of the everlasting political movements and struggles in this period. Over this period, the collective system on the one hand retained its advantages in mobilising labour and continued to make progress in the production of main crops, especially in grain production; on the other hand, it faced the growing tension between the population and limited resources, especially in the late 1970s, due to restrictions on commodity exchange and labour migration.

The fifth chapter focuses on the Reform from 1978 to 1992. In this chapter, I use the data from Zhaitan to examine the outcomes of reform, including the results of the Household Responsibility System (HRS). HRS has been regarded as one of the most significant practices of the reform, but my research reveals that it was not the main source of achievement in Zhaitan in the years after 1978 and it did not make a big difference to the livelihood of peasants. What really mattered was the reform of the compulsory purchase system by the government and the resumption of rural industry and market. The former offered peasants further autonomy in decisions about household economic arrangements, and the latter sped up the transfer of the workforce from agriculture to non-agricultural sectors. This trend seems to mark a return to the original mode of household economy, i.e. the combination of working in

agriculture and working outside in non-agricultural sectors, but it brought much improved living conditions.

The last chapter summarises the course of the transition over the 80 years studied in this thesis. I also comment on the effects of external interventions since the 1940s on the household economy, based on the evaluations in the previous chapters.

Chapter 2

Stability and Disruption: Livelihood before 1949

This chapter concerns the livelihood of the village of Zhaitan before 1949. Before 1949, modern agricultural technology had not yet been largely introduced to or widely applied in the countryside. Except those areas close to industrial centres, for example, the countryside in south Jiangsu Province,³⁶ the majority of rural areas still maintained the livelihood that had existed for hundreds of years.³⁷ On the other hand, the power of the state in rural areas was still limited to the collection of taxes and requests for labour. The government was rarely involved in village affairs, which were usually under the control of lineage organisations and local elites.³⁸ Therefore, peasants usually had to rely on their local links and become self-organised to tackle any difficulties or uncertainty that might arise in life. This situation was also applicable to villagers in Zhaitan.

By 1949, the household economy of Zhaitan was largely determined by the geographic features, i.e. the landscape and location, of the village. Farming had been the most significant method of generating income for the family economy, but its output was limited by the area of arable land. As the village is surrounded by mountains, the land suitable for crop growing is limited. For rice cropping, irrigation was a major problem. Given these circumstances, and benefiting from the location of the region, people formed intentions to move out of the mountains to go into business. This gradually formed a commercial tradition among the villagers, and became an essential component of the economy of some families. Nevertheless, by 1949, beside the income generated by it, this tradition did not bring fundamental change to life inside the village, though some trace of influence from outside the village was reflected

³⁶ Ma, 'Economic Growth in the Lower Yangzi Region of China,' 355-392. Kung et al., 'Human Capital, Migration, and a 'Vent', ' 117-141.

³⁷ From the 1920s, although some official and non-official institutions started the experiments in transforming the rural economy and society, these were just experiments and were generally limited to certain places. The most influential experiments included the practice in Dingxian Hebei Province, launched by Yan Yangchu from the late 1920s to the early 1930s, and the practice in Zouping Shandong Province, launched by Liang Shuming in the early 1930s. In the south of Jiangsu Province, there were also experiments aiming at improving the agriculture and silkworm raising. See Fei Xiaotong, *Jiangcun Jingji*, 172-198; and Sigrid Schmalzer, 'Breeding a Better China: Pigs, Practices, and Place in a Chinese County, 1929-1937,' *The Geographical Review*, 92 (2002): 1-22.

³⁸ About the discussion on the role of local elite in Chinese society, see Joseph Esherick and Mary Backus Rankin, ed., *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance* (Berkeley: University Press, 1990).

by the style of some new houses built there in the 1930s.³⁹ At the village level, the ancestral hall was the most significant authority. The meeting minutes and accounting information of the ancestral hall revealed that it was not only responsible for worship and ceremonies related to the lineage, but was also involved in providing the relief to lineage members facing difficulties.

Despite this assistance, by 1949 the majority of households were impoverished and only able to maintain very basic living standards. By 1937, this economic mode presented the characteristic of being both steady and fragile. Subject to the limitation of available resources and undeveloped technology, the villagers were vulnerable to natural disasters. In addition, they suffered from the external intrusion from time to time. From 1927 to 1949, the most noticeable intrusion was the wars. From the Sino–Japanese War to the Civil War between the Nationalist Government and the Communist Party, the overall deterioration of the national situation and the heavy burden of the military led to the worsening of the economy of the village. During the Sino–Japanese War, although the mountains protected the region from direct invasion by Japanese troops, the war made supplies of food and other necessities more difficult to obtain and afford. During the Civil War, under the rule of the Nationalist Government, the village suffered the heavy burden of taxes and irregular levies, and also faced losses to the workforce, to support the military action of the government. The influence of this disruption was reflected by the frequent implementation of a philanthropic event, *Pingtiao* (平糶, to sell the rice at a price lower than the market during the inflation or starvation), in the 1940s. In this chapter, I will take one such event in 1945 as an example to illustrate the influence of the war and how local society got self-organised to relieve the difficulty.

This chapter has eight sections. The first section is about the landscape and the local resources of the village; the second and third sections introduce rice cultivation, the irrigation problem and crop rotation, as well as the labour arrangement around the rotation; the fourth section concerns the output of the agriculture, particularly the rice production, and the

³⁹ For example, the new house of the head of the village presented an obviously different style from the traditional local houses. This house had larger, round windows in the lower position of the wall which was distinctive from traditional windows. The latter were narrow and small, and usually set near to the top of the wall for the sake of security.

allocation of the output; The fifth concerns the sidelines, and the sixth is about the commercial tradition of the village. In the seventh section, I illustrate the disruption that local villagers faced and how they tried to deal with the difficulties; the last section is the conclusion.

Landscape and Resources: Land and Hills

Land was one of the main resources for production and the major means of investment, particularly in a society where agriculture was still the base of the economy. It was not only one of the main sources of wealth accumulation, but also the final destination of the accumulated wealth. In the Lower Yangzi area, as rice was the major grain crop as well as the crucial food staple, the amount of paddy fields or land that was able to get access to irrigation played a key role in the family economy. In this situation, the plain area always had the advantage over the hilly area in the development of agriculture because, at a time when there was no modern power such as steam, gas or electricity, it was hard to lift the water up and also to hold it in the fields. For this reason, the quantity and quality of land determined the economic condition of a family, even a region.

For example, although Jixi county was known for *Diji Minpin* (地瘠民贫, barren land and poor people) because of the high mountains within its territory,⁴⁰ the economy of the county differed between the northern and southern part. The northern part was, relatively, wealthier than the south because it contained larger area of land that was in a basin (see Figure 1).⁴¹ Therefore, as one of the villages in the north of the county, Zhaitan was in a better economic condition compared with the villages nestling at the foot or on the hillsides of the mountains. Evidence of this can be seen in the scale of the ancestral hall; as the most significant public building in the village, the scale and interior of the ancestral hall was a sign of the economic strength of a single lineage. According to the record of the village gazetteer, the structure of the ancestral hall of Zhaitan, Qinxun Tang, was built in 1622–1627 and boasted 100 wooden pillars and occupied over 1,722 square metres, excluding the yards.⁴²

⁴⁰ See 'Fengsu,' 风俗 (Customs), in *Jiaqing Jixi Xianzhi*, 364.

⁴¹ See 'Fuyi,' 赋役 (Taxes and Levies), in *Jiaqing Jixi Xianzhi*, 402.

⁴² The structures of Qinxun Tang were entirely detached in the early 1990s, and two new buildings were constructed on the original site afterwards for the use of an elementary school. Today, all of the

The whole project was managed by a committee of 36 members, and the funds were raised through donations from lineage members.⁴³ This not only suggested the effective management of the village's lineage organisation, but also indicated that the economy of the village was good enough to support such a big project. Considering the fact that it was not until the mid-Qing Dynasty that the people of Zhaitan started to conduct business outside on a large scale, at that time the economy of the village must have been based on the land and farming. In contrast, all the villages at the edge of the basin, i.e. at the foot of the mountain or on the hillsides of the mountains, were in a disadvantageous condition, and their ancestral halls were much smaller, with simple interiors.⁴⁴

Figure 1. Fields in the north of Jixi County, photographed on 7 August 2011



side chambers have been demolished and are occupied by villagers' houses. Only two main yards have remained, and the remains of the stone sculptures and yards did suggest the scale of the original building.

⁴³ 'Hu Jingxing Tang Zuzong Bu,' 胡敬星堂祖宗簿 (Family Tree of Hu's Jingxing Tang), in *Lishi Dang'an* 历史档案, Vol.L3-14, preserved in Zhaitan Village Archives.

⁴⁴ This information was obtained from the conversation with Bao Tingshun on 1 September 2011, who was 98 years old, living in Baojia Village, one of the small villages on the hillside to the northeast of Zhaitan. I also obtained this impression from the visits to Ruichuan and Jinshan in 2011. The latter is a small village in the mountains to the west of Zhaitan.

In spite of the relative advantage of available land, with the growth of the population the amount of land in Zhaitan gradually became insufficient to support its villagers. There was no formal and official investigation carried out to gather exact information on the land and its ownership in this area before 1949, but we can gather some evidence from individual receipts of the Land Report of 1942. The investigation held in the early 1950s for Land Reform also provides some information on the condition of the village in terms of land. In the following section I will examine both kinds of evidences, one by one.

During the governance of the Nationalist Government, there was one land report movement (*Tudi Chenbao Yundong*, 土地陈报运动) in the 1930s, aimed at obtaining exact information on land and the tax burden involved. This movement was carried out first in Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces from 1929, and then extended to other provinces.⁴⁵ In Zhaitan, the report was implemented in 1937. However, this progress was soon interrupted by the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War and was not resumed until 1942, when the government was under huge financial pressure from the war.⁴⁶ As a method of investigating and confirming the ownership, location and amount of land and then ascertaining the tax standard applied to it, the land report was supposed to increase the financial income of the government and equalise the tax burden.⁴⁷ The two reports have left some clues about the condition of land-ownership in Zhaitan. The 1937 land report left an uncompleted draft on the land information owned by the ancestral hall of Qinxun Tang. It recorded the size, the location, the names of tenants, the lease type and the rent of the land (Figure 2).⁴⁸ In the 1942 report, 24 receipts have remained, which were issued to 8 individual farm owners and

⁴⁵ See Zheng Qidong 郑起东, 'Guomin Zhengfu Tudi Chenbao Yanjiu,' 国民政府土地陈报研究 (The Research on the Land Report of the Nationalist Government), *Gujin Nongye* 古今农业, 1 (2008): 96-108.

⁴⁶ See 'Disanci Quanguo Canzheng Huiyi Dahui Xuanya,' 第三次全国财政会议大会宣言 (The Statement of the Third National Finance Conference), in *Tianfu Gaizhi Faling Huibian* 田赋改制法令汇编, Vol.1, No.1, preserved in Anhui Provincial Library.

⁴⁷ See 'Anhui Sheng Zhengfu Wei Juban Tudi Chenbao Gao Minzhong Shu,' 安徽省政府为举办土地陈报告民众书 (A Bulletin of Anhui Provincial Government on Holding the Land Report), and 'Anhui Sheng Zhengfu Bugao,' 安徽省政府布告 (Declaration of Anhui Provincial Government), in *Tianfu Gaizhi Faling Huibian*, Vol. 3. No.1.

⁴⁸ See 'Hu Qinxun Tang Tianmu Bianhao Caobu,' 胡亲逊堂田亩编号草簿 (Draft Report on the Land Numbered of Qinxun Tang), in *Lishi Dang'an*, Vol. L3-4.

recorded the name of the head of each household and the type and size of the land in certain sections (Figure 3).⁴⁹

Both materials convey the information that the land owned by local households was highly fragmented and scattered. Take the receipts of one owner, Hu Shangyi, as an example. The archives of the village have preserved 6 receipts titled with the name of Hu Shangyi. A receipt issued on 14 December 1942 reveals that Hu Shangyi owned 8 pieces of land within Section 14 (see Figure 3). The largest piece was 0.52 *mu* and the smallest one was only 0.03 *mu*. Among all his 21 pieces of land, located in five different sections, the largest one was 2.333 *mu*, while the average size of a parcel of land was 0.467 *mu*. For another household, named Hu Shangren, his 29 land parcels were distributed across 9 sections, and the average size of these pieces of land was only 0.47 *mu*. On all of the 24 receipts, there were 93 pieces of land registered. The total area of these land parcels was 45.648 *mu*, and the average size was 0.491 *mu*. When we turn to the land owned by Qinxun Tang, it was almost the same. According to the Land Report draft of 1937, there were 175 land parcels owned by Qinxun Tang. The total area of the land was 80.504 *mu*, and the average size of each land parcel was 0.46 *mu*, which is quite close to the data of 1942.

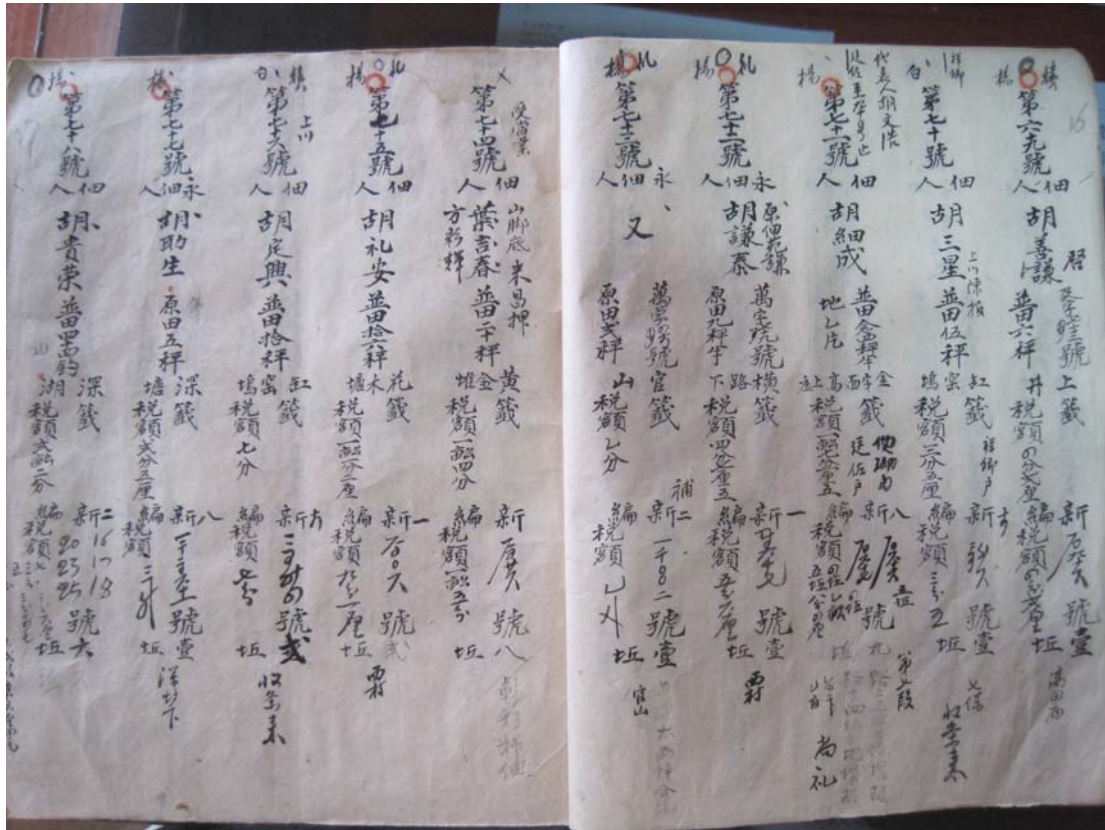
Of course, these materials did not apply to every single household; they provided only partial information on the land size and distribution of the village, and we must be careful not to generalise this evaluation to the whole village. However, according to the Ownership Certificates of Land and House Property⁵⁰ of 1951, preserved in the archives of Jixi County, the only complete set of data incorporating all the properties of each household in the village, and also the closest to the pre-1949 period, land fragmentation in this area was a basic fact.

⁴⁹ According to the Land Report, all of the land in one area was divided into hundreds of sections and numbered. About the receipts, see '1937-1943 Tudi Chenbao Shouju 1937-1943,' 土地陈报收据 (Receipts on the Land Report), in *Lishi Dang'an*, Vol. L4-5.

⁵⁰ See '1951 Jixi Xian Di'er Qu Zhaitan Cun Tudi Fangchan Suoyou Zheng,' 绩溪县第二区宅坦村土地房产所有证 (1951 Ownership Certificates of Land and House Property of Zhaitan Village in Jixi County), Vol.117-121, preserved in Jixi County Archives. These certificates were issued in October 1951 as the result of the Land Reform. But, as the first batch of villages involved in the Land Reform in the county, the Land Reform of Zhaitan actually started in October 1950 and ended in November 1950. See Xu Keyuan 徐可远, 'Jixi Xian Tudi Gaige Dashi Ji,' 绩溪县土地改革大事记 (Land Reform Memorabilia of Jixi County), in *Jixi Wenshi Ziliao* 绩溪文史资料, Vol.3, ed. ZhongguoRenmin Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi Jixixian Weiyuanhui Wenshi Ziliao Weiyuanhui 中国人民政治协商会议绩溪县委员会文史资料委员会 (1993), 43-50.

The size of most land parcels was less than 0.5 *mu* and, although the land owned by each person could reach 1 *mu* in total, it was always composed of several tiny, broken land parcels.

Figure 2 - Sample: Draft Report on Land Owned by Qinxun Tang, copied by courtesy of Zhaitan Village Archives



All of the evidence proves that land fragmentation and highly dispersed land ownership made the accumulation of land very slow and difficult. Compared with those landlords in the plains area, who often possessed over 10,000 *mu* of land,⁵¹ before 1949 in this area, there were seldom large land owners. As there is no record of the land owned by each individual family in Zhaitan, we can only remark on the general condition of land in the county. Table 1 shows the land ownership of different classes in Jixi County before the Land Reform took place.

⁵¹ See Zhang Youyi 章有义, *Zhongguo Jindai Nongyeshi Ziliao* 中国近代农业史资料 (The Historical Data of Agriculture in Early Modern China), Vol.3 (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 1957), 693–700.

Figure 3- Sample: Receipt of Land Report, copied by courtesy of Zhaitan Village Archives

計開

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地除將證件驗明發還外特給收據以憑請領營業執照此據

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11	11	山 田	山 地	山 田		
	四分六厘七毫	五厘四毫	五厘	五厘		
第 1136 號	第 1137 號	第 1139 號	第 1138 號	第 1135 號	地 址	畝 數
		11	11	山 田		
		五厘	五厘	四分六厘七毫		

中華民國二十一年十二月十日
主任

According to the table, the middle and poor peasants were the largest peasant groups. They accounted for 81.14 per cent of the households and owned 49.54 per cent of the land. On average, each middle peasant household had 5.02 *mu* of land, and each poor peasant household had 1.59 *mu*. The landlords accounted for 2.79 per cent of the households in the county, while owning up to 21.16 per cent of the total land. However, in spite of the unbalanced percentage, the actual land owned by each landlord was only 36.82 *mu* on average. Considering that people with better economic conditions usually had more chance of getting married and bringing up children, landlords often had larger families with more members, so

the gap between the landlord class and the poorer classes in the land owned per person should be even narrower.

Table 1 Classes and Land Ownership of Jixi County Before and After the Land Reform⁵²

Classes	Land Owned before the Land Reform (<i>mu</i>)	Number of Households	Land Owned per Household (<i>mu</i>)	Land Owned after the Land Reform
Landlords	25,700.389	698	36.82	3,422.439
Rich Peasants	6,329.236	376	16.83	3,683.670
Middle Peasants	40,928.374	8,151	5.02	52,021.485
Poor Peasants	19,238.302	12,138	1.59	46,167.753
Farm Labourers	107.007	483	0.22	1,133.854
Others	14,107.285	3,158	4.48	10,433.624
Common Land	15,047.537			Nil
Total ^a	121,458.13	25,004	4.86	116,862.825 ^a

Note: ^a The total area of land after the Reform was smaller than before because, before the Reform, some pieces of land were located in other counties but owned by the residents of Jixi County. This land was usually

⁵² Data resource: Xu Keyuan, 'Jixi Xian Tudi Gaige Dashi Ji,' 50.

farmed by tenants in other counties. But the land allocation during the Land Reform was limited within the boundary of one county, so this land was excluded from the land of Jixi.

The above evidence demonstrates the basic fact that there was a general land shortage, especially of paddy fields. In addition, the scattered and fragmented nature of land ownership also caused difficulties in using the land. Considering that Zhaitan was surrounded by a range of mountains, was it possible to transform these mountains into arable land so as to expand the land area? The answer seemed to be negative. There was one piece of evidence showing that people might sometimes reclaim land in the mountains, although it took a longer time to make the land suitable for growing crops. A lease in 1942 recorded that a man who was guarding the hills owned by Qinxun Tang had reclaimed two pieces of hilly land on the hillside. During the first few years, he was allowed to reclaim it without paying any rent. After a while, when the land was suitable for planting, he signed a lease with the ancestral hall and started to pay a fixed annual rent of 5 *yuan* to the ancestral hall.⁵³ Though this story seems to confirm the feasibility of reclaiming farmland from the hills, whether this practice was popular at that time is doubtful. There are two reasons to support this assumption.

Firstly, most of the mountains owned by Zhaitan are high and steep, and also far from the village, therefore it was too difficult to make use of these mountains. For example, although planting tea bushes on the hills was popular and profitable in this area, villagers in Zhaitan did not do so regularly until the late 1970s. The second reason seemed to be related to concerns for the local environment. There is evidence showing that there were restrictions on people reclaiming land on the mountains and planting upland crops, in order to prevent the soil erosion. The *Jiaqing Jixi Xianzhi* recorded that there used to be groups of people from Anqing (安庆)⁵⁴ swarming into Jixi, camping in the mountains and reclaiming land for the cultivation of corn. This behaviour was prohibited many times by the local authority as it was ‘baring the hills and making the rocks not hold the soil’.⁵⁵ This record clearly presents one attitude of the local people to the reclamation of land on the mountains.

⁵³ See ‘Zupi,’ 租批 (Rent Contract), in *Lishi Dang’an*, L4–11.

⁵⁴ It was a prefecture beside Yangzi River in Anhui Province, north to Jixi.

⁵⁵ See ‘Fengsu,’ in *Jiaqing Jixi Xianzhi*, 365.

Above all, although lying in a relatively flat area within the mountains, the land that could be used for farming was still limited. In the following sections, I will demonstrate that, with the scattered, small pieces of land, it was hard for peasants to support their families, and therefore, people had to find other ways to do so.

Rice and Water

As I stated earlier, land and the economy attached it constituted the main part of the household economy in Zhaitan. Agrarian activity was almost continuous throughout the whole year, not only because of the natural rhythm of crop growth, but also due to the shortage of land, which meant that every piece of land had to be utilised in an extremely efficient and compact way. In addition, all the social events and other sidelines had to be organised in accordance with the arrangements of agriculture, especially the growth of the staple crops.

Before 1949, growing rice was still the main activity during the year in Zhaitan. Rice was the staple food by which people obtained the necessary calories. In private accounts, most rents were calculated, recorded and paid in unhusked rice. From 1941, the Nationalist Government decided to levy farm taxes in kind.⁵⁶ With this policy, unhusked rice also became the method of paying taxes. In records of the expenditures of ancestral halls rice was also sometimes used to pay the wages of people who attended the management of the ancestral halls. However, the natural environment imposed several restrictions on rice cultivation. The mountainous landscape made the temperature of the soil lower than in the plains, which was disadvantageous for rice-growing. Moreover, the soil on the mountains is a red soil, composed of grit and stones, which is not ideal for growing rice. However, the biggest challenge was the problem of irrigation.

There is no river or stream passing through the fields of Zhaitan. The main irrigation facilities in the village were the two ancient wells and ponds, which were dug hundreds of years ago, spread throughout the village and its fields. The largest pond in the village was

⁵⁶ See 'Disanci Quanguo Canzheng Huiyi Dahui Xuanya,' 第三次全国财政会议大会宣言 (The Statement of the Third National Finance Conference), in *Tianfu Gaizhi Faling Huibian* 田赋改制法令汇编, Vol.1, No.1.

Shen Tang, a reservoir on the northern hillside of the village which stored the water from a spring in the mountains and which, prior to 1949, could irrigate 100 *mu* of land. Another larger facility was the canal connected to the water mill one mile away, which was owned by the ancestral hall, Qinxun Tang. This canal could irrigate at least 250 *mu* of land.⁵⁷ According to the related records dispersed in the Expenditure Book and the Meeting Minutes of the ancestral hall, we can speculate that it was the lineage organisation, i.e. the ancestral hall, that managed the important irrigation facilities such as the Shen Tang Reservoir and the canal, which of course were also established and shared by all the beneficiaries. An extract from the minutes of a meeting on 14 July 1940 reveals that, due to the drought of that year, the ancestral hall held a meeting to decide how to distribute the water in the canal to the land that it passed through.⁵⁸ The meeting decided to divide the canal, connected to the water mill, into three sections; each section would be responsible for the irrigation of 83 *mu* of land and would be under the charge of one person, who should collect fees in return for providing water. The cost of the irrigation was 5 *jin* of unhusked rice per *mu*. Another meeting of the ancestral hall in 1944 also discussed the maintenance of the Shen Tang Reservoir.⁵⁹ It decided to appoint five persons from five branches of the lineage as irrigation managers, and the money for maintenance was to be managed by the head manager of the ancestral hall. However, since some small dams and canals only benefited private land, it was the responsibility of the land owner to keep them in good condition. The Expenditure Book of Qinxun Tang recorded several repairs to the dam and canal. These facilities were apparently attached to the land that was cultivated by the tenants, but the expenses for the repair were paid by the ancestral hall.⁶⁰

As the location of most of the land is higher than that of the water, another problem was how to lift the water to the higher fields. The most popular instrument was the dragon-bone water lift (Figure 4), which was made of wood. For land which was not very high, people often used a sort of hand-driven water lift which was smaller and could be operated by one

⁵⁷ See 'Ciwu Huiyi Jilu,' 祠务会议记录 (Meeting Minutes of the Ancestral Hall), 14 July 1940, in *Lishi Dang'an*, L4-3.

⁵⁸ See 'Ciwu Huiyi Jilu,' 14 July 1940, in *Lishi Dang'an*, L4-3.

⁵⁹ See 'Ciwu Huiyi Jilu,' 5 December 1944, in *Lishi Dang'an*, L4-3.

⁶⁰ See 'Qinxun Tang Kaizhi Tengqing Bu,' 亲逊堂开支誊清簿 (Expenditure Book of Qinxun Tang), in *Lishi Dang'an*, L3-10.

person. However, for land at a higher level, a large foot-driven water lift had to be put to use. This water lift needed at least two people to pedal simultaneously to lift the water from the pond or canal into the field. However, in spite of all these above efforts, some land still could not be properly irrigated. The Ownership Certificates of Land and House Property in 1951 recorded the irrigation status of every piece of land and show that almost half of the land did not have access to irrigation.

Because of all these difficulties, rice cultivation was limited to single cropping in this area, and its yield was also very low. The best land, with sufficient irrigation, might gain 300 *jin* of unhusked rice per *mu*, while some hilly land, without proper irrigation, could only obtain 70–80 *jin* unhusked rice per *mu*.⁶¹ It was estimated, however, that one adult labourer normally consumed approximately 1.5 *jin* husked rice per day.⁶² Assuming that the consumption of a child was half that of an adult, a family with just one couple and two children would need at least 1600 *jin* husked rice per year. Considering that the production of one *mu* of good land was only 200–300 *jin* unhusked rice in a normal year, and 1 *jin* unhusked rice would produce 0.7 *jin* husked rice, the family would need at least 7–11 *mu* of land of this standard to meet the demand for food; for a larger family, the land required would be even greater. Taking the situation illustrated above into consideration, the land owned by most families in the county was only 1–5 *mu*, therefore it was almost impossible for most families to meet their basic demand for grain by only planting rice on their own land. Renting land and looking at other business opportunities were undoubtedly possible ways out, and I will elaborate upon these later. In addition, planting other grain crops became necessary.

Wheat was one of the major and popular supplements to the staple food as it requires much less irrigation and could be planted in the winter, after the rice rotation. In the years

⁶¹ See Cao Shengzhi 曹昇之, 'Guxiang Huiyilu,' 故乡回忆录 (Memoir on the Hometown), in *Wangchuan Gujin* 旺川古今, 36. This is an unpublished book compiled by Wangchuan Village which is composed of memoirs and a few introductory texts on the village. After the success of *Longjing Chunqiu* of Zhaitan, the major villages in the area started to imitate Zhaitan and compile their own village histories. About the general rice production, *Longjing Chunqiu* also mentioned that it was between 200 and 300 *jin* for normal land in a normal year. This was consistent with the memory of Cao Shenzhi. See *Longjing Chunqiu*, 38.

⁶² This number was provided by my interviewees Hu Yue'an and Hu Yougui. It would vary with the change of diet. In the period when most of the calories required to sustain life came from carbohydrates, the demand for rice was be much higher than that of today, as we now have far greater resources at our disposal.

when rice was not sufficient, cakes and pies made from flour and filled with salted vegetables became popular and were required to help people survive the months before the rice harvest.

Figure 4 Foot-driven Dragon-Bone Water Lift, photographed in Zhaitan Museum on 26 September 2010



Crop Rotation and Agrarian Rhythm

The crop rotation shaped the essential rhythm of life for households in Zhaitan, which defined the so-called busy season as well as the slack season in terms of labour utilisation. In this section, I will discuss the crop rotation of Zhaitan and the annual agricultural production process. The purpose is to give readers a background on agricultural production in the village, and, more importantly, to make readers aware of how labour was used and distributed in agriculture and how the cropping system was carried out. Thus, discussions in later chapters on the changes to the organisation of production and the cropping system in the later periods can be better understood.

Before 1949, the crop rotation in Zhaitan generally followed the mode of rice–wheat. On some pieces of land, the wheat was replaced by rapeseed, which produced oil for family consumption. In this period, the single cropping of rice was carried out in this area. The rice cycle usually started in the lunar month of May⁶³ and ended in August or September. Each household might have a different timetable, but the difference would not exceed around half a month. The first step was to level the field, so peasants would first plough the fields and then flood them. The water made the soil soft so that it could be raked to make the field smooth and flat. This process was completed with some simple wooden and iron tools. Using cattle was the most popular method of ploughing the fields and was a replacement for human power, although not every household could afford cattle. Because of the hilly landscape, people in this area only raise cattle, rather than water buffalo, which were more popular on the outside plains. After the soil was prepared, the first busy season would come.⁶⁴

⁶³ In the later description on the agrarian activities of the year in this chapter, all the months refer to lunar months. Although the western calendar had already prevailed in social publications and governmental statements, in Zhaitan, the private Expenditure Books or the Rent Books of the ancestral halls still adopted the traditional lunar calendar of China. This is probably because the Chinese lunar calendar was basically a calendar serving agrarian activities, which could be illustrated by the Chinese title of this calendar: ‘*Nong Li*’ (农历, the agrarian calendar). As the essential activity in the village had been agriculture, and most of the income within the village was from agriculture, it was reasonable to organise and record all the activities using the lunar calendar. However, it does not mean that the village was enclosed and indifferent to external changes. Looking up the meeting minutes of the ancestral hall, we can find that the meeting times were often recorded with double dates, one in the lunar calendar and the other in the western calendar. It implies that the recorder was well aware of the two systems.

⁶⁴ The details on the agricultural production have two sources. One is my own experience, as most of my relatives on my mother’s side are peasants. The second is the fieldwork in Zhaitan. My guide in the village was a hard-working peasant, and also a good teacher, from whom I learned all the details of the crop rotation and got some chances to practice farming skills.

Setting the young seedlings was the first hard work which did not rely on any tools, but on the hands alone. This was work that usually required the cooperation of several people. To move the rice seedlings from the seedling nursery to the paddies, mature male labourers strode over the wet and narrow footpaths across the fields, shouldering baskets filled with the seedlings, and when they arrived at the paddy fields, others would take the seedlings and convey them to the people responsible for planting, who stood in the fields. Transplanting seedlings was not such heavy a task, so young teenagers were often employed as auxiliary labour. Females, however, with bound feet, were not able to work on the fields, and they usually stayed at home, cooking for the people working outdoors.

The seedlings grew quickly in the hot weather, but so did the weeds. The next step was to weed the field, and often took place a few weeks after transplanting the seedlings; then the peasants could fertilise the soil. Lime was popularly applied to neutralise the acidic solid in this mountainous area. As for the fertiliser, its main ingredients consisted of manure and plant ashes. During the growth period of the seedlings, these two jobs had to be carried out several times. However, irrigation and drainage were required throughout the whole process and had to be arranged with care: the seedlings had to grow in water, but the water within the fields had to be maintained at a certain level because both over-flooding and a lack of water were harmful to growth. Therefore, peasants had to keep a close eye on changes to the weather to make sure that the water within the fields was at the proper level.

From July to the harvest was the first slack season. Generally, rice flowered and seeded in July and August. During this period, people only needed to look after water levels and prevent diseases and pests. Almost 20 days before the harvest, they had to drain the water out from the fields. If the weather conditions during this period were appropriate, which means there was neither flood nor drought, peasants would then have a relatively enjoyable period. This undoubtedly offered a chance for rural amusements. The well-known *Wupeng Hui* (五朋会, the fair of the Group of Five) was held during this period. It was a festival organised by five major villages in the north of Jixi County, including Zhaitan, usually held in July and

hosted by each village in turn. It was a 9-day carnival that involved processions, worship and dramatic performances. In a sense, it was an event to show the power of the village.⁶⁵

From the middle of August to September, harvesting and the following grain drying were the principal activities of the village. It was the second busy time in the year, and a highly labour-intensive period of the rice cycle. Ripe rice had to be reaped as soon as possible, otherwise, if it started to rain, it would quickly rot in the field. To speed up this process, for each piece of land at least two people were required: one for reaping and the other for threshing. Both tasks involved heavy work. Before 1949, the harvesting was carried out manually, and the only tool used was the scythe; there was no kind of machine available for threshing. Peasants separated the seeds from the rest of the plant by beating the plant against the internal wall of a cube-shaped wooden barrel; such barrels were named *Ban Wu* (板屋) in the local area, as they were big containers made of wooden boards (see Figure 5). The seeds dropped into the barrel while the rest of the plant was remained outside. This was strenuous work; only mature labourers could work properly and make sure that most of the seeds were collected. To smooth the process, children were often required to join the threshing as well. Their work was to convey the plant bundles between the harvesting and the threshing. During this season, in order to solve the shortage of labour, cooperation between households, particularly the mutual assistance of labour, was popular. This cooperation usually took place between relatives and neighbours. Moreover, it was also a season for people with little or no land to earn some extra money. In fact, it was the best opportunity during the year to earn money. Likewise, the women were very busy in the kitchen, ensuring that they made more food for more people, and at a higher standard. According to convention, people who were involved in the mutual aid of harvesting did not take any rewards, but the host household had to provide proper meals during this period. In Zhaitan, the convention was three formal meals per day plus a snack in the afternoon.

The next step, following the harvesting, was drying the grain. In Zhaitan, before 1949 there was no mechanical method of drying the grains, so they were left exposed to direct

⁶⁵ The festival was held in honour of a local hero and guardian, Wanghua, who organised military forces to suppress regional rebels in the late 6th century and early 7th century and thus secured the whole Huizhou region.

sunlight. Again, peasants crossed their fingers for good weather; otherwise the grains would quickly grow mould. Dried grains would then be stored until the next distribution—for example, to pay the farm tax and rent. The rice cycle was followed by the planting of wheat and rapeseed. As I mentioned earlier, wheat was a necessary supplement to the food, and the rapeseed provided basic cooking oil for daily consumption. Most families planted both crops after the rice harvesting in October and harvested them in late April and early May of the following year. Growing wheat and rapeseed did not require as much care as rice growing, because the two plants do not require such strict controls on water. Therefore, after setting the seeds in the field, the villagers went into the second and longer slack season. From *Dongzhi* (冬至, one of the 24 solar terms, usually on 21 or 22 December) to *Qingming* (清明, usually on 4 or 5 April), a series of celebrations and ceremonies, concentrating either on the lineage connections or on individual entertainment, would be organised.

Figure 5 *Ban Wu*, a wooden barrel for threshing, photographed in the Zhaitan Museum on

26 September 2010



Production, Rent and Tax

The production of the field depended on quite a few variables: the location of the land, the irrigation conditions, the fertiliser used, the weather during the year, and so on. As I mentioned above, before 1949, in a good year and with sufficient irrigation, the best land of one *mu* could yield at most 300 *jin* of unhusked rice, or 210 *jin* husked rice. In comparison with the plains, this number is relatively low. According to Dwight H. Perkins's assessment, under the traditional farming mode, the production of rice per *mu* on average in the Lower Yangzi region, including Jiangsu and Jingxi, was generally over 400 *jin* in the nineteenth century.⁶⁶ Data from another national investigation showed that the rice yield in the 1930s was 342 *jin* on average, and J.L. Buck presented the number to be 446 *jin*.⁶⁷ In any case, the rice production per unit of Zhaitan was relatively low. In spite of the lower production, however, the harvest could not be kept exclusively by the peasants: landowners had to pay the farm tax and surtaxes; tenants had to share the harvest with their landlords.

In 1934, 1 *mu* of land entailed 0.23815 *yuan* of farm tax and 9 types of surtaxes, including education, security, construction, and local finance, among others; and the rate of surtax was up to 0.814 *yuan* on 1 *yuan* of farm tax, plus 0.02 *yuan* of education surtax per household.⁶⁸ Therefore, the official farm tax and surtaxes for 1 *mu* of land was 0.4520041 *yuan* in total. As the husked rice price in 1934 in the village was 0.05 *yuan* per *sheng*,⁶⁹ this burden was equal to 9 *sheng* of husked rice or 12.8 *jin* unhusked rice, which meant almost 4.3 per cent of local rice production on the best land in the best year.

While the tax rates had been relatively stable,⁷⁰ the rent was more variable. In Zhaitan, there were basically two kinds of tenant: one called *Yong Dian Ren* (永佃人), who had the permanent right of tenancy on the land which could then be inherited by his offspring or transferred to other tenants without the permission of the landlord; and the other, called *Dian*

⁶⁶ Dwight H. Perkins, *Agricultural Development in China 1368-1968* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1969), 21.

⁶⁷ Perkins, *Agricultural Development in China 1368-1968*, 267.

⁶⁸ See 'Jixi Xian Tianfu Fujia Diaocha Biao,' 绩溪县田赋附加调查表 (The Table of Farm Tax and Surtaxes of Jixi County), 9 February 1934, Vol. 1-281, preserved in Jixi County Archives.

⁶⁹ 1 *sheng* = 1 *jin* = 16 *liang*. In Zhaitan, *sheng* was used to measure husked rice and *jin* was used to measure unhusked rice.

⁷⁰ The rate of farm tax and surtaxes had been almost stable until 1942 when the National Government of Nanjing started to charge the farm tax in kind in order to meet the demands of the war.

Ren (佃人), who only had the right of cultivation. The land leased to *Yong Dian Ren* was called *Yuan Tian* (原田) while the other, leased to *Dian Ren*, was called *Bing Ding Tian* (并顶田). The rents for the two types of tenants were also different. For *Yuan Tian*, as the tenants had certain rights on the land, the rent they paid was lower. In the meeting minutes of 1933, the ancestral hall set the rent for *Yuan Tian* as 30 per cent of the rice production.⁷¹ In a statement of 1944, issued by *Qinxun Tang* and *Guizhi School* to claim the rent, the rent for *Yuan Tian* increased to 40 per cent of the rice output.⁷² For the *Bing Ding Tian*, the rents were both announced as 50 per cent of the rice output. However, this rent rate was not really fixed: it also depended on the quality of the land. For good land, the rent was usually half of the harvest, while, for worse land, the rent might be 30–40 per cent of the harvest. In addition, sometimes fixed rent was carried out regardless of the harvest. This usually applied to land with very bad conditions,⁷³ such as in the case of the contract on reclaimed hilly land that I mentioned previously. However, it seemed that in the 1940s, with the deteriorating political situation and the economy, the lease on land tended to be unstable. The leased period sometimes was not fixed, which merely depended on the harvest. If in one year the harvest was good, then the landlord would continue to let the land to the same tenant; otherwise, the land would be taken back. The rent was not fixed and was also decided on a yearly basis.⁷⁴

With the information above, we are now able to make an assessment of the output and expenditure of rice in a family. Take *Hu Yougui*'s family as an example.⁷⁵ Before 1949, there were 11 members in the family and they farmed 20 *mu* of land, of which 3 *mu* was owned by themselves, while 17 *mu* was rented from other families. As previously mentioned, the rice yield in this region was between 200 and 300 *jin* for good land and 70–80 *jin* for bad land. If we assume that the production of unhusked rice for one *mu* of land on average was 200 *jin*,

⁷¹ See 'Ciwu Huiyi Jilu,' 11 July 1933, in *Lishi Dang'an*, L4-3.

⁷² See 'Hu Qinxun Ci Guizhi Xiaoxuexiao Gongbu Yian,' 胡亲逊祠桂枝小学校公布议案 (The Announcement of Hu's Qinxun Ci and Guizhi Elementary School), 19 August 1944, in *Lishi Dang'an*, L4-12.

⁷³ The data was from the conversations with *Hu Shengmao* on 23 August 2011, and *Bao Tingshun* on 1 September 2011 respectively. The former was 90 years old and the latter was 98 years old.

⁷⁴ The source of this information is the same with the last note.

⁷⁵ Regarding this issue, I interviewed 9 people of over 70 years old in 2010, 2011 and 2013. Although all of them were helpful for my better understanding about the background at the time, *Hu Yougui*'s presentation was the clearest and the most complete. As a result, I quoted his presentation as an example to show the livelihood before 1949 in *Zhaitan*. *Hu Yougui* was an ordinary villager of *Zhaitan*, 81 years old when I interviewed him in 2010.

which was a quite positive assessment, then the family would harvest 4,000 *jin* of unhusked rice. In tax, they had to make a payment for 3 *mu* of self-owned land; they also had to pay the rent for the remaining 17 *mu* of land. If we take the tax rates of 1934, at least 38 *jin* of rice would be deducted first. For the rent part, as the rent for each piece of land was different, I will take the average level of 40 per cent. This family then had to pay 1,360 *jin* of rice to the landlords. The rice that remained was just 2,602 *jin*. For a family with 11 people, comprising 6 adults and 5 children, if we assume one adult labourer would consume 1.5 *sheng* of husked rice, and children just half of that, the whole family would require 4,653.75 *jin* of unhusked rice for the year. In short, there was a gap of over 2,000 *jin* between the supply and the demand for rice. As a result, the family had to rely on other types of food to feed its members; for example, wheat, corn and millet were popular crops in the village at that time. During the interview, Hu Yougui said:

‘At that time, people had a good appetite. Take my grandfather as an example: in the morning, he had at least two big bowls of rice as his breakfast. There was no fat in the diet, just vegetable oil. We only ate salted vegetables at breakfast, and even fried soy bean was a luxury...basically, when the rice was harvested, we would eat rice; and then, after the wheat was harvested, we would eat wheat. There was barely any surplus grain, just enough to feed the family, but the condition of my family was not bad. For most families, they often ate and waited, and had to borrow grain from others.’

The relatively good condition of Hu Yougui’s family was attributed to the amount of land that they farmed. Whether self-owned or leased from others, it made the family almost self-sufficient in grain. However, a household did not require food alone. To buy tools, kerosene, clothes and everything else that could not be produced at home, peasants had to have cash. Because of this, sidelines became necessary to sustain the daily life of the household, which would take full advantage of all its available workforce to earn extra money. In addition, leaving the resource-limited village to seek other business opportunities also became a traditional way to improve the household economy.

Sidelines

Silkworm Farming

As farm work was usually performed by mature male adults, sidelines, such as raising silkworms and pigs, and growing vegetables, were the main work for women. As for children, those under 12 or 13 years old always formed auxiliary labour in all of the household businesses.

Raising silkworms was a traditional sideline in this area, but it was not until the early nineteenth century that the silkworm industry became popular in the northern part of the county, when an official taking charge of local education, Shen Lian (沈练), who had come from Jiangsu province, introduced this industry into the village of Wangchuan and then extended it to nearby villages, including Zhaitan.⁷⁶ In 1926, it was stated that ‘among the 22 villages in *Badu* (八都),⁷⁷ except Shang Jinshan and Huangyao, all the villages were involved in the production of silk’.⁷⁸ In the Sixty Counties Economic Investigation of Anhui Province (安徽省六十县经济调查表), issued in 1922,⁷⁹ there was a silk cocoon firm entitled Jinglun (经纶, combeding silk threads) set up in nearby Shangzhuang town to purchase cocoons from individual households. This firm had four cocoon-drying chambers and acquired 35,000 *jin* of cocoons every year, which it sold to the filature factories in order to make silk in Shanghai and Nanjing. Yet, this kind of cocoon firm was a newly emerging business in the local area. By the 1920s, local villagers reeled the silk by themselves, using hand-driven wooden filature machines, and then sold the silk directly on to the traders. However, as the silk made by this wooden machine was uneven and the shade was not right, when modern filature factories emerged in the big cities from the 1920s, the hand-made silk did not compare favourably with that made by the industrial machines. The price of

⁷⁶ See Hu Shimin 胡士敏, ‘Jixi Cansang Shengchan Shilue,’ 绩溪蚕桑生产史略 (A Brief History of Silk Production in Jixi County), in *Jixi Wenshi Ziliao*, Vol. 1, 1985, 141–150.

⁷⁷ Ba Du 八都 was the old title of the current Shangzhuang Town.

⁷⁸ See Hu Buzhou 胡步洲, ‘Jixi Xiangtu Dili,’ 绩溪乡土地理 (The Countries and Geography of Jixi), 1926. It was a local textbook used in the schools of Jixi, preserved in the Provincial Library of Anhui.

⁷⁹ This investigation was held by the *Anhui Jingji Diaocha Weiuanhui* (安徽经济调查委员会, the Anhui economic investigation committee), beginning in 1929. The results of the investigation were issued in 1922 with two volumes of tables, one for brief tables and the other for detailed tables. The detailed volume has been preserved in the Provincial Library of Anhui. However, the brief one has already been lost.

hand-made silk then dropped dramatically and peasants preferred to sell the cocoons instead of the silk.

As for the reality of raising silkworms in Zhaitan, I was told that ‘each household raised silkworms at that time (the period before 1949)’. For families who had a workforce surplus, it could be a profitable business and would earn considerable extra income for the family, because raising silkworms was basically a labour-intensive business, and only households with sufficient workforce, especially female workforce, could manage it. Before the 1950s, the silkworm industry in Zhaitan still followed the original method, as it was first introduced into the area. People only raised silkworms in the spring, usually from March to April, when the wheat and rapeseed were still at the growth stage and the work in the fields was not intense. From the egg to the cocoon, the entire process of silkworm growth usually took one month. After the baby silkworms hatched out from the eggs, their demand for food, i.e. mulberry leaves, grew quickly. After three sleeps, which was usually three weeks after hatching, between the last sleep and spinning the cocoons, the appetite of silkworms became immense. They spent almost all their time eating, and this demand had to be met immediately. For a household who raised *Ban Zhang* (半张, half piece)⁸⁰ of silkworm eggs, the demand for leaves during this period would be at least 100 kg per day. All the leaves were manually picked in the field and carried home on their shoulders. People had to spend most of their time in the field, picking the leaves every day. For those families who raised more silkworms, this job could become so intense that people had to stay in the mulberry field all the time in order to prepare food for the silkworms, and could not even spare the time to go home to feed themselves. That was not all. The silkworms that were busy eating also produced large amounts of faeces, which had to be removed as soon as possible in order to keep the environment clean and to prevent disease. All of the work needed hands, and this situation would last for a whole week.

With one month’s hard and careful work, if there was no disease and the temperature and weather were both suitable, the rewards were good. For example, if a family raised one *zhang*

⁸⁰ *Zhang* is the unit used to measure the amount of silkworm eggs. Silk eggs of one *Zhang* will need 10 flat baskets of 1m in diameter to hold them when they are growing up. *Ban Zhang* means a half and it is the minimum amount that people usually raised.

of silkworm eggs, which was the usual amount in the village, they could produce around 30 *jin* of cocoons. According to the price of the cocoons recorded in the Sixty County Economic Investigation, 100 *jin* of cocoons cost 40 *yuan*.⁸¹ Thus the family could raise 12 *yuan* from this business in one year. Assuming the rice price was stable at that of 1934, i.e. 0.05 *yuan* per *sheng*, this income was equivalent to 240 *sheng* husked rice, exceeding the best production of one *mu* of rice.

Despite its lucrative nature, the silkworm industry in Zhaitan was always a sideline and never played a major role in the family income. One reason might be the limitation of land. In a village with a high tension between the population and the land, mulberry trees could only be planted on the ridges of fields, roadsides or in other fragmented spaces. The scale of mulberry cultivation was thus restricted. In addition, in the 1930s the global economic crisis hit the silk industry in the cities of China which, in turn, caused the silkworm industry to shrink further at the village level.⁸²

Pig Farming

Raising pigs was another traditional sideline in Zhaitan. It was one of the major income sources for some households, but not for all, as it needed both spare workforce and spare food. The growth period of the pig was usually one year, and it had to be fed with a mixture of fresh grass, wild vegetables, water and leftovers. To cut the fresh grass in the field was heavy work, which usually took place in the early morning, and thus obviously required the existence of an auxiliary workforce. On the other hand, not every family could afford to rear pigs. It took money to buy a piglet, and there was a high risk of disease and death during the rearing of the pigs due to the low level of veterinary techniques in place. Therefore, for families who often had difficulties in feeding themselves, raising pigs was a real luxury. In reality, before 1949 in Zhaitan, if a household raised even one pig, it would be considered a prestigious family. Local storekeepers would visit the family and send them a voucher, which allowed them to buy groceries in the store without having to pay immediately. They only needed to make one

⁸¹ See 'Anhui Sheng Liushi Xian Jingji Diaocha Biao,' 安徽省六十县经济调查表 (Sixty Counties Economic Investigation of Anhui Province), 1922, preserved in Anhui Provincial Library.

⁸² See Zhang Youyi, *Zhongguo Jindai Nongyeshi Ziliao*, 487-492.

payment at the end of the year with their pig. This credit was taken as a privilege to demonstrate the superior economic condition of a family.⁸³ The family of Hu Yougui, mentioned above, was one of those who enjoyed this privilege.

Chopping and Selling Firewood

For household who were worse off, selling firewood was an indispensable and popular supplement to the economy. Chopping wood in the mountains and selling it to families who needed it was an easy way of getting some ready cash. It was a job with a very low threshold; the only requirement was physical strength and a simple wood chopper. The work was flexible and suitable for families with less land and fewer members; however, the income was also meagre. The expenditure book of the ancestral hall held some records on the purchase of firewood. According to the records in the book of Aozhan Tang, one of the branch ancestral halls in Zhaitan, in 1924, 20 *jin* of dried firewood cost 0.12 *yuan*, and on the same day 6 *sheng* of husked rice cost 0.264 *yuan*. Another record in 1926 showed that 100 *jin* of firewood could be exchanged for 10 *sheng* of rice.⁸⁴ Although there was a slight drop in the price, it was generally stable. Therefore, 100 *jin* of firewood could buy 13 *sheng* of husked rice, and that could feed an adult for around nine days.

Business outside the village

In an area short of land resources, the best way of obtaining a fortune was to run a business, either by operating a store in the village or by going out into the cities to find opportunities. With the gradual accumulation of wealth from the business, it was considered to be wise and secure to invest the money in land and housing in the village.

Before the Sino–Japanese War, *Xue Shengyi* (学生意, learning how to run business) had been a promising way for a family to improve their economy. Teenage boys were sent by their parents to their relatives or acquaintances in the prosperous cities and towns to learn how

⁸³ This information was obtained from the interview with Hu Yougui, and was confirmed by another informant, Hu Jin'an. The latter was 85 years old when I carried out the interview.

⁸⁴ The data came from 'Aozhan Tang Zhunian Lunliu Zhiyong Bu,' 奥瞻堂逐年轮流支用簿 (The Expenditure Book of Aozhan Tang on Annual Basis), in *Lishi Dang'an*, L3-11.

to run a business, after having received a few years of elementary education.⁸⁵ Initially they worked as apprentices in the store for three years and did not get paid, but received free accommodation and food. After the first three years, those who showed an aptitude for the business would be hired formally and receive a wage or salary. A few years later, after obtaining sufficient skills and experience, some of them would leave and start their own business. This was the standard and also the ideal route for most young people. In fact, the expression *Xue Shengyi* implies that the purpose of people who went out from the village was not just to get a job in the city, but was also to learn the skills and to accumulate the experience to prepare themselves for running their own business.

When a person finally settled down and established his own business outside, a direct connection between him and other members in the village was set up. The family members inside the village would receive money from the merchants outside, and the village also obtained their sponsorship in public affairs.

Regarding the former, there was no evidence concerning the exact contribution of running a business to the family economy, but one fact might be able to provide some circumstantial evidence. In Zhaitan, two branches of the lineage, Qianmen (前门, a branch supposed to live at the front of the village) and Zhongmen (中门, a branch supposed to live in the middle of the village) had a greater population than other branches in the village. According to the family tree attached to *Longjing Chunqiu*,⁸⁶ in these two branches, a majority of families had reproduced over 40 generations up to 2000, but the other branches only had 38 or 39 generations at most. This might be connected with the fact that there were more people in Qianmen and Zhongmen working outside before 1949. The implication of this link is that it was usually easier for the people from households with better economic conditions to get married. Therefore, it was very common for people from better-off families to get married at an earlier age and then have children earlier. Furthermore, before 1949, as a man was permitted to have more than one wife, a wealthier man was very likely to have more wives and produce more children. The example of Hu Shipai (胡士沛) from Qianmen

⁸⁵ See Cao Shengzhi, 'Guxiang Huiyilu,' 42-43, and Hushi 胡适, *Hushi Koushu Zizhuan* 胡适口述自传 (The Personal Reminiscences of Dr. Hu Shi), trans. Tang Degang 唐德刚 (Beijing: Huawen Chubanshe, 1992), 2-3.

⁸⁶ See *Longjing Chunqiu*, 278-394.

provided evidence for this situation. Hu Shipai had lived in and run businesses in Jinhua of Zhejiang Province around 100 years ago. He was known as a successful merchant and was highly regarded in the village. During his stay in Jinhua, he rented a wife from a local poor family and got two sons from this leased wife. The two boys were later sent back to Hu Shipai's legal wife in Zhaitan, and were brought up in the village with his other two boys, born to his legal wife. The four boys later took charge of his businesses in Jinhua and properties in Zhaitan respectively. Moreover, as the legal husband of this leased wife in Zhejiang was too poor to feed his own children, he transferred one of his sons to Hu Shipai. This boy then inherited Hu Shipai's surname, shared his property and lived in Zhaitan as well.⁸⁷ In this story, the wealth of Shipai was the only factor that helped him to obtain so many sons.

Disruption and Self-help Under the Leadership of the Ancestral Hall

Although with all of the efforts listed in above sections most villagers might be able to maintain a basic livelihood, the household economy was always vulnerable to any uncertainty, for example, natural disasters and the risks brought by social and economic changes. For Zhaitan, from 1937, in addition to natural disasters, war became a major factor that disrupted the lives of the villagers.

In the 1940s, with the continuation of the war, the economic condition of the village worsened noticeably. In 1944, the Administrative Office of Southern Anhui Province (皖南行署) announced a local policy which exempted the household from the original compulsory donation to the government and implemented another system, named *Xiangzhen Zhunbeijin* (乡镇准备金, Provision of Township). The new system required local residents to pay the provision to the government according to their property.⁸⁸ In December, after the county government frequently urged the Longjin township government (the township to which Zhaitan was subordinate) to pay the provision, the township government submitted an

⁸⁷ The whole story was heard from two informants. One was my landlady, Hu Wanli, and Hu Shipai was her great-grandfather-in-law; the other was Hu Shipai's grandson, Hu Guanyi.

⁸⁸ See 'Sannianlai zhi Zongjie,' 三年来之总结 (The Summary of Three Years Work), in *Sannianlai Wannan Xingzheng Jianbao* 三年来皖南行政简报, 3 (1945), 1-3, in *Minguo Dang'an* 民国档案, Vol.1, preserved in Jixi County Archives.

application for a reduction. The application said that the local people ‘usually relied on support from [family members] running businesses in Shanghai and Wuhan. Due to the war against the Japanese in recent years, the transportation was shut down, and the money transfer was blocked. The families without land are often under the threat of running out of rice and fuel.’⁸⁹ In addition to this application, according to the records on *Pingtiao* (平糶, a philanthropic event to sell rice at a price lower than the market rate during inflation or starvation) preserved in the village archives of Zhaitan, this event was organised at least eight times in the years 1943 – 1947: three times in 1943, once in 1944, three times in 1945 and once in 1947. This suggests that grain shortages were not occasional during this period.

In fact, since 1940 problems with food supply had become common in the whole Huizhou Region, as the surrounding Yantze Delta was occupied by the Japanese from 1937. As an isolated mountainous region which had never managed to feed its people on its own grain production, the supplying of food became even more difficult in wartime. In 1944 even the troops stationed in this area could not obtain an adequate supply of rice and had to borrow rice from wealthy households. The Zhaitan village archives have preserved 9 receipts issued by the *Jixi Xian Choujie Junliang Weiyuanhui* (绩溪县筹借军粮委员会, Committee of Jixi County for Raising Grain for the Troops). The amount of grain borrowed by the committee varied from 20 to 105 *jin*.⁹⁰ In February 1944, it seems that the troops stationed in the township faced a shortage of food again, as another request to lend rice to the stationed troops was sent to the ancestral hall.⁹¹

In this situation, the Administrative Office of Southern Anhui Province (皖南行署) launched *Yimu Di Yundong* (一亩地运动, Movement on One *mu* of Land) in 1941. The movement required every person from 18 to 50 years old, including teachers, staff in offices, workers and peasants, to reclaim one *mu* of land to plant corn or other upland grain crops in

⁸⁹ See *Minguo Dang'an*, Vol.129, 15, in Jixi County Archives.

⁹⁰ See ‘Jixi Xian Choujie Junliang Weiyuan Junliang Jieju,’ 绩溪县筹借军粮委员会借据 (Receipts for Borrowing Grain for Troops by the Committee of Jixi County for Raising Grain for the Troops), in *Lishi Dang'an*, L4-9.

⁹¹ See ‘Jieju,’ 借据 (Loan Receipt), in *Lishi Dang'an*, L4-10.

order to improve the supply of food.⁹² The results of this movement were unknown, but it at least reflected the fact of a widespread food shortage.

In addition to the difficulty in food supply, the war also brought another problem to the region—inflation. Table 2 below shows the change in price for some kinds of goods in Jixi county town from 1933 to 1947.

Table 2 Prices of Necessities in Jixi County Town 1933-1947⁹³

Year	Currency	Rice (per 100 <i>jin</i>)	Wheat (per 100 <i>jin</i>)	Pork (per 100 <i>jin</i>)	Charcoal (per 100 <i>jin</i>)	Veg Oil (per 100 <i>jin</i>)	Salt (per 100 <i>jin</i>)	Sugar (per 100 <i>jin</i>)	Kerosene (per 100 <i>jin</i>)
1933	Silver	4.5	4.8	17		16	16-17		
1934		5.6	5	18	2.2	14.1	3.9	19.3	11
1935		4.82	4.3	15.3	2	12	3.4	16.4	12
1937	Fabi ⁹⁴	5.1	4.5	25	1.2	22.8	5.5	31.2	20
1940		14	13	122	3.5	96	27	132	12
1943		280	280	1,160	70	912	371.8	1,250	1,410
1945		5,400	5,200	10,620	440	28,000	12,000	44,000	22,000
1946		29,100	32,000	18,000	5,600	140,000	33,500	192,000	64,000
1947		240,000	264,000	849,800	48,000	600,000	240,000	822,000	240,000

Table 2 reveals that, since 1940, the prices of the main necessities in the county town had risen sharply. The price of rice in 1945 was over 1,000 times the price before the war, wheat 1,155 times, pork 424 times, oil 1, 228 times, and salt 2,181 times. From 1945, due to the subsequent civil war, the inflation worsened further. The data from the village showed a similar trend. According to the records of Aozhan Tang, the price of rice had risen from 0.04

⁹² See ‘Wannan Zhanshi Yimudi YundongTuixing Banfa Gangyao,’ 皖南战时一亩地运动推行办法纲要 (Guideline for Implementing the Movement of Yimu Di During the Wartime in the South of Anhui Province), April 1941, in *Minguo Dang’an*, No 1-288, preserved in Jixi County Archives.

⁹³ Source: Jixixian Difangzhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui 绩溪县地方志编纂委员会 ed, *Jixi Xianzhi* 绩溪县志 (Gazetteer of Jixi County) (Huangshan: Huanshan Shushe, 1998), 467.

⁹⁴ From November 1935, *Fabi* took the place of silver coins as the legal currency. The conversion rate of Silver to *Fabi* was 1:1.

to 45 *yuan* per *sheng* during the period 1926–1945. From 1926 to 1938, the price had stayed stable, at around 0.05 *yuan* per *sheng*; but in 1940 it jumped to 0.4 *yuan* per *sheng* and then had kept on rising. In July of 1945, it had already risen up to 45 *yuan* per *sheng*, 900 times the pre-war price.⁹⁵ This situation triggered the action of the government to restrict prices. In January 1943, every county in the south of Anhui Province established a specific institution, the *Wujia Guanzhi Huiyi* (物价管制会议, Price Regulation Committee), which tried to monitor and restrict prices, but this effort seemed only to end in failure.⁹⁶

Apart from the pressure imposed by the war, this region was also hit by drought.⁹⁷ The 1944 rent books of Qinxun Tang show that, among the 158 land parcels owned by the ancestral hall, there were 39 parcels reporting drought, while 9 parcels were noted as *Jianshou* (监收) or *Jianfen* (监分),⁹⁸ more than the previous years. This condition made the shortage of food even more serious than before. Under the double pressure of war and crop failure, and since the government did not have an effective method to tackle the problem, the local community had to be self-organised to deal with the difficulty. In Zhaitan, this was represented by the frequent philanthropic action of *Pingtiao*. As the record on the event of 1945 was more complete than other years, I take the event in this year as an example to present how a lineage village managed to assist its members.

From late July to early August of 1945, the activity of *Pingtiao* was held in Zhaitan three times: on 29 July, and 3 and 7 August. According to the record in the three volumes of the *Pingtiao Bu* (平糶簿, book recording the *Pingtiao* activity) of 1945, all of the three actions were organised by Qinxun Tang, the general ancestral hall, in spite of various other sponsors.⁹⁹ In the minutes from the meetings of Qinxun Tang in 1945, two meetings were

⁹⁵ The data was extracted and calculated from the daily records of ‘Aozhan Tang Zhunian Lunliu Zhiyong Bu,’ 奥瞻堂逐年轮流支用簿 (The Expenditure Book of Aozhan Tang on an Annual Basis), in *Lishi Dang’an*, L3–11.

⁹⁶ See *Sannianlai Wannan Xingzheng Jianbao*, 2 (1945), 70–91, preserved in Anhui Provincial Library.

⁹⁷ See ‘Qishou Dayou,’ 秋收大有 (Big Harvest for the Autumn), 1944, in *Lishi Dang’an*, L3–7. It was the rent book of Qinxun Tang, recording the rent of each piece of land during this year.

⁹⁸ *Jianshou* and *Jianfen* literally mean dividing the harvest in the field under the supervision of the landlord or his agent, which usually happened at times of disaster, when the crop did not grow well and the tenant could not pay the rent as usual.

⁹⁹ See ‘Minguo Sanshisi Nian Liuyue li Pingtiao Bu,’ 民国三十四年六月立平糶簿 (The *Pingtiao* Book Set up in June 1945), ‘Minguo Sanshisi Nian Liuyue li Erci Pingtiao,’ 民国三十四年六月立二次平糶 (The Second *Pingtiao* in June 1945), and ‘Minguo Sanshisi Nian Liuyue li Sancu Pingtiao,’ 民

organised around the topic of *Pingtiao*, one on 19 July and the other on 21 July, just before the event itself. At the first meeting it was decided to carry out the relief, and a committee of 13 members was appointed to be responsible for the event. As all the rice stored in the ancestral hall had been on loan from the Suijing Tuan stationed in the town, which was supposed to be returned after the harvest in autumn, the ancestral hall decided to raise the rice from the families with surplus grain in the village. At the second meeting, the ancestral hall decided to buy the rice at the price of 40 *yuan* per *sheng* from five families and sell it on at the price of 30 *yuan* per *sheng*. The loss caused by the price gap between the purchase and the sale was to be covered by the rent from the tilt hammer owned by the hall.

The event was held one week later. Nine of the 13 committee members supervised the whole process, and 169 households obtained 719 *sheng* of rice at the price of 30 *yuan* per *sheng*. The quota for each person was 1 *sheng*. Thus, there was a total of 719 members of the lineage who received the benefit. The rice was purchased from six families, and all of the loss caused by the event was borne by Qinxun Tang, as promised. However, the relief seemed to be far less than the real need. Five days later, one of the lineage members, Hu Baosheng, launched the second relief. He bought 2,000 *sheng* rice from the nearby Jingde county and sold it to the families short of food at the price of 40 *yuan* per *sheng*, which was said to be half of the market price; the loss was borne by himself.¹⁰⁰ Four days later, another lineage member, Hu Zhaojia, launched the third relief with the ancestral hall. This time, 513 *Sheng* rice was distributed at the price of 35 *yuan* per *sheng*. The loss was shared between Hu Zhaojia and the ancestral hall.

In total, over 3,000 *jin* rice was distributed to over 700 members of the lineage within ten days at a lower price than the market rate. If the number of people who benefited from the first relief is taken as the real number of people who suffered from starvation, each person obtained 4.5 *sheng* of rice or so. In respect of the food standard I mentioned above, this level of relief was obviously insufficient, although the donors might have done their best. In fact, when facing this kind of crisis, even the combination of the ancestral hall and the wealthy

国三十四年六月立三次平糶 (The Third *Pingtiao* in June 1945), in *Lishi Dang'an*, L3-6. Again, the 'June' in the title was the time of lunar calendar.

¹⁰⁰ See 'Minguo Sanshisi Nian Liuyue li Erci Pingtiao.'

members was not sufficient to tackle the problem thoroughly since they, too, were limited by the crisis.

On the list of names of the households who received the subsidy during the 1945 *Pingtiao*, some names were very noticeable. Hu Guochen, who had been very well known in the village for his stores and oil mill in the 1930s, had to close his stores after frequent harassment from the local government and from hooligans, and thus lost his major income sources so that, in the crisis of 1945, his family had to accept relief from the ancestral hall. The family of Hu Dihui, who had been a merchant travelling in Jiangxi Province and who had returned to the village in 1945 to avoid the war, also received a donation. It is reasonable to speculate that it was the war that deprived his family of the extra income from the external world and thus caused their economic trouble. These people had been viewed as the 'wealthy class' of the village before the war, and their fate had changed dramatically; yet there were the other households whose conditions were even worse.

Conclusion

Before 1949, due to the restrictions of the geographical landscape, Zhaitan had developed a household economy that combined agriculture, sidelines and external businesses. Without any modern agrarian techniques or any ensuring arrangements, most families had, reluctantly, to sustain them all. In this condition, any unexpected disturbance from outside was very likely to destroy their livelihood. The war from 1937 to 1949 was an example. It worsened the economy of the households in the village steadily and caused frequent starvation in the village.

The case of Zhaitan also shows that in a society frequently facing natural risks and social upheavals, when relief from outside was not available, kinship links became the only thread that people could grasp. The event of *Pingtiao*, organised by the ancestral hall in association with the wealthy members in Zhaitan, illustrated how self-relief was organised when access to official help from the government was unavailable. But compared to the extent of the difficulty, this relief fell far short of meeting the needs of the people, since both individual helpers and the ancestral hall themselves suffered from the same difficulty.

Chapter 3

Collectivisation: Socialist Revolution and Its Outcome

This chapter concerns a historical period that brought fundamental changes to Zhaitan village and rural China. With the military victory of the Chinese Communist Party, the Chinese mainland has been controlled by the CCP since 1949. The new government, on one hand, endeavoured to recover and reshape the economy and social order after the war; on the other hand, they embarked on the process of industrialisation. Rural areas, because of their huge population and the importance of agriculture in the national economy, became the front line for these economic and social revolutions.

From June 1950, land reform was extended in the newly liberated area under an amended Land Reform Law. The reform was to abolish the exploitative relationships in the countryside and redistribute the land among the peasants. By the end of 1952, the undertaking of land redistribution was largely accomplished. However, the economic impact of the land reform was not impressive due to the shortage of means of production such as draft animals and tools. Hence, since 1953, a movement encouraging mutual aid and cooperation between peasants was officially launched. With strong and public support from Mao Zedong, the form of this cooperation soon evolved from the mutual-aid team to the agricultural production cooperative. When it came to the higher stage of the cooperative, the land, which had previously been owned by individual families, became the commonly owned land of the cooperative. Land, tools and draft animals were pooled, and the income of each member was no longer linked with the land but to the work points earned by each individual. However, under the further propaganda of the communist dream and the real need for the coordination of large water projects for the irrigation of crops, the advanced cooperatives only existed for two years and then were merged and replaced by the people's commune.

The movement of the people's commune reached its peak in 1958 as an essential section of the Great Leap Forward (GLF) that was prevailing in the country. The people's commune was not only a larger unit for agricultural production, but also obtained the authority of local government at township level. To that extent, the process of collectivisation in rural areas was accomplished. The rural economy and peasants were incorporated into the rigidly planned

national economy. However, due to the deficiency in production management caused by the over-sized production units, the chaotic allocation system and the boasting atmosphere prevailing in the cadres of the CCP at different levels, the movement of the people's commune and the GLF culminated in the Great Famine of 1959–1961.

This chapter focuses on this historical process in Zhaitan Village, especially on the collectivisation movement. The land reform was a revolutionary event in China. It was initially launched by CCP in the late 1940s in northern China, and was extended to the whole country after the establishment of the new state.¹⁰¹ However, this movement is not as much an economic revolution as a political revolution.¹⁰² Previous research, whether on northern China, or on the south of China, generally agreed that the land redistribution made little difference to the agricultural production and the economic condition of peasants.¹⁰³ In this chapter, I will give further evidence from Zhaitan Village.

Based on the accounting records preserved in the village archives, I will also evaluate the economic performance of the collectivisation movement at the levels of both the household and the collective in Zhaitan. The collective productivity has been criticised as being less economically efficient from the perspectives of farm size, labour incentives, allocation of resources and the employment of administrative methods rather than the market methods.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, by studying the archival materials from Zhaitan, I will demonstrate that in the 1950s when modern agricultural technology was not in general use in China and the agrarian capital was still very limited, any improvement in the production of crops, particularly the grain crops, was dependent upon the intensive use of labour. In the conditions of the time,

¹⁰¹ For a vivid description of the Land Reform in the 1940s, see W.H. Hinton, *Fanshen* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966). Another classic work is D. Crook and I. Crook, *Mass Movement in a Chinese Village* (London: Routledge, 1979).

¹⁰² See Chris Bramall, 'Inequality, land reform and agricultural growth in China, 1952–55: A preliminary treatment,' *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 27, 3 (2000): 30–54; Jack Gray, 'Political Aspects of the Land Reform Campaigns in China, 1947–1952,' *Soviet Studies*, 16, 2 (1964): 209–231; Fangchun Li, 'Mass Democracy, Class Struggle, and Remolding the Party and Government during the Land Reform Movement in North China,' *Modern china*, 38, 4 (2012): 411–445.

¹⁰³ See James Kai-Sing Kung, 'The Political Economy of Land Reform in China's 'Newly Liberated Areas': Evidence from Wuxi County,' *The China Quarterly*, 195 (2008): 675–690. Also see Bramall, 'Inequality, Land Reform and Agricultural Growth in China,' 30–54, and Hinton, *Fanshen*.

¹⁰⁴ See Michael Ellman, 'Agricultural Productivity Under Socialism,' *World Development*, 9/10 (1981): 979–989; James Kai-Sing Kung, 'Egalitarianism, Subsistence Provision, and Work Incentives in China's Agricultural Collectives,' *World Development*, 22, 2 (1994): 175–187; Lin, 'Collectivisation and China's Agricultural Crisis,' 1228–1252.

only the method of collective production could put all of the workforce and limited resources together to make full use of them.

Prelude—*Jiefang* (解放, liberation) and the Land Reform

In April 1949, when the message that the People's Liberation Army had crossed the Yangzi River was delivered to Wangchuan, the village where the Nationalist army was stationed, the army immediately announced their surrender and joined the action of 'liberating' the Huizhou Prefecture. At the same time, the local authority was handed over to the local branch of the Communist Party without resistance.¹⁰⁵ In the first transitional year, although the previous underground CCP members were actively involved in setting up new organisations of cadres and peasants within the village, it seems that there was no fundamental change introduced in Zhaitan. According to the expenditure book of Aozhan Tang, between April 1949 and March 1950, members of this lineage branch still held worship ceremonies and paid tributes to their ancestors during the traditional festivals. The ancestral hall continued to subsidise the single elderly members as usual, and its managers met up frequently to discuss public affairs such as the refurbishment of the ancestral building and the payment of taxes. In addition, the book also shows that the payment of rents to the ancestral hall by the tenants was not terminated. This suggests that the land tenure in the village was not transformed immediately.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ According to local informants, when the news that the PLA had crossed the Yangzi River arrived, the local garrison, *Bao Wu Lu* (保五旅, the 5th Security Brigade), was attending a banquet organised by local people. The troops immediately decided to surrender. The message of *Jiefang* (解放, liberation) was announced during the performance of a local opera troupe at night, and the gathering immediately became a celebration party. However, according to the official records, before the 5th Security Brigade marched to Jixi County, the troops had already decided to change sides in the war as a result of the continuous effort of the local underground CCP organisation. On 24 April, after the chief of the Brigade announced the decision of *Qiyi* (起义, uprising), the Brigade returned to Wangchuan Village to meet with the local communists. A welcome banquet was held by the local administration of the Communist Party that night. See Zhonggong Shiwei Dangshi Yanjiushi 中共市委党史研究室, 'Wannan Junmin Ceying Dajun Dujiang Jingguo,' 皖南军民策应大军渡江经过 (The Course of How the Army and People in South of Anhui Province Were Arranged to Back up the PLA to Cross the Yangzi River), in *Anhui Wenshi Ziliao Quanshu Xuancheng Juan* 安徽文史资料全书宣城卷 (Hefei: Anhui Renmin Chubanshe, 2005), 135-138. The website of Jixi County archives has more details on this process. See <http://www.jixida.com/a2781.html>, accessed 31 December 2013. The narrative of my informants is slightly different, but the timing of the event is consistent with official records.

¹⁰⁶ See 'Aozhan Tang Zhunian Lunliu Zhiyong Bu', 174-177.

It was in June 1950, at the beginning of the land reform, that the village started to be involved in the dynamic process of revolution across the country. The land reform, as the primary method that embodied the firm resolution of the new government to transform rural society, on one hand completed the redistribution of the means of production, but on the other hand reshaped the economic and social relationships and the leadership inside the village. On the economic aspect, it confiscated land, tools, houses and draft animals from the landlords who were not engaged in labour themselves but made money by usury and leasing the land, and allocated them to the poorest groups who had little or no means of production. Through the redistribution of resources, it guaranteed the land to the tiller and that each family could support themselves more or less with their own assets. On the political and social aspect, the land reform classified people based on the property they owned, and to whether and to what extent they were involved in 'exploitation'. According to this principle, the old ruling class, including the landlord class,¹⁰⁷ as well as the lineage organisations were dismembered and deprived of their status as the actual leadership within the village. Instead, the cadres, trained by the CCP and mainly from the poor peasant class, became the new authority on behalf of the CCP. With the dismantling of old social relationships, a straight and separate connection was set up between the governmental authorities and the individual households newly released from the old social networks. On the basis of this reformation, at the next stage, the peasants could be mobilised and reorganised by the government for the strategy of industrialisation and modernisation.

In spite of the profound influence of land reform, particularly in remoulding the rural society, the economic effect of this movement was not firmly manifested. One reason might be that the transition from land reform to the collectivisation movement was too quick to allow an evaluation of the significance of the former. Though an official investigation shows

¹⁰⁷ For the definition of landlord class, see 'Zhengwuyuan Guanyu Huafen Nongcun Jieji Chengfen de Jueding,' 政务院关于划分农村阶级成分的决定 (The Resolution of the Governmental Administration Council on the Classification of Rural Areas), 20 August 1950, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64186/66655/4492593.html>, accessed 31 December 2013. The 1950 definition particularly stressed the character of 'exploitation' of the landlord rather than the amount of land they owned. It implied that the goal of land reform was not simply to redistribute the land and means of production, but also to eradicate the old economic relationships and the personal dependence attached to the economic relationships between the landlord and tenants.

remarkable growth on the land cultivated in eastern China from 1949 to 1952,¹⁰⁸ it should be cautious in attributing the outcome to the land reform, because it is also likely to be the result of the more stable and secure social and economic environment after the civil war. However, in the northern area, i.e. the ‘old liberated area’, although the land reform had a longer history, as it had been carried out earlier than in the south—in the 1940s—researchers found that there was hardly any improvement in the living conditions of the peasants. Because the deficiency of land, tools, and draft animals was a general problem, the simple redistribution of land and other assets was not able to make a difference to the peasants’ economy.¹⁰⁹

In Zhaitan, although there are no statistics on the details of production and income of individual households after the land reform, archival material on the landowning and housing conditions provides some evidence on the difficulties faced by peasants in the village after the reform.

As one of the first villages of the land reform experiment, the movement in Zhaitan was started on 11 October 1950 and completed on 3 November in the same year. In August of 1951, an Ownership Certificate of Land and House Property was issued to each household in the village by the county government. These certificates, preserved in the county archives, are the only primary source on this historical event.

This archival material¹¹⁰ comprises four volumes of information on 376 households in Zhaitan. Each certificate listed the name of the head of the household, the family population, the arable land owned by the household, the irrigation condition of each piece of land, the attached properties on the land—such as the number of trees—and the housing information after the reform. I randomly selected 109 certificates out of the four volumes¹¹¹ and grouped

¹⁰⁸ See Huadong Junzheng Weiyuanhui Tugai Weiyuanhui 华东军政委员会土改委员会, ‘Huadong Qu Tudi Gaige Chengguo Tongji,’ 华东区土地改革成果统计 (Statistics on the Results of Land Reform in Eastern China), in *Zhonghua Renmin Guoheguo Jingjishi 1949–1952*, 246.

¹⁰⁹ See Hinton, *Fanshen*, also see Bramall, ‘Inequality, Land reform and Agricultural Growth,’ 30–54.

¹¹⁰ See ‘1951 Jixi Xian Di’er Qu Zhaitan Cun Tudi Fangchan Suoyou Zheng.’

¹¹¹ Although these data were alleged to be open to the public, in reality there were many restrictions for the readers. Photocopying was not allowed, and even transcription was restricted. I was merely allowed to transcribe the information of some households. Hence, I selected 109 households randomly from the 4 volumes of certificates and transcribed the details of these families. It may not reflect the property and land condition of all the families in the village precisely, but can give us a general idea of the situation.

the 109 families based on their size. With the data recorded on each family's certificate, I calculated the area of land owned by each group on average. Table 3 shows the details.

Table 3 Land Owning of Families After the Land Reform in Zhaitan¹¹²

Number of Family Members	Number of Families	Arable Land Owned by One Family (mu)			Arable Land Owned per Capita (mu)
		Average	Min.	Max.	
1	12	1.891	1.136	3.264	1.891
2	20	2.775	1.207	5.399	1.388
3	23	3.00	0.612	5.05	1
4	23	4.666	1.37	7.948	1.167
5	7	5.493	2.169	7.754	1.099
6	16	5.86	2.317	15.839	0.96
7	5	2.918	1.739	6.516	0.417
8	2	5.447	3.822	7.072	0.681
9	1	9.889	9.889	9.889	1.099

Note: The area of arable land was composed of paddy fields, dry land and vegetable plots.

The table demonstrates that the redistribution of land was not egalitarian. There was still a considerable difference in the area of arable land owned by each family. This situation conformed to the principle of the 1950 Land Reform Law. According to the 1950 Land Reform Law, the reform was to emancipate the rural productive force and to develop agricultural production to meet the demand for the industrialisation of China.¹¹³ Under this guideline, the economy of rich peasants, middle peasants and the households involved in industry and commerce was particularly protected. All the land owned by rich peasants and middle peasants, whether farmed by themselves or by workers, remained; land and property used for commerce or industry, even if owned by the landlord, could also remain. This may

¹¹² Source: the original information on the land and family population came from the '1951 Jixi Xian Di'er Qu Zhaitan Cun Tudi Fangchan Suoyou Zheng.'

¹¹³ See 'Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Tudi Gaigefa,' 中华人民共和国土地改革法 (Land Reform Law of the People's Republic of China) Chapter 1. 30 June 1950, http://www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/wxzl/2000-12/10/content_4246.htm, accessed 31 December 2013,

explain why some households owned more land than others. Furthermore, families whose main income came from nonagricultural sectors such as industry, commerce, handicrafts and so on, were only permitted to keep a small amount of land. This might be the reason behind the fact that the amount of land owned by some families was below the average size.¹¹⁴

In spite of the radical cases, however, the distribution of arable land was relatively even. The land owned per capita for most families was between 0.5 *mu* and 2 *mu*. In accordance with the calculation in Chapter 2, in one year, one *mu* of rice paddy produced 210 *jin* of husked rice at most, but one adult consumed 1.5 *jin* of husked rice per day. Even if the peasant did not pay any taxes and did not keep seeds, in the best of times, the harvest was still not able to meet the annual level of grain consumption; other supplements such as wheat and corn were still necessary. Of course, in contrast with the situation before the land reform, the condition of the poorest people, who had not owned any land, should have improved since they obtained more or less land after the reform without any payment.

Leave the ideal situation behind, the reality was even more difficult. As the certificates recorded, much of the land was dry or hilly, which usually meant irrigation was more difficult and thus production was lower. Of the 722 pieces of land owned by the 109 households, only 281 could be irrigated. To improve irrigation, huge labour and investment was needed, which was an almost impossible undertaking for individual families.

Apart from the land, let us examine the other property of peasants after the land reform. Housing was another important beneficiary of the land reform. According to the certificates, among the 376 households, there were 217 households who owned houses after the reform. All of the registered housing consisted of brick bungalows or storeyed buildings. Hence, we can reasonably assume that the remaining households must have lived in simple huts built with mud and thatch, which were very common in rural areas of inland China before the 1970s. The condition of this accommodation was so poor that such huts were not considered as a kind of property. In addition, of the people who owned a housing property, the certificates also reveal that only 5 households owned detached houses and the rest of the 212 families had to share 71 houses between them. It was common for one family to own the

¹¹⁴ See 'Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Tudi Gaigefa', chapters 2 and 3.

left-hand bedroom, while another family owned the right-hand bedroom. The other spaces, such as the living room, kitchen and toilet were shared by both families. But it was often the case that more than three families shared a single house. In an extreme case, there were 6 families living in a two-storeyed house. Each family owned one bedroom and shared the kitchen and toilet. In this situation, all of the family members had to sleep in one bedroom at night.

In short, the land and housing situation in Zhaitan village after the land reform demonstrates that the reform played a role in improving the condition of the poorest people through the redistribution of land and other property. These people started to support their families using their own assets. However, owing to the shortage of land and other assets, there was no essential change in the productive and living conditions of the people. Hence, cooperation among peasants was necessary.

Agricultural Production Cooperative

As a social revolution, although land reform successfully transformed the rural society and established the authority of the CCP at the grass-roots level, it did not solve the prevailing poverty in the countryside. An official statement published in December 1952 stated that in 1952 per capita grain production was only around 500 *jin*; 10 per cent of peasants still could not feed themselves.¹¹⁵ At the same time, the leadership of the CCP proposed to accomplish industrialisation in 10–15 years, according to the *Guodu Shiqi Zong Luxian* (过渡时期总路线, General Line for the Transitional Period). In this situation, the demand for raw materials from industry and the demand for grain from the increasing urban population were expected to grow quickly. Therefore, finding the means to improve the agrarian economy, and especially to raise the agricultural output in the short term became a major challenge. Since industry and technology in China were still at a very low level and were thus unable to play a role in the

¹¹⁵ See ‘Wei Dongyuan Yiqie Liliang Ba Woguo Jianshe Chengwei Yige Weida de Shehui Zhuyi Guojia er Douzheng,’ 为动员一切力量把我国建设成为一个伟大的社会主义国家而奋斗 (Mobilise Every Strength to Build a Great Socialist Country), December 1952, in *Nongye Jitihua Zhongyao Wenjian Huibian 1949-1957* 农业集体化重要文件汇编 (Collection of Important Documents on Agrarian Collectivisation), ed. Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Guojia Nongye Weiyuanhui Bangongting 中华人民共和国国家农业委员会办公厅 (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 1980), 205–211.

growth of agriculture, the CCP endeavoured to improve the organisation of agricultural production, i.e. to organise individual peasants into mutual-aid teams and production cooperatives.

The Central Committee of the CCP presented three forms of mutual-aid and cooperative: the temporary mutual-aid of labour, the long-term mutual-aid team, and the elementary production cooperative.¹¹⁶ The first form merely concerned the aid in terms of labour during the busy season. The second was more fixed and concerned the division of work within the teams and the accumulation of public assets. The third usually pooled the land and required the peasants to work together. With encouragement from the central government and favourable policies, by 1952 there were 453,640,000 households—four times the number of 1950—joining 80,260,000 mutual-aid teams.¹¹⁷

In 1953, the progression from mutual-aid teams to agricultural production cooperatives was further urged by Mao Zedong, who even interpreted this issue as a kind of struggle between socialism and capitalism.¹¹⁸ With this directive and propaganda, over the next few years the dispersed individual peasants were quickly organised and incorporated into all kinds of cooperatives. The elementary cooperatives were soon expanded and upgraded into advanced cooperatives. In 1958, this was further developed to the people's commune. From then on, the private ownership of land in China formally ended.

In Zhaitan, the movement started in 1952. Following the official suggestion, at the first stage, peasants organised mutual-aid teams based on their relationships in daily life. Each team was made up of a few dozen households that had good relationships. Some teams were quite loose. People only exchanged labour during the busy season, which did not involve any kind of distribution of output. People offered aid simply in return for a meal, which was the same as the traditions formed in the past. The other kinds of teams were more complicated. Within such teams, people not only shared the labour, but also pooled the capital such as tools

¹¹⁶ See 'Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Nongye Shengchan Huzhu Hezuo de Jueyi Cao'an,' 中共中央关于农业生产互助合作的决议草案 (The Draft Agreement of the Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party on the Mutual-Aid and Cooperative of Agricultural Production), 15 December 1951, in *Nongye Jitihua Zhongyao Wenjian Huibian*, 37–45.

¹¹⁷ See Wu Chengming *et al.* ed., *Zhonghua Renmin Guoheguo Jingjishi*, 502.

¹¹⁸ See 'Guanyu Nongye Huzhu Hezuo de Liangci Tanhua,' 关于农业互助合作的两次谈话 (Two Talks on Agricultural Mutual Aid and Cooperation), in *Nongye Jitihua Zhongyao Wenjian Huibian*, 197–203.

and draft animals. Labour and capital were evaluated when they were put into the team, and then represented the share of their owners in the team. All of the team members worked together with these common resources. At the end of the year, the team's output was distributed to each household based on the shares.¹¹⁹

The experiment of mutual-aid teams lasted for only three years. In 1954, some teams started to move forward to the elementary agricultural production cooperatives. By 1955, all of the households in Zhaitan were organised into seven elementary agricultural production cooperatives. One year later, all of the households and cooperatives had been further merged into an advanced agricultural production cooperative (hereafter referred to as the advanced cooperative), and the original seven elementary cooperatives became the seven production teams of the advanced cooperative. But in 1957, to improve the efficiency of management, the seven teams were further split into 23 production teams.¹²⁰

In comparison with the mutual-aid team, the cooperative had more inclusive content and the organisation was more complicated. To join the cooperative, members had to pool most of their property, including seedlings, mulberry trees, tea trees, large farming tools, cattle, all of the land except the vegetable plots, and the attached water facilities. Except for the land, all of these assets became collective-owned property after joining the cooperative. The value of each asset was assessed based on the market and an equivalent price was paid to the peasants when they joined the cooperative. As the land was still privately owned in the early stage of the cooperative, the owner was given a certain number of shares according to the area and quality of the land. At the end of the year, the landowner would receive the land dividend based on his shares and the output of the collective.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ The information was from the interview with Hu Manru on 18 October 2010 and Hu Yixin on 19 October 2010.

¹²⁰ The whole progress towards the cooperative was fast and consistent with the trend of the whole country. In the words of one of my informants, Hu Manru, it was *Dashi Suoqu* (大势所趋, motivated by a general trend). Though the official instructions always stated that the organisation should be of peasants' own accord, the cadres were always faithful to the directives from the central government. It was impossible for villagers to stay away from the organisation and choose to *Dan'gan* (单干, work alone).

¹²¹ See 'Nongye Shengchan Hezuoshe Zhangcheng,' 农业生产合作社章程 (The Article of Agriculture Production Cooperative), 1957, in *Yongjiu Dang'an* 永久档案, Vol.2, preserved in Zhaitan Village Archives. The article provided a general principle on who was eligible to join the cooperative, how to join, how to arrange production and how to allocate the output of the cooperative. It is not sure how the article was produced, but it was more likely a statement agreed by the cooperative members, as there were some places different from the official template. The most considerable one

The management of the advanced cooperative started to show some characteristics of planned economy. According to the contracts signed between production teams and the advanced cooperative in April 1958,¹²² the advanced cooperative produced a general production plan at the beginning of each year and then broke down the goals into specific tasks for each production team. Take Production Team 3 as an example. Team 3 had 55.18 *mu* of rice paddy. The contract stipulated that the team must hand over the following grain and other products to the cooperative after the harvest:

Wheat: 2,690 *jin*;

Rapeseed: 529 *jin*;

Peas : 65 *jin*;

Rice: 24,626 *jin*;

Soybeans: 660 *jin*;

Cotton: 100 *jin*.

If the team surpassed the targets, the cooperative would reward them with a certain percentage of the extra products. If it failed, the team was responsible for covering the gap between the targets and the actual outputs in kind. To fulfil the above targets, the cooperative also specified the number of total work points for each crop—from sowing the seeds, to the harvest. These work points are shown below:

Wheat: 170.85;

Rapeseed: 84.02;

Peas: 3.85;

Rice: 1,014.98;

Soybeans: 52.01;

Cotton: 8.4;

was that the official article required the land to be owned by the collective while the version of Zhaitan remained the private ownership. See ‘Gaoji Nongye Shengchan Hezuoshe Shifan Zhangcheng,’ 高级农业生产合作社示范章程 (The Template for the Article of Agriculture Production Cooperative), 30 June 1956, in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian* 建国以来农业合作化史料汇编 (The Corpus of Historical Documents on Agricultural Cooperative since the Founding of the Nation), ed. Huang Daoxia 黄道霞 *et al.* (Beijing: Zhonggong Dangshi Chubanshe, 1992), 351-357

¹²² See ‘Zhaitan Nongyeshe Wuqiu Zuowu Sanbao Hetong,’ 宅坦农业社午秋作物三包合同 (Three Guarantees Contract of Zhaitan Agricultural Cooperative on the Summer and Autumn Crops), in *Changqi Dang'an* 长期档案, Vol.7, preserved in Zhaitan Village Archives.

Fertilisation: 685.

At the end of the year, the cooperative would allocate the output on the work points of the team. The cooperative would not pay for any extra work points used beyond the specification. While the cooperative tried to regulate the work of the teams, it was also responsible for the production costs. The contract specified that the cooperative should provide the team with 4,966 *jin* of lime for each season and 1 *jin* of kerosene for each month, free of charge.

The contract concerned a crucial issue of the collective production: the evaluation of the labour of each member. From the beginning of the advanced cooperative, a system of work points was introduced to evaluate the labour of collective members. This system was applied widely across the country until the collective system broke down. It varied slightly in different places. Here I will briefly introduce the version used in Zhaitan.

One of the foremost purposes of the work point system was to allocate a number of work points to each worker in the collective. In Zhaitan, the allocation of points was based on the age, physical capability, and skills of the person. The number ranged from 2 to 10, with 10 being the highest;¹²³ female labour was usually allotted fewer points.¹²⁴ This number meant that, if a male worker was evaluated at 10 work points, he would earn 10 points for one day's work. For a female worker evaluated at 5 work points, this meant that she could only earn 5 points for a day's work.

In addition to the labour, all of the work to do with farming and sidelines within the cooperative was also assessed for a number of work points. There is also evidence of this assessment. Take farming on dry land as an example. Sowing seeds in 1 *mu* of flat land was evaluated as a task worthy of 20 points; weeding the grass for the first time was 25 points, and the second time was 20 points; harvesting one *jin* of grain was 0.25 points, whatever crop it was.¹²⁵ This assessment was based on the load of each task. A task worth 25 points required

¹²³ See 'Shangzhuang Xiang Zhaitan Cun Gaojishe Sheyuan Pingding Gongfen ji Fudan Gongyohua Jijin Gaikuan Biao,' 上庄乡宅坦村高级社社员评定工分及负担公有化基金概况表 (The Form of the Work Points Evaluated and the Share of Common Funding of Each Member in the Advanced Cooperative of Zhaitan) (hereafter referred to as the Pingding Gongfen Biao), in *Duanqi Dang'an* 短期档案, Vol.1, preserved in Zhaitan Village Archives.

¹²⁴ The informants told me that the maximum number of work points for a female worker was usually 8.

¹²⁵ See 'Zhaitan Nongye Hezuoshe Handi Gengzhong Feigong Biao,' 宅坦农业合作社旱地耕种费工表 (Table of Work Points of the Work on Dry Land of Zhaitan Agricultural Cooperative), in *Duanqi Dang'an*, Vol.7-8.

two and a half days to be completed by a labourer worth 10 points. So the team head could arrange for one 10-point labourer to work for two and a half days to finish this task or 5 labourers of 5 points to work for one day, and so on.

With these work points, the labourer's work was standardised and quantified. At the end of the year, the accountant for the cooperative would calculate the accumulated work points obtained by each worker. Then, according to the output to be distributed in the cooperative, he would calculate how much one work point was worth. Hence, each worker would know how much he/she had earned for the year.

In addition to the output allocation based on the work points system, the cooperative also carried out an allocation system based on the needs of its members. As almost all of the means of production were handed over to the cooperative, its members theoretically did not have the chance to work privately for their families, except for planting some dry-land crops on their private plot. Furthermore, the allocation of output usually took place at the end of the year. Under these circumstances, meeting daily needs for food and cash was a potential problem. To prevent this difficulty, a prepaid system was applied in the cooperative. Peasants were given a certain amount of the output in each harvest season, which could be green tea, rice, wheat or even cash. At the annual closing, i.e. the allocation at the end of the year, these prepaid money and goods would be deducted from the labour rewards based on the work points. After the deduction, if there was a surplus, the household would receive the surplus; but if there was a negative balance, the household must pay the balance to the cooperative.

In addition, at the early stage of the cooperative period, the peasants had another type of income for their investment to the collective. As I mentioned before, the land and capital input into the cooperative were not given for free. All of these means of production had been evaluated in advance and the family would receive a certain number of work points or sum of money as a return. Take the paddy field as an example: each piece of land had to be evaluated independently according to its size, quality and the crops growing on it. However, pieces of land of the same size might be assessed with different values. This can be illustrated by a draft form preserved in the village archives. The form recorded the land each household put into the cooperative in 1956. For instance, Hu Huazao had *1mu* of land beside Shentang, which was used to plant wheat. The value of this land was assessed to be 63 work points.

However, the value of another piece of hilly land of the same size, owned by Hu Guozhong, also used for growing wheat, was assessed to be worth merely 58 work points. And another piece of land of the same size growing rapeseed was allocated 73 work points.¹²⁶ The allocation of tea is another example, although this was valued in a different way. The valuation was based on the usual production of tea trees. For the households who contributed tea trees to the cooperative, they received 30 per cent of the tea produced by these trees. For members who did not have any tea trees, the distribution of tea was according to the number of family members. In 1956, each person in this kind of family would receive 0.625 *jin* of tea.¹²⁷

The work point system and the output distribution system reveal that the cooperative was a very sophisticated institution. It was carefully designed to make full use of the resources and at the same time to prevent damage to the interests and work initiatives of its members. However, what was the result in practice? The next two sections will review the performance of cooperatives from three aspects: labour input, fertilisation, and the output of main crops.

Performance of the Cooperative: Input, Output and Labour Reward

From 1952, the individual rural households had gradually been organised. From mutual-aid teams, elementary cooperatives, advanced cooperatives, to the people's commune, the scale of the organisation had been expanding. However, it was not until 1956, when the whole village was incorporated into one advanced cooperative, that the style of production management started to show a centralised character. As the last section has shown, a kind of double management system was set up in the advanced cooperative. At the cooperative level, the leadership was responsible for producing targets and allocating resources and income. At the production team level, the leadership was responsible for managing routine production

¹²⁶ See 'Zhaitan Nongye Gaojishi Shuitian Handi Qingmiao Rushe Fenhu Pingding Biao,' 宅坦农业高级社水田旱地青苗入社分户评定表 (The Evaluation Form for the Paddy Field, Dry Land and the Seedlings Put into the Advanced Cooperative of Zhaitan), in *Changqi Dang'an*, Vol.3.

¹²⁷ See 'Zhaitan Nongyeshe Chaye Rushe Chouwan Chengben ji Yufen Biao,' 宅坦农业社茶叶入社抽完成本及预分表 (The Form on the Extracted Cost and the Estimated Distribution of Tea for the Agricultural Cooperative of Zhaitan), in *Duanqi Dang'an*, Vol.3. The original unit used in the form was the old measurement unit *jin* and *liang* for which 1 *jin* is equal to 16 *liang*. In order to make the numbers easy to understand, I have already converted them into the current unit of *jin* for which the conversion is 1 *jin* = 10 *liang*.

and recording the labour of cooperative members. This system was maintained for almost two and a half years before the Great Leap Forward, which caused the radical expansion to a different system of people's commune. As the production was very organised, a number of accounting and labour records concerning the production procedure, production input and output and the allocation of output, were produced and saved. These records not only provided evidence for the operation of the collective system, but also made more detailed analysis of the performance of this system possible. In this section, I will first analyse the production input during the advanced cooperative period. It comprises the labour input and fertiliser input. Then I will demonstrate the output of the collective production, and the income of the members.

Labour Input

One of the major characteristics of the cooperative production was that the entire workforce in the cooperative was centrally managed. This allowed many tasks to be carried out simultaneously. To illustrate this characteristic, I will take the work of Production Team 2 in 1956 as an example. The village archives of Zhaitan preserve the work records of the production teams from 1 May 1956¹²⁸ to 31 March 1957. The report slips detailed the work done and the corresponding work points for every five days.¹²⁹

In 1956, there were 55 households in Production Team 2¹³⁰. The five-day report reveals that the major work was the cultivation of rice, rapeseed, tea, silkworms, and wheat. From the beginning of May, cooperative members started to level the land to prepare for rice planting. At the same time, the rapeseed started to be harvested. After the harvest, the land was levelled and prepared for rice growing as well. In addition, May was also the season to pick the tea leaves. Early June was the season for harvesting the wheat, when some of the land had already been planted with rice. The same procedure was followed: after the harvesting of the

¹²⁸ The advanced cooperative was launched on 1 May 1956, and the work points of the teams were recorded at the same time.

¹²⁹ See '1956 Zhaitan Nongyeshe Laodong Fenlei Wuri Baogaodan,' 宅坦农业社劳动分类五日报告单 (The Five-Day Report of Zhaitan Agricultural Cooperative on the Classified Labour), in *Duanqi Dang'an*, Vol.6.

¹³⁰ See 'Sheyuan Wanglai Zhang,' 社员往来账 (The Cooperative Members Current Account), 1956, in *Kuaiji Dang'an* 会计档案, Vol.1. This account recorded the transitions between each member and the cooperative, preserved in Zhaitan Village Archives.

wheat, this land was cleared and levelled immediately to prepare for rice planting and other grain crops such as soybeans, sweet potatoes and sorghum. From late June, silkworms stepped onto the stage. The cycle of raising silkworms usually took one month. In July, as the silkworms went into their final sleep, the most labour-consuming work of the month began. In August, the most important work was the harvesting of the early rice and the seeding of the late rice. In September, the rice planted in late May had to be harvested, and the second cycle of silkworm rearing was started at the end of the month. October was another busy season. While the cooperative members continued to look after the silkworms, the late rice was also ripe. In this month, other grain crops, such as the sweet potatoes, soybeans and so on, were also to be harvested. This work lasted until mid-November.

Comparing the above work cycle with the cycle pre-1949, the workload of the cooperative was much heavier. First, the cultivation of silkworms during the cooperative period doubled. In the past, peasants only raised silkworms in the spring. Second, the double cropping of rice was carried out. Under the collective production system, the rice cropping ran through most months of the year from May to November. From May to September, it was the cultivation of early rice (sometimes called the summer rice); from June to November was the time for cultivating the late rice. But in the past, peasants had planted the rice for just one season. Due to the extension of the rice-cropping period in the cooperative system, the production cycles for wheat and rapeseed overlapped with the rice cycle. This could only take place under the collective system, and may be attributed to the centralised management of labour and land in the cooperative.

To illustrate the labour usage, I calculated the work points of the team recorded on the five-day report. The data is shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Work Points of Production Team 2 in 1956¹³¹

May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
5281.824	6333.43	9531.35	5314.49	4364.46	7120.78	3943.26	3715.28

¹³¹ Source: '1956 Zhaitan Nongyeshe Laodong Fenlei Wuri Baogaodan'.

Note: The numbers for November were incomplete. There was only data for the first half of the month.

The table clearly shows that July was the busiest month of the year. Of the 9,531.35 work points, the work concerning silkworms accounted for 3,073.76 points. And most of these points were obtained within the 5 days from 11 July to 15 July. This was very different from the years before the collective period. As the last chapter demonstrated, July and August used to be the first slack months of a year. This is the result of the change in the production arrangement during the cooperative period; the workload became heavier and the labour was used more intensively.

In 1957, when the organisation of the advanced cooperative became more stable, the labour input was further raised. In the 55 households of Team 2, except for 5 households whose data was not complete, 36 households worked more in 1957 than in 1956, accounting for 72 per cent of all of the households.

Fertiliser Input

In spite of the intensive use of labour in agricultural production, the input of fertilisers showed a similar trend. In the 1950s, fertilisers were composed of chemical fertilisers, human and animal manure, green manure, and lime. The most popular chemical fertiliser was ammonium sulfate, a kind of nitrogen fertiliser. According to the accounting books of the cooperative, the ammonium sulfate had already been supplied by the local supply and marketing cooperative in 1956, and it was mainly applied in rice production. However, the main source of fertilisers was still the homemade organic fertiliser such as human and animal manure, green manure, plant ash, and lime. Table 5 lists the fertiliser input in 1956 and 1957. The first column of each year is the value of the fertiliser, and the second column for each year is the amount of each fertiliser.

Table 5 Fertilisers Input of the Advanced Cooperative¹³²

Type	1956		1957	
	Cost (<i>Yuan</i>)	Amount (<i>Jin</i>)	Cost (<i>Yuan</i>)	Amount (<i>Jin</i>)
Green manure	123.75 ^a	-	-	-
Human and Animal Manure	2,535.26	-	2631.5	-
Lime	3,090.13 ^b	178,371	3683.49 ^d	187,933
Ammonium Sulfate	707.57 ^c	3,867	376	2,055
Others	4.88	-	-	-
Total	6,461.59	-	6,690.99	-

Notes:

^a The green manure was input by individual households on 14 May 1956, when the advanced cooperative had just been organised. It was milk vetch, which was a very popular source of manure in the southern Yangzi area. The growing period of this plant is usually from winter to April.

^b The market price of lime was 0.0165 *yuan/jin* in 1956. The cost of lime input in this year included 2000 *jin* of lime plaster at a price of 0.09 *yuan/jin*.

^c The price of ammonium sulfate was 0.183 *yuan/jin* in 1956 and 1957.

^d The price of lime in 1957 rose to 0.0196 *yuan/jin*.

The above data reveals that the major fertilisers were still manure and lime, which accounted for over 89 per cent of the total. The chemical fertiliser only played a minor role in agricultural production. In 1957, the use of chemical fertilisers saw a remarkable decrease, while the use of human and animal manure and lime increased. Before giving an explanation for this phenomenon, we must keep one thing in mind, i.e. that the chemical fertiliser was more expensive than other fertilisers, while the other fertilisers could be made by the members themselves at a very low cost. Both the manure and lime were produced in this way, and the cooperative did not have to pay extra money for them. This might be the reason why people preferred to use homemade fertilisers than chemical fertilisers when capital was very

¹³² Data Source: the data was collected and calculated from 'Zhuanzhang Rijizhang,' 转账日记账 (The Transfer Journal), 1956, and 'Fenlei Mingxi Zhang,' 分类明细账 (The Subsidiary Ledger), 1957, in *Kuaiji Dang'an*, Vol. 1.

limited. In addition, the heavy use of manure and lime was further evidence for the input of labour. As there were no modern vehicles used at that time, these fertilisers had to be transported by humans. This made fertilisation one of the most labour-consuming tasks during production. In fact, the contract between Production Team 3 and the cooperative presented in the last section has already proved that fact. In the contract, the number of work points allocated to fertilisation was 685, second only to that of rice cultivation.

Performance of the Cooperative: Output

The agricultural output is usually affected by a number of variables. Management is important, but sometimes accidental factors will play a crucial role. Hence, it might be too rash to link output to productive organisation, especially when such organisation had only been in place for two years. For this reason, it might be unreasonable to allege the success or failure of the cooperative merely by reviewing the figures for its output. But we can simply check the data of 1956 and 1957 to have an idea of the performance of the cooperative in the early years. Table 6 shows the output of the cooperative over the years 1956–1957.

Table 6 Output of the Cooperative 1956–1957¹³³

Item	1956	1957
Wheat (<i>jin</i>)	68,867.12	38,148.12
Rice (<i>jin</i>)	534,233.6	634,065
Rape seed (<i>jin</i>)	300	12,440.6
Tea (<i>yuan</i>)	794.41	2,145.74
Silkworm (<i>yuan</i>)	2,573.79	5,852.55
Soybean (<i>yuan</i>)	1,084.3	2,323.82
Corn (<i>jin</i>)	3,372	632

The table shows that with the exception of wheat and corn, all of the other main items experienced rapid growth in 1957. The most remarkable growth was seen in rice, rapeseed,

¹³³ Data Source: the figures were collected and calculated from ‘Zhuanzhang Rijizhang,’ 1956, and ‘Fenlei Mingxi Zhang,’ 1957.

tea, and silkworms. The improvement in the output of rice and silkworms, the most labour-consuming businesses, was likely related to the increased labour input. Over the two years, the most remarkable change of productive condition was input of labour and fertilisers, in spite of the change in size of the production team. The growth in the input of fertiliser, however, as I noted in the last section, was also the result of the growing input of labour.

The respective outputs of rice and wheat in 1957 show an opposing trend. While the production of rice grew, the output of wheat decreased by almost 10,000 *jin*. This might be attributed to the adjustment of the plan of production. As the seedling of early rice needed to be conducted by the harvest of wheat, the cultivation of early rice had to occupy some of the land usually used to grow wheat. Moreover, as the production of rapeseed increased in 1957 and the two crops usually competed for land, the decrease of wheat might also be because the cultivation of rapeseed increased remarkably in this year.

In addition, the general improvement in the output of various businesses in 1957 suggests a more balanced or comprehensive economic structure. With the centralised management of resources, the cooperative was able to develop a wider range of production in agriculture and other sidelines. From 1957, the cooperative had not only continued its traditional farming and sidelines such as rice, wheat, rapeseed, corn, beans, green tea, and silkworms, but also became involved in the production of lime, noodles and oil.¹³⁴

Labour Reward and Family Income

To illustrate the labour reward and the family economic condition during the cooperative period, I will once more take the households in Production Team 2 of 1956 as examples. The production team was split in 1957, but the families remained intact. Therefore, by simply searching the family name on the accounting books, I was able to obtain the data of these households for the two years. The details are shown in Table 7, which contains the work points, labour reward and financial balance of 55 households.

¹³⁴ See 'Fenlei Mingxi Zhang,' 1957.

Table 7 Labour Rewards and Family Finance 1956-1957¹³⁵

Name of the Household Head	1956			1957		
	Work Point	Labour Reward (yuan)	Balance of Family Account (yuan) ^a	Work Point	Labour Reward (yuan)	Balance of Family Account (yuan)
Hu Zhonghui	234.60	239.29	7.25	317.26	253.81	100
Hu Shenggan	151.90	154.94	44.32	189.85	151.88	50.73
Hu Shanqian	170.57	173.98	-40.51	219.49	175.59	-24.69
Hu Shengmao	161.61	164.84	3.81	158.33	126.66	33.19
Hu Zhanghui	260.951	266.17	21.63	345.38	276.3	-14.56
Hu Zunzhou	48.31	49.28	-10.85	11.06	8.85	-10.23
Hu Lixing	53.59	54.66	6.37	66.58	53.26	0.02
Cao Chunxia	35.33	36.04	-1.05	32.79	26.23	0
Hu Duhui	7.77	7.93	-2.13	0.3	0.24	-7.36
Cheng Xia	15.97	16.29	-4.38	21.76	17.41	0.01
Wang Liju	7.77	7.93	-5.17	1.71	1.37	-0.37
Cheng Dongxian	6.79	6.93	-8.12	0.175	0.14	-10
Hu Shunshi	11.58	11.81	-58.76	10.26	8.21	-32.25
Wang Cai'e	38.11	38.87	0.57	9.21	7.37	4.36
Zhang Chunmei	24.90	25.4	-3.68	22.41	17.93	7.03
Ye Qiuxiang	74.42	75.91	13.65	26.69	21.35	10.66
Bao Caifu	98.37	100.34	-16.43	149.6375	119.71	-119.71
Hu Daohui	102.24	104.28	-27.84	144.49	115.59	-7.4
Hu Runsheng	295.09	300.99	-13.76	405.54	324.43	0
Hu Xianghui	202.80	206.86	-38.59	339.63	271.7	-2.68
Hu Jiayuan	127.17	129.71	27.93	156.79	125.43	0

¹³⁵ Data source: 'Sheyuan Wanglai Zhang,' 1956 and 1957. The data on work points was calculated according to the labour rewards of each family and the value of work points in each year.

Name of the Household Head	1956			1957		
	Work Point	Labour Reward (yuan)	Balance of Family Account (yuan)	Work Point	Labour Reward (yuan)	Balance of Family Account (yuan)
Hu Yonghan	85.04	86.74	5.06	143.2	114.56	0
Hu Xuegao	152.51	155.56	8.89	205.24	164.19	-10.02
Hu Shengjia	103.75	105.82	-23.12	146.96	117.57	0
Hu Jintai	36.23	36.95	-3.17	44.04	35.23	0
Hu Jia'an	57.01	58.15	12.34	71.41	57.13	-11.35
Wang Lanhua	47.79	48.75	1.4	27.81	22.25	0
Wang Shi	19.29	19.68	-0.34	21.08	16.86	0
Cao Qinzhi	21.36	21.79	-3.45	28.19	22.54	0
Dong Dexiang	36	36.72	2.76	45	36	0
Hu Rusong	3.9314	4.01	-24.15	1.34	1.07	-6.93
Hong Zhuyun	32.451	33.1	4.38	50.61	40.49	0
Cheng Xiba	45.94	46.86	-19.54	86.08	68.86	0
Hu Yaoquan	93.87	95.75	-8.19	170.85	136.68	0.01
Song Aishi	67.92	69.27	-9.31	96.09	76.87	0
Hu Ji'an	171.39	174.81	8.55	214.91	171.93	-25.66
Dong Wentian	182.27	185.91	-23.58	265.89	212.71	10.35
Hu Guo'an	145.43	148.34	16.74	218	174.4	0
Hu Duxiang	231	235.62	-0.03	259.54	207.63	0
Hu Xuexiao	97.78	99.73	-2.18	107.16	85.73	-9.32
Hu Guoben	87.59	89.34	32.82	149.51	119.61	0
Fang Lichun	70.87	72.29	19.88	120.48	96.38	0
Hu Nanhui	63.92	65.19	-25.9	61.66	49.33	0
Hu Anji	89.68	91.47	15.86	127.84	102.27	0
Wang Yuexian	62.06	63.3	3.28	92.39	73.91	3.45
Pan Caijiao	50.20	51.2	-15.95	64.55	51.64	0

Name of the Household Head	1956			1957		
	Work Point	Labour Reward (yuan)	Balance of Family Account (yuan)	Work Point	Labour Reward (yuan)	Balance of Family Account (yuan)
Hu Haochun	12.10	12.34	-3.95			
Jiang Shun'e	81.93	83.57	-5.31	110.78	88.62	0
Cheng Zhongjia	14.74	15.03	-15.36			
Cheng Xiujiao	63.28	64.55	-0.29	71.05	56.84	0.56
Zhang Lixiang			-3.66	19.075	15.26	0.1
Hu Yuhui	108.71	110.88	18.13	143.9	115.12	0.7
Hu You'an	1.22	1.24	-26.79	3.94	3.15	0
Bao Ji'an			-27.4			0
Wang Ronggui			-56.88			
Total	4,467.10	4,556.41	-254.2	5,797.92	4,638.29	-71.36

^a The balance of the family account was the amount of family income minus the value of goods and cash prepaid by the cooperative in the year.

According to Table 7, in 1957, the labour input in Team 2 was much improved in terms of the amount of total work points that the team members obtained. From 1956 to 1957, the total work points of the team increased by nearly 30 per cent from 4,467.1 to 5,797.92, and the labour reward also increased, but to a much smaller extent—by 1.8 per cent, from 4,556.41 *yuan* to 4,638.29 *yuan*. This fact implies that the output of the cooperative in 1957 did not match the input of labour of that year, which could be reflected by the labour reward per unit, i.e. the value of each work point. In 1956, the value of each work point was 1.02 *yuan*, but in 1957 it was reduced to 0.80 *yuan*. As the price for major agricultural products did not change in 1957, this suggests a decrease in the real value of the work point. However, if we look at the information at the family level, the situation appears a little different.

According to the table, in 1957 there were 36 households earning more work points in 1957, and 24 of them obtained a greater labour reward, while 12 of them experienced a drop in the labour reward. This suggests that in 1957, through the much increased labour input,

most families managed to counteract the decrease in the value of the work point and achieved an overall increase in their family income. But for the families who input less labour, or whose labour input was not sufficient to offset the drop in the value of work points, their income from labour decreased.

Furthermore, if we take the overall financial condition into account, we find that the economic condition of the family was in fact improved in 1957. Under the system of the advanced cooperative in Zhaitan, except for cash income from labour, peasants also had income from investment in collective production, and received goods after the harvest of each crop. For example, in June, after the wheat was harvested, all the families in the cooperative received a certain amount of wheat for their own consumption.¹³⁶ And they were also paid by inputting fertiliser, particularly the manure, into the field. All these incomes and distribution of goods were recorded on the account and calculated at the end of the year. At the end of the year, the accountant of the cooperative calculated the balance of the household after considering the total income of the family and the goods and cash that had been allocated to them during the year. If the balance of the income after deducting the allocated goods and cash was positive, the family would receive the balance in cash, otherwise they would be in debt. According to the record of the account, this debt usually was transferred to the next year and was deducted from the family income of that year. With this distribution system, in 1956, the beginning of the cooperative, 34 households had a negative balance at the end of the year, which means that their income was not able to cover their consumption and expenditure for the year. However, in 1957, 26 of them had either paid off their debts or had less debt. In this year, only 15 households owed to the cooperative, and the balance of all the households on average increased from -4.62 *yuan* in 1956 to -1.37 *yuan* in 1957. This result demonstrates that the economic condition of most households generally improved, which can be attributed to either the increased input of labour or increased investment.

People's Commune

From 1954 to 1957, the movement of collectivisation progressed quickly with the continuous expansion of the organisation. However, in 1957 the production team in the

¹³⁶ See 'Sheyuan Wanglai Zhang,' 1956 and 1957.

cooperative reduced in size, which seemed to signal a more cautious attitude to the expansion of the productive unit; this cautiousness was soon abandoned by a nationwide people's commune movement in 1958.

In 1957, the advanced cooperative was widely established in rural areas and the socialist reformation in urban areas was also completed. Under the resultant optimistic atmosphere, the Central Committee of the CCP proposed a further plan to speed up agricultural production.¹³⁷ In response to the plan, a campaign to build water facilities and accumulate fertilisers in rural areas was launched in the winter of 1957. The construction of large water projects caused the demand for cross-village and even cross-county cooperation, which led to the merger of cooperatives.

In addition, from 1955 a large-scale rural organisation became an admirable target for some of the top leaders of the CCP. Mao Zedong believed 'the small cooperative was not able to conduct large-scale operations and use machinery due to the shortage of people, land and capital. These small cooperatives will continue to limit the development of productive force. Hence, they should be merged gradually.' He suggested the scale of future cooperatives could be equal to the territory of the township or even several townships, which might include over 10,000 households.¹³⁸

Inspired by these two facts, in the spring of 1958 some cooperatives in Henan and Liaoning Province merged to form larger cooperatives. On 1 July 1958, the magazine *Red Flag* first presented the concept of 'commune'—a combination of agriculture and industry. On 18 July 1958, it further published Mao's opinion on developing the people's commune, which suggested that the destination should be the large commune, incorporating industry, agriculture, commerce, education and the military gradually and sequentially.¹³⁹ He appealed, 'in the current situation, we should establish the people's commune involving the general development of agriculture, forestry, husbandry, fishery and sidelines as well as the

¹³⁷ See '1956 Dao 1967 Nian Quanguo Nongye Fazhan Gangyao,' 1956 到 1967 年全国农业发展纲要 (Agricultural Development Guideline of 1956-1967), 1957, in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 464-467.

¹³⁸ See 'Zhongguo Nongcun de Shehui Zhuyi Gaochao,' 中国农村的社会主义高潮 (The Climax of Socialisation in Rural China), 1955, 611.

¹³⁹ See Maurice J Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 218.

combination of workers, farmers, businessmen, students and soldiers'.¹⁴⁰ Encouraged by this attitude, from late July the people's commune became an overwhelming campaign in the country. On 30 September 1958, it was announced that the people's commune was almost established throughout the whole country. By 29 September 1958, 90.4 percent of peasants had joined the commune, and each commune had 4,797 households on average. In some provinces, the territory of one commune even covered a whole county.¹⁴¹

In October 1958, the advanced cooperative of Zhaitan was dismissed and incorporated into the people's commune of Yuejin. All of the original assets, including the land, tools and public accumulation funding were transferred to the commune; the private plots, which remained in the hands of individual households, were also handed over to the collective.

In the early stages of the commune, the production organisation and management scheme of the cooperative was retained. The Zhaitan cooperative was still the unit of production and accounting, and the previous distribution system, i.e. the combination of the work points system and the supply system, was maintained too. But, from November 1958, with the progress of the Great Leap Forward, a more centralised system aiming at mobilising as much of the labour force as possible into the collective production was implemented, and through which public canteens, nurseries and kindergartens were set up.¹⁴² These public institutes provided free services for the members of the commune so that the female workforce was exempt from the duties of child care and cooking and could focus on the collective work like the male workforce. However, these measures, although important in mobilising as much labour as possible to work on collective construction, especially on the building of water projects, also lessened the economic burden of the collective. Take the canteen scheme as an example. In the first months, the meal supply was not only free to all of the members, but was also unlimited. This caused huge amounts of waste and soon became

¹⁴⁰ See 'Guanyu zai Nongcun Jianli Renmin Gongshe Wenti de Jueyi,' 关于在农村建立人民公社问题的决议 (The Agreement on Establishing the People's Commune in Rural Areas), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 494–495.

¹⁴¹ See 'Quanguo Jiben Shixianle Renmin Gongshehua,' 全国基本实现了人民公社化 (The People's Commune Realised in the Whole Country), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 503–504.

¹⁴² According to the village gazetteer, in 1960, the village had 6 canteens, 9 nurseries (with 70 children and 23 nursery nurses) and 1 kindergarten (with 52 children and 2 teachers). See *Longjing Chunqiu*, 86.

unaffordable. Hence, from June 1959, though the provision of food through the canteen was still maintained, the provision became rationed.¹⁴³

The centralised management of the household was soon embodied in agricultural production. All of the households in the village were divided into two companies, and each company was further divided into three platoons, imitating militarised management. To strengthen the fighting atmosphere, a bell tower and broadcasting station were set up at the centre of the village. Under this system, the entire workforce had to listen to orders from the leadership of the commune. This made it easier to arrange the labour force to complete the tasks commanded by the government. By 1 December 1958, the village had sent at least 29 labour forces to the factories in the county town and other villages to assist industrial production, including the production of steel.¹⁴⁴ While these workers did not contribute to agricultural production, their work was still counted into the work points of the collective and thus they also attended the village's distribution at the end of the year.¹⁴⁵ This system further raised the burden on the food supply and worsened the food shortage in the village.

Consequence: the Great Famine

The dramatic expansion of production units and the radical policy of the GLF soon created a number of problems. According to the record in the village gazetteer and the descriptions of villagers, in addition to the labour force sent to the factories, during the GLF more of the workforce was involved in the construction of reservoirs, many of which were in other villages. As all these labourers did not contribute to the agricultural production of Zhaitan, but did attend the allocation of its output, this situation not only raised the burden on Zhaitan's village economy, but also caused a labour shortage in the agriculture of the

¹⁴³ See 'Sheyuan Wanglai Zhang,' 1958 and 1959; and 'Xianjin Riji Zhang,' 现金日记账 (The Cash Journal), 1958 and 1959, in *Kuaiji Dang'an*, Vol.2.

¹⁴⁴ See 'Fengchuanxiang Yuejin Renmin Gongshe Tu Mu Shi Zhuan Zhujiang Dengjibiao,' Zhuan Zhujiang Dengjibiao' 冯川乡跃进人民公社土木石砖竹匠登记表 (The Registration Form of House-Builder, Carpenter, Mason, Bricklayer and Bamboo Craftsman in Yuejin Commune of Fengchuan Township), in *Changqi Dang'an*, Vol.8.

¹⁴⁵ The information is from the interview with Hu Yougui on 19 October 2010.

village.¹⁴⁶ When the harvesting season came, there were not enough labourers available, and thus the grain in the field was not harvested in time, which caused a loss of output.

Furthermore, another result of the GLF was an air of boasting and exaggerations of production which spread over the country. As the boom in crop production was published in the official propaganda, the cadres of Zhaitan village could not stay still. When the inspector from the senior government came down to examine the crop production, in order to show that Zhaitan had emulated the progress of the nation, people transplanted the rice from several patches of field into one single patch before the rice became ripe. This meant that the production of this field seemed to be over ten times its previous amount.¹⁴⁷ This method made the space between plants too narrow for them to grow, and caused the field's crop to fail. More importantly, it conveyed a false message to the senior authorities. With the exaggerated production of grain, the procurement target of grain was set higher and higher accordingly.

In 1959, the commune estimated that the rice production of Zhaitan could reach 1,381,812 *jin*, so that the procurement target was set at 164,000 *jin*. However, in reality the actual rice production in 1959 was 604,241 *jin*, only half of the expectation, while the rice purchased by the government still amounted to 154,791.4 *jin*. Including the tax paid to the government, which was 118,844.4 *jin* of rice, the rice handed over to the government accounted for 45.3 per cent of the total production. In 1960, with the ongoing fever of boasting and exaggeration, the target of grain procurement was again raised, this time to 259,985 *jin*. Yet, the actual output of rice was even lower than in 1960, merely 405,264.92 *jin*. After deducting the actual procurement of 245,173 *jin* and the seeds, which accounted for 566 *jin*, only 120,654 *jin* of rice was left for distribution to the peasants. For this reason, in November 1960, the grain stock was only 14,274 *jin*, including 10,579 *jin* of rice, 571 *jin* of soybeans, 738 *jin* of sorghum and 2,276 *jin* of buckwheat.¹⁴⁸ As the contemporary population of the village was 1,147, each person had only 12.5 *jin* of grain to survive the next six months

¹⁴⁶ See 'Longjing Chunqiu,' 86; and I received the same information from Hu Yougui on 19 October 2010 and my landlady, Hu Wanli.

¹⁴⁷ This method seemed to be very popular in the GLF. I heard it from different villages, including Zhaitan and my home village.

¹⁴⁸ The data were extracted and calculated from 'Mingxi Fenleizhang,' 1959 and 1960, in *Kuaiji Dang'an*, Vol.3.

until the wheat harvest, i.e., each person could only have an average of 34g of grain to consume each day during this period.

Hence, as a result of the reduced grain production, the increased demand from the workers, and the purchase target from the government, from late 1959 to 1961 a serious famine spread over China and also Zhaitan. In Zhaitan, the crisis started in the spring of 1960 and worsened from the winter of 1960 to the spring of 1961, which was directly reflected by the food supply to the village. The supply of food in Zhaitan had experienced three stages since 1958. As I mentioned before, in November 1958, the cooperative method continued. Peasants ‘borrowed’ rice and wheat from the collective when they ran out of food, and repaid it at the end of the year from their labour reward. From November 1958 to June 1959, they ate freely in the public canteen. From 11 June 1959, due to the shortage of food, rationing was applied in the village. With rationing, each person was allocated a certain amount of grain according to their age. People up to and including 15 years old were regarded as children and had a lower ration, while people over 15 were considered adults, and had a higher ration.¹⁴⁹ The standard varied from month to month depending on the output of each season and the stock.

Here I take one family as an example to illustrate the development of the famine in Zhaitan from 1959 to 1961. As, during this period, the same grain ration was applicable to all families, the condition of this family is representative of the other families in the village. In 1960, there were 10 persons in the family of Hu Yuanju: 5 adults and 5 children. The details of food supply to this family were as listed below.

¹⁴⁹ See ‘Zhaitan Shengchandu Kouliang Fendeng Dingliang Xuling Diaochabiao,’ 宅坦生产队口粮分等定量虚龄调查表 (Investigation Chart of Age for the Food Distribution of Zhaitan Production Team), in *Changqi Dang’an*, Vol.21.

Table 8 Grain Ration of Hu Yuanju from July 1959 to May 1961

Time	1959 ¹⁵⁰						1960 ¹⁵¹		
	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March
Daily Food Ration (jin)	8.8	14.8	14.8	14.8	10.5	10.5	3.6	3.4	6.1

Time	1960								
	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Daily Food Ration (jin)	8.9	8	9.3	7	9	8.1	7.8	4.9	4.2

Time	1961 ¹⁵²				
	January	February	March	April	May
Daily Food Ration (jin)	7.6	7.6	7.6	7.6	7.6

The data above indicates a clear trend in the food supply. During this period, food shortages usually happened in the winter and the spring when the output for the first year was consumed and the output for the next year had not yet come. In June, the harvest of wheat relieved the situation. From August, as the rice ripened and was harvested, the food supply usually improved significantly.

According to this table, the most serious food shortages in Zhaitan occurred in January, February, November and December of 1960. In January and February 1960, the whole family

¹⁵⁰ Data source: 'Sheyuan Wanglai Zhang,' 1959.

¹⁵¹ See '1960 Yi zhi Shi'er Yuefen Kouliang Guihubiao,' 1960 年一至十二月份口粮归户表 (Family Food Distribution Chart for January-December 1960), in *Changqi Dang'an*, Vol.20.

¹⁵² Source: 'Sheyuan Wanglai Zhang,' 1961, in *Kuaiji Dang'an*, Vol.3.

only had around 3.5 *jin* of food each day, which was comprised of wheat and rice. As stated in the last chapter, if one adult normally needed 1.5 *jin* of rice and a children needed 0.75 *jin* of rice for one day, then a family with 5 adults and 5 children needed 12.5 *jin* of rice. Therefore, in these two months, the food supply was a mere 28 per cent of the normal level.

According to the table, the conditions in November and December 1960 were slightly better than in January and February, and the data for 1961 seems much better than the same period in 1960, although the supply recorded on the account book was still much lower than normal. Nevertheless, the reality may have been different. There is a problem with the record on food distribution for 1961. There was only one record of food distribution for the five months, on 31 May 1961, and the data for the 5 months in Table 8 is simply an average. In contrast with the records of other periods, this was unusual. It might be reasonable to assume that this was the only distribution for the five months, which means that there was no food to distribute until the end of May, so each family received the amount of five months at the end of May as compensation. In fact, there is other evidence that clearly indicates the serious deficiency in food during this period. A chart of the food arrangements between November 1960 and May 1961 revealed that since December 1960, the village had relied heavily on vegetables and food substitutes to sustain itself. Related to the introduction of *Longjing Chunqiu*, the so-called food substitutes were wild herbs and the roots of wild plants.¹⁵³ From January to May 1961, the village was only able to arrange 2.8 *jin* of grain for each person per month.¹⁵⁴ This food supply was even worse than the first two months of 1960.

The subsidiary ledgers on grain confirmed the crisis from 1960. According to the subsidiary ledger, in 1960 the village frequently purchased grain from the state-owned grain institute to meet the food demand of the peasants. In March, April, May, July, and December 1960, the village purchased grain 6 times. In July, after all of the wheat harvested in June and

¹⁵³ According to the record of this book, in the winter of 1960, to relieve hunger in the village, cadres secretly dismissed the public canteens and led peasants to the mountains to dig fern roots. People cooked fern roots and extracted the starch as one of substitutes for rice and wheat. In the village museum, there were special tools displayed for digging fern roots and making the starch. See *Longjing Chunqiu*, 86–88.

¹⁵⁴ See ‘Haizhai Gongshe Zhaitan Dadui Liulingnian Shiyi Yuefen Zhi Liuyinian Wuyuefen Liangshi Shenghuo Anpaibiao,’ 浩寨公社宅坦大队 60 年 11 月份至 61 年 5 月份粮食生活安排表 (The Chart on the Food Arrangement for Zhaitan Brigade, Haozhai Commune from November 1960 to May 1961). The chart is an uncategorised manuscript preserved in the village archives. The manuscript was filled with charts and tables which seemed to be a notebook of the accountant.

the stock was consumed, the village took an action of *Modi* (摸底行动, an action to find out the real situation). During this action, the cadres searched the home of each peasant to collect all of the grain privately stored by the peasants. 6,890 *jin* of rice was collected and redistributed to all of the households in the village.¹⁵⁵ In 1961, the subsidiary ledger shows that in January, due to the shortage of stock, all of the rice seeds were distributed and consumed. In April 1961, the stocks of all of the supplementary grains such as soybean and buckwheat were consumed.

Conclusion

From 1950 to 1961, a series of revolutions brought fundamental changes to Zhaitan village. The land reform transformed social relationships and improved the economic condition of the poorest peasants by the redistribution of property. But in the 1950s, due to the shortage of capital and China's extremely undeveloped industry and technology, the changes to land ownership did not help to solve the general poverty in the countryside and improve the agriculture in a short time period. The transformation of the way production was organised was the only method to pool the resources of the village and speed up agricultural development. From 1952 to 1958, the collective system was gradually established in Zhaitan. By pooling the resources and managing the land and labour centrally, the collective system was able to make full use of the available labour and develop the labour-consuming businesses. The practice of Zhaitan demonstrates that this intensive input of labour had positive effects on the gross production of crops and sidelines. Although the mass input of labour reduced the labour reward per unit, i.e. the value of each work point, the general financial condition of the family was improved. However, the development of the cooperative economy was soon disrupted by the people's commune and the Great Leap Forward movement. A number of workforces from Zhaitan were transferred from agricultural production to industry and irrigation construction in other places, but their rewards were still paid by the village. This not only raised the economic burden of the village, but also caused an agricultural labour shortage in the village, which led to crop failure. In addition, under the

¹⁵⁵ See the records under the accounting subject 'Rice' in 'Mingxi Fenleizhang,' 明细分类账 (The Subsidiary Ledger), 1960, in *Kuaiji Dang'an*, Vol.3.

fever of the communist society, the country fell into the habit of boasting. This led to high levels of procurement by the government. All of these factors prompted the famine that lasted from late 1959 to early 1961.

Chapter 4

The Development of Collective Economy and the Labour Dilemma

This chapter focuses on the second stage of the collective economy of Zhaitan, from 1963 to 1978. Although the collective system was criticised for economic inefficiency and a lack of incentives for peasants, the data from Zhaitan shows that in a relatively stable environment, the agriculture in Zhaitan experienced an overall substantial development during this period, particularly in grain production in the 1970s. Irrigation was remarkably improved, and a new rice cropping method was introduced and extended in the 1970s, which substantially promoted rice production and thus solved the problem of food shortages in the village. However, the improvement was still largely based on the mass mobilisation of the labour force, largely because of the growing labour force, particularly in the 1970s, and restrictions on labour flow. The productivity of the labourers was also improved via the increased input of chemical fertiliser, but it played a minor role in the gross growth of output.

Collective production was criticised for the stagnation of agricultural output that arose from difficulties in monitoring the work of the peasants and the excessive egalitarian remuneration and allocation system.¹⁵⁶ But some more detailed research at the village level had different findings. A study on the labour management of a village in Jiangsu Province demonstrated that given the identification of the benefit to collective members and leaders as well as the collective output, the attitude of villagers towards collective farming was not simply determined by the state's policy but by the formal and informal institutions operating in the team. Supervision was thus not a problem in routine work, and the critical factor was the personality of the team leader and the style of management.¹⁵⁷ Another study from James Kaising Kung also argued that from a holistic point of view that the egalitarianism was more

¹⁵⁶ See Louis Putterman, 'The Incentive Problem and The Demis of Team Farming in China,' *Journal of Development Economics*, 26 (1987): 103–127. Also see Lin, 'Collectivisation and China's Agricultural Crisis in 1959-1961,' 1228–1252.

¹⁵⁷ See Huaiyin Li, 'Everyday Strategies for Team Farming in Collective-era China: Evidence from Qin Village,' *The China Journal*, 54 (2005): 79–98.

based on the subsistence nature of the Chinese agricultural economy given the scarcity of job opportunities and land resources.¹⁵⁸

My research, based on the annual agricultural statistics of Zhaitan village and the minutes of meetings of the village leadership, also shows that the collective system was not the crucial obstacle to the development of the economy. Under the command of the state and pressure from the growing population, the leadership of the village managed to mobilise the labour force as much as possible to develop irrigation and improve the crop rotation. Combined with progress in the application of chemical fertilisers, the gross production of food grain and the production per unit of land experienced a considerable improvement. The economy in Zhaitan had also been steadily developing rather than remaining stagnant. Owing to the centralised management, the traditional labour-intensive sideline of silkworm farming was expanded; pig farming, as one of the major income sources of the family, was encouraged and extended among the households; and a brigade-owned forestry plantation was established and maintained by a dedicated team. In the 1970s, the collective also managed to get extra income from a few small businesses other than the agriculture, such as grain and oil processing and construction.

In contrast with the dramatic increase in gross output, in the 1970s, though the food grain allocated was able to meet the need of collective members, the cash income of each family was still very low, and most families were in debt. The improvement in the productivity of labourers was also limited in spite of the increased input of chemical fertiliser. This should be attributed to the strict state command on the rural area, particularly on the labour flow, which raised the tension between the arable land the work force and prevented the redundant labour force from working outside to obtain extra income for the family.

This chapter is made up of five sections. The first section briefly introduces the historical background of the rural collective economy. The second section elaborates on the mobilisation and management of labour and the outcome of this in Zhaitan under the collective system. The third section demonstrates the achievement of collective economy, and the fourth section presents the problems of the collective system. The fifth section is the

¹⁵⁸ See Kung, 'Egalitarianism, Subsistence Provision and Work Incentives in China's Agricultural Collectives,' 175–187.

conclusion. All the analysis is based on primary sources collected from the Zhaitan archives and conversations with local villagers.

The Three-Tier System and the 'Learn from Dazhai' Movement

The worsening famine from the spring of 1960 caused a setback to the Great Leap Forward movement. From November 1960, in spite of the ongoing disputes within the CCP, the Central Committee of CCP started to put the brakes on the movement and solve the difficulties in agriculture. The new policies reduced the scale of the production unit to solve the commune's management problem. Large amounts of rural labour that had been recruited to industry during the GLF were sent back to the countryside to compensate for the shortage of agricultural labour.¹⁵⁹ On the ninth plenary session of the 8th CPC Central Committee, a policy of readjustment (of the proportion of different sectors in national economy), consolidation (of existing economic outcomes), reinforcement (of the production of light industry and handicrafts) and improvement (of the quality of products, the management and productivity) was published, and the focus of the policy turned to agriculture.¹⁶⁰

From September 1962, though the commune system was retained, the production team was formally confirmed as the accounting unit of the rural economy, in place of the commune and the production brigade. The resumed production team was equivalent to the former elementary cooperative in terms of scale, and was usually made up of a few dozen households. It obtained the power to manage the land, farming tools and draft animals, to arrange the cultivation of crops and husbandry, and to allocate the output of the team based on the plans and targets of the production brigade and people's commune. From then on, however, the commune merely served as a local governmental institution and the production brigade,

¹⁵⁹ 'Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Nongcun Renmin Gongshe Dangqian Zhengce Wenti de Jinji Zhishixin,' 中共中央关于农村人民公社当前政策问题的紧急指示信 (An Emergency Letter of the Central Committee of CCP on the Current Policy of Rural People's Commune), 3 November, 1960, and 'Zhonggong Zhongyang dui Sheng, Shi, Qu Dangwei de Zhishi- Guanyu Chedi Jiuzheng Wufeng Wenti,' 中共中央对省、市、区党委的指示——关于彻底纠正五风问题 (The Directive of the Central Committee of CCP to the Party Committees of Provinces, Cities and Districts: Thoroughly Correct the Five Winds), 15 November, 1960, in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 613–617.

¹⁶⁰ 'Zhongguo Gongchandang Dibajie Zhongyang Weiyuanhui Dijiuqi Quanti Huiyi Gongbao,' 中国共产党第八届中央委员会第九次全体会议公报 (Communiqué of the ninth plenary session of the 8th CPC Central Committee), <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64560/65352/4442072.html>, accessed 31 December, 2013.

equivalent in scale to the advanced cooperative before the GLF took over authority for transferring the directives, managing large water projects and brigade-owned enterprises, collecting taxes and taking care of public affairs such as education and health.¹⁶¹ The three-tier management system was maintained from 1963 to 1978, even during the disturbance of the Cultural Revolution. Under the collective framework, combined with a rigid household registration system (*Hukou*, 户口),¹⁶² the reformed commune system ensured that the mass of the rural workforce was under control and the rural economy was integrated into the command of the state plan.

During this period, a significant movement prevailing in rural areas was the *Nongye Xue Dazhai Yundong* (农业学大寨运动, the Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture movement). Dazhai was a village in the mountainous Taihang area of Northern China, which had been suffering from difficulties with irrigation and meagre land. According to propaganda, since 1953, the peasants in this village had been organised and worked diligently in the valleys under the leadership of the village party branch. They built a number of dams to improve irrigation and thus transformed the barren hilly land into arable land. This achievement was officially reported and praised in 1964.¹⁶³ Praised as self-reliant and hard-working, Dazhai

¹⁶¹ See 'Nongcun Renmin Gongshe Gongzuo Tiaoli Xiuzheng Cao'an,' 农村人民公社工作条例修正草案 (Draft Revisions on Rules and Work Regulations of Rural People's Commune), June 1961 and September 1962, 'Guanyu Jinyibu Gonggu Renmin Gongshe Jiti Jingji Fazhan Nongye Shengchan de Jueding,' 关于进一步巩固人民公社集体经济、发展农业生产的决定 (The Decision on Further Consolidating the People's Commune and Collective Economy and Developing the Agricultural Production), 27 September 1962, 'Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Gaibian Nongcun Renmin Gongshe Jiben Hesuan Danwei Wenti de Zhishi,' 中共中央关于改变农村人民公社基本核算单位问题的指示 (The directive of the Central Committee of the CCP on Changing the Basic Accounting Unit of Rural People's Commune), 13 February 1962, and 'Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Nongcun Jiben Hesuan Danwei Wenti de Zhishi,' 中共中央关于农村基本核算单位问题的指示 (Directive of the Central Committee of the CCP on Rural Basic Accounting Unit), 7 October 1961, in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 613–741.

¹⁶² The *Hukou* system was carried out in China from 1958. The system required every family to register with the police station or local authority. It also differentiated people of PRC into rural residents and urban residents. The latter had privileges in housing, education and social welfare while the former were strictly limited for migration. The restriction on the movement of rural residents was said to ensure the labour force in agriculture and the stability and security of urban areas, which was criticised as the reason for the disparity between the rural and urban residents and the discrimination against rural people. See 'Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Hukou Dengji Tiaoli,' 中华人民共和国户口登记条例 (The Regulation on the Registration of Hukou in PRC) and the attached explanation made by Luo Ruiqing, the ministry of public security at that time, http://www.law-lib.com/law/law_view.asp?id=1338, accessed 31 December 2013.

¹⁶³ For the official report on the details of Dazhai, see the editorial 'Yong Geming Jingshen Jianshe Shanqu de Haobangyang,' 用革命精神建设山区的好榜样 (A Positive Model of Constructing Mountainous Area with Revolutionary Spirit) and the report 'Dazhai Zhilu,' 大寨之路 (The Road of

was regarded as a model of collective economy, and its experience was then extended to the country.¹⁶⁴ Over the next ten years, ‘Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture’ became a major movement in rural China. Although the propaganda of this movement varied according to the political situation, the essential experience of Dazhai remained unchanged. The rural collective was encouraged to rely on the efforts of its members to develop the collective economy (自力更生, *Zili Gengsheng*) and work hard to overcome all of its difficulties (艰苦奋斗, *Jianku Fendou*). This simply suggested the extreme significance of hard work by the labour force when it was hard to obtain support from outside, especially support in the form of machinery from industry and investment from the government.

In these circumstances, ensuring the supply of labour for the rural collective economy became a basic policy of the government. In respect of the central government, the security of labour supply had been repeatedly stressed after the famine,¹⁶⁵ even during the disturbances of the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976¹⁶⁶. At an early stage of the revolution, when most young people in urban areas were roused to join the *Hong Weibin* (红卫兵, Red Guards), linked up (串联, *Chuanlian*)¹⁶⁷ and got involved in the violence, the central government

Dazhai, published on Renmin Ribao 人民日报 (People’s Daily, 10 February 1964; another detailed investigation on Dazhai was Liao Luyan 廖鲁言, ‘Dazhai Dadui Diaocha Baogao,’ 大寨大队调查报告 (An Investigation Report on Dazhai Brigade), 25 May 1964, in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 792–793, 799–804, and 794–799.

¹⁶⁴ Zhou Enlai, ‘Zhengfu Gongzuo Baogao,’ 政府工作报告 (The Report on the Work of Government), delivered at the First Session of the Third National People’s Congress in December 1964, in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 794.

¹⁶⁵ See ‘Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Nongcun Renmin Gongshe Dangqian Zhengce Wenti de Jinji Zhishixin,’ and ‘Nongcun Renmin Gongshe Gongzuo Tiaoli Xiuzheng Cao’an,’ in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 613–617, 640–647.

¹⁶⁶ The failure of the Great Leap Forward caused the CCP to reflect on its leadership and cadres in rural society. The corruption and power abuse among the rural cadres was gradually exposed, which was regarded as having damaged the image and authority of the Party and required immediate correction. In 1963, the Central Committee of CCP decided to launch a socialist education movement to differentiate between the enemy and themselves, clean up the party, and consolidate the majority of peasants and cadres to fight against the common enemy of socialism. In 1965, the content of the movement was changed to ‘*Siqing* (四清, four clean-up)’, to clean up politics, clean up the economy, clean up the organisation and clean up thoughts. The major objects of the movement became the capitalist roader inside the party who was in power. In 1966, the movement was finally developed into a revolution which rapidly spread to the whole country within several months. Though the movement was named the Cultural Revolution, it caused the largest chaos in politics and social order since 1949 and imposed inestimable influence to the lives and beliefs of thousands of people. For the details of the revolution and the political struggle inside the party, refer to the classical text of Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*, 273–286.

¹⁶⁷ At the early stage of Cultural Revolution, millions of students left schools and universities and joined the Red Guards. They travelled across the country spreading Mao Zedong Thought, attending debates and posting big-character posters, and also flooded into Beijing for an audience with Mao. At

commanded peasants not to go to urban areas to get involved in the movement.¹⁶⁸ In 1971, a report on the experience of ‘Learning from Dazhai in the Agriculture’ emphasised once again that there must always be sufficient labour on the frontline of agricultural production.¹⁶⁹

The Mobilisation and Management of Labour and Its Effect in Zhaitan

In 1963–1978, in spite of the political upheavals, particularly the Cultural Revolution, in the outside world, the situation in Zhaitan generally remained stable and peaceful. The Cultural Revolution did have its effects on the village: for example, the original administrative authority, the committee of Zhaitan brigade, was replaced by the revolutionary committee of Zhaitan brigade. But the original committee members remained in the new revolutionary committee, and apart from the chaos caused by students in the first months, the effect of the revolution fell mainly on the families related to the former Nationalist government and the cadres. At the first stage, encouraged by the Red Guard movement in urban areas, students in Zhaitan also organised and joined in breaking down old buildings and antiques in the village, as these were regarded as symbols of the old, backward era, and a decadent life style. But as the central committee of the party gave commands to prevent the expansion of struggles in the countryside, the majority of peasants stayed away from the movement.¹⁷⁰ In October 1968, a movement requesting the reorganisation of the Party was again launched in Zhaitan, the target being the brigade leaders and party members. It called for criticism and self-criticism among the party members and also asked them to disclose crimes and error committed amongst themselves so as to wipe traitors and inactive members from the party. This movement ended in the spring of 1969 with the replacement of some of

the same time, violence had spread over the country between different branches of Red Guards and caused thousands of deaths.

¹⁶⁸ See ‘Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Jindong Mingchun Nongcun Wenhua Dageming de Zhishi,’ 中共中央关于今冬明春农村文化大革命的指示 (The Directive of the Central Committee of CCP on the Cultural Revolution in Rural Areas in This Winter and Next Spring), 4 December 1967, in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 830–831.

¹⁶⁹ See ‘Dangqian Nongye Xuedazhai Yundongzhong de Yixie Wenti,’ 当前农业学大寨运动中的一些问题 (Some Problems on the Current Movement of Learning from Dazhai in the Agriculture), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 83–835.

¹⁷⁰ Information about the revolution in Zhaitan is mainly from conversations with my landlady in the village, Hu Wanli, during the second fieldwork in 2011.

the cadres, although this did not affect the majority of the members of the party and the collective.¹⁷¹

In this relatively stable situation, both the population and the labour force available in Zhaitan increased substantially between 1963 and 1978. In 1963, the population of the village was 1,318, but by 1978, it had risen to 1,645—an increase of 25 per cent; the labour force, i.e., women of 16–55 and men of 16–60,¹⁷² increased by 70 per cent from 454 to 772.¹⁷³ During the same time, the population of the nation increased by 41 per cent, while the national labour force increased by 36 per cent.¹⁷⁴ The growth of the labour force in Zhaitan was almost double the national figure, suggesting that the village might have faced more pressure to resolve the issue of surplus labour and thus had a stronger motivation to carry out labour-intensive projects. As the data on labour utilisation in this period is not available, it is unlikely to be possible to make a quantitative comparison of labour utilisation with the previous cooperative period. Nevertheless, given the poor progress on the use of machinery, there were some major achievements in the collective economy that are indicative of an intensive input of labour force.

The first indicator was the expansion of irrigated land. Work on improving irrigation began largely in the late 1950s. The effect of irrigation projects during this period was hard to assess since no related records were left. However, according to an irrigation development plan produced by the brigade in 1963, the land that had ensured irrigation by the time was merely 155.4 *mu* of the total 1,256 *mu* of rice paddy.¹⁷⁵ The plan showed a decision to expand the irrigated land by enlarging the existing ponds and canals and building new ponds

¹⁷¹ For details on the reorganisation of the party in Zhaitan, see the meeting minutes of the party branch of Zhaitan from 20 October 1968 to 17 July 1969, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol. 18 and 20.

¹⁷² About the definition of workforce, there was no record preserved and the description of villagers varied. There was merely a note on the annual statistical report of agricultural production of 1969 saying that men aged from 16 to 60 and women from 16 to 55 were counted as the workforce. Among them, men of 18–50 and women of 18–45 were the fully able workforce while the others were the half-able workforce.

¹⁷³ Source of figures: 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 宅坦大队农业生产统计年报 (The Annual Statistical Report on the Agricultural Production of Zhaitan Brigade), 1963–1978, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol. 9, 12, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24, 27, 31, 34, 38, 39, and 42.

¹⁷⁴ Source: Guojia Tongjiju Nongdiao Zongdui 国家统计局农村社会经济调查总队, ed., *Xinzhongguo Wushinian Nongye Tongji Ziliao* 新中国五十年农业统计资料 (Agricultural Statistics for the Fifties Years of New China) (Beijing: Zhongguo Tongji Chubanshe, 2000).

¹⁷⁵ See '1963-1970 Zhaitan Dadui Hanlao Baoshou Wenchan Gaochan Nongtian Jihua,' 宅坦大队旱涝保收稳产高产农田计划 (The Field Plan to Ensure Stable and High Yield Despite Drought or Flooded), in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol.10.

over the next six years. There was no existing data on the progress of this plan, but according to the annual statistical report, by 1970, the land that had ensured irrigation had risen to 830 *mu*, and all of the arable land in Zhaitan had obtained access to irrigation.¹⁷⁶ In particular, one of the most significant achievements was the construction of Shentang Reservoir. From June to December of 1965, the brigade managed to increase the capacity of the original reservoir from 8,000 m³ of water to 100,000 m³. After the expansion, the reservoir was able to irrigate 400 *mu* land.¹⁷⁷

The second noticeable piece of progress was the introduction of a new rice cropping system. Due to the restrictions of the local climate,¹⁷⁸ previously if peasants wanted to double crop the rice, they had to sow the late season rice before the early season rice was harvested. Thus the late rice had to be planted in the gap field between the early rice crops. In this situation, it was difficult to take care of both of the rice crops, and the sown area of both crops was also limited.

In 1971, Shangzhuang Commune, to which Zhaitan was subordinated, sent some cadres to Jiakou Commune of Lin'an County in Zhejiang Province to learn about the technology used in continuous double rice cropping. The new technology improved the cultivation method of the seedling of the early rice so that it could be transplanted earlier than before and thus the harvest of the early rice could be brought forward as well. In this way, the growth of early rice and late rice would not overlap, and the land could be utilised more efficiently. Hence, in 1971, as the sown area of early rice saw a moderate rise to 800 *mu*, up from 624 *mu* in the previous year, the late rice also saw a drastic 68 per cent increase from 461 *mu* in 1970 to 776 *mu*.¹⁷⁹ The total output of the double cropping rice increased by 34 per cent, from 844,900 *jin* in 1970 to 1,131,900 *jin* in 1971 as a result. In 1972, with further breakthroughs in seed breeding and seedling raising and transplanting, the continuous double cropping

¹⁷⁶ See 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 1970, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol.22.

¹⁷⁷ See Jixianxian Shuiliju 绩溪县水利局, 'Shentang Shuiku Gongcheng Jungong Baogaoshu,' 深塘水库工程竣工报告书 (The Completion Report on Shentang Reservoir), April 1980, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol.58. This report concerned the initial construction of the reservoir and the restoration in the 1970s after a severe flood destroyed the main body of the dam.

¹⁷⁸ The temperature in this mountainous area is usually lower than the plain area, so the growth period of rice is shorter than in the latter.

¹⁷⁹ See 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 1970 and 1971.

technology was extended even more widely in the brigade. The sown area of early rice and late rice was increased to 1,051 and 900 *mu* respectively.

The success of the continuous double cropping of rice was, on one hand, the result of the improved irrigation, and on the other hand related to the substantial supply of labour. The climate in the Yangzi River valley dictates that to ensure the growth of double cropping rice with appropriate temperature and rainfall, the only method was to compress the time of the harvest of the early rice and the sowing of the late rice. This caused a particularly stressful period in the year which was named by local peasants as *Shuang Qiang* (双抢, double rush), i.e. a rush in both the harvesting and the planting. The process usually started from late July and lasted for three weeks, involving substantial amounts of work. In the fields alone, it entailed harvesting, land flattening, irrigation and transplanting seedlings, not to mention the work away from the field. As the most important period of the year, the collective leadership usually produced specific plans for proceeding in order to control the process.

According to the annual statistical report of Zhaitan, it was not until 1970 that the whole brigade had one machine for transplanting rice seedlings. In the next eight years, the number of rice transplanters only increased to two, one owned by the Hengjie team and the other owned by the Hululing team. The other eight teams did not own any machines. In addition, in terms of power sources other than man power, it was not until 1972 that the brigade owned its first gasoline engine and diesel engine, mainly used for pumping and draining the water, and it only acquired its first electric motor 1977. These machines would have saved a considerable amount of labour in irrigation, but their real roles in Zhaitan were most likely minor, since by 1977 the whole brigade had merely one piece of each machine, and in 1978 it only managed to buy one more diesel engine. The only significant progress in terms of the utilisation of machinery was the use of a rice thresher. This was also introduced in Zhaitan in 1970, but its use was quickly extended. In 1971, there were 16 rice threshers in total in the brigade, and all of the production teams in Zhaitan owned one or two of these machines. In 1978, the number of rice threshers increased to 37. This trend may be related to the new continuous double cropping method of rice production, since it helped to speed up the harvest.¹⁸⁰ Overall,

¹⁸⁰ All of the data was extracted from the 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 1963–1978.

judging by the ownership of machinery in Zhaitan, it is reasonable to speculate that the new machinery did not play a substantial role in this rush period. Except for threshing, all of the work had to be completed manually, which must have created a substantial demand for labour.

To ensure the supply of labour for agriculture, especially in the double rush of summer and the irrigation construction in the winter, labour management was a crucial issue. According to the meeting minutes of the leadership of Zhaitan, two measures were carried out to make sure that the majority of the labour force could be put into collective production. At the meeting of the brigade Revolutionary Committee on 15 March 1969, which agreed to start the movement of 'Learning from Dazhai', the committee decided to take all of the private plots of over 0.06 *mu* back to the collective and also to suspend the work of craftsmen. Both decisions were intended to restrict the private use of labour.¹⁸¹

The first measure, i.e. the restrictions on privately owned land, not only ruled that the private plot of each family should not exceed 0.06 *mu* regardless of any increase or decrease in the number of family members, it also took all of the extra land, including the newly reclaimed private fields on the mountain, back to the collective.¹⁸² This regulation was not only to expand the scale of collective land so as to strengthen the collective economy, but also to limit the time and effort spent on private economy, so that the majority of the labour and efforts in the brigade could be put into the collective work. This regulation was based on the fact that after the Great Famine, the restrictions to private economy in Zhaitan were relaxed for a while. It had become popular to reclaim land on the hill to plant dry-land crops, such as corn and sweet potatoes. The enthusiasm for private production seemed to have an adverse effect on collective production. For example, at the party reorganisation meeting of 16 November 1968, a cadre confessed that the grain production of his team dropped by 10,000

¹⁸¹ See the minutes of 'Dadui Geweihui Kuoda Xuexiban,' 大队革委会扩大学习班 (The Enlarged Class of the Brigade Revolutionary Committee), 15 March 1969, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol.20, 4.

¹⁸² This decision was reached after several discussions. On 15 May 1969, it was eventually agreed by all of the production teams. See the minutes of 'Kuoda Ganbu Huiyi,' 扩大干部会议 (The Enlarged Cadres Meeting), 15 May 1969, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol.20, 14.

jin in that year because his team members spent too much time planting sweet potato on their private plot.¹⁸³

To ensure the effectiveness of the restriction, a penalty policy was applied at the same time. If people violated the rule, i.e. by secretly expanding their private plots, their grain ration would be reduced. Since the grain consumed by the collective members during this period was still mainly allocated by the collective, this measure seemed to have an effect. From then on, there were no more complaints or discussions related to this issue at the leadership meetings.

The second measure to restrict the work of craftsmen,¹⁸⁴ however, seemed to be more difficult to put into practice. The work of craftsmen in Zhaitan was not isolated from agriculture; rather, most of it was regarded as a sideline. In the 1960s, in a relatively relaxed period, the craftsmen were allowed to go outside of Zhaitan to earn extra money in the slack seasons and in their leisure time. This income was usually shared between the workers and the collective.¹⁸⁵ But in 1969, with the initiation of the ‘Learn from Dazhai’ movement, which was followed by a series of construction and production plans, the demand for labour increased rapidly. This required all of the labour force, including the craftsmen outside, to focus on collective projects instead of their private businesses. For this reason, all the craftsmen were commanded to return to the village to work on agricultural production. This request was stressed again in 1972 when the continuous double cropping of rice was further extended in Zhaitan,¹⁸⁶ and it was regularly repeated at the meetings of brigade cadres from then on.

Besides these craftsmen, the workers who worked at the local third-line factories were also called back. In the late 1960s, a number of armaments factories were moved from Shanghai into the mountains of southern Anhui Province as part of the strategic migration.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ See the minutes of ‘Zhaokai Dangyuan Kuodahui,’ 召开党员扩大会议 (The Enlarged Meeting of Party Members), 16 November 1968, in *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol.18, 24.

¹⁸⁴ The craftsmen in Zhaitan included the carpenters, bricklayers, bamboo weavers, stone and wood sculptors, the stick ink sculptors and so on. The first two were the largest group.

¹⁸⁵ The information about the work of craftsmen in Zhaitan came from the interviews with Hu Yue’an and Hu Manru. The former was a bamboo weaver, and the latter was a barber at that time.

¹⁸⁶ See the minutes of ‘Zhiwei Kuodahui,’ 支委扩大会议 (The Enlarged Meeting of the Party Branch Committee), 20 March 1972, in *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol. 25, 4.

¹⁸⁷ These factories were called *Sanxian Chang* (三线厂, the third line factories), as these factories were usually located in the west or the mountainous area in the east and middle of China, which was ranked

This brought an unusual opportunity for local young people, since it was almost impossible for rural labourers to work in urban areas or in industry during this period unless they were recommended by the brigade cadres. During the movement, local labourers were recruited to set up factories, which became a desirable job for its relatively high wage. As the labour rewards in the brigade were usually not more than 1.0 *yuan* per day, a young labourer, man or woman, could earn 1.2 *yuan* per day in the factory.¹⁸⁸ The records of one meeting also revealed that the average wage for a worker was 39 *yuan* per month, and even the lowest-ranking worker could earn 35 *yuan* per month.¹⁸⁹ For this reason, a number of labourers left the village for these factories. Nevertheless, in 1972 they were required to come back by April to reinforce the agricultural work force in the extension of the continuous double cropping of rice.¹⁹⁰

This control on labour utilisation and migration, and its effect on irrigation and the rice cropping system, were proved to prompt substantial progress in the rice production of Zhaitan and thus changed the grain crop structure.

The Achievement of Collective Economy

Take Grain as the Key Link (以粮为纲, Yiliang Weigang): The Growing Yield of Staple Foods

With the improvement of irrigation and the practice of continuous double rice cropping, the cultivation of rice was further expanded in Zhaitan in the 1970s. The proportion of rice in food grain increased both in terms of the sown area and gross production. Table 9 gives details of the production of the main food grains, and Table 10 calculates the proportion of each crop in gross grain production based on the data of Table 9. The food grain in Zhaitan

third in the possibility of being invaded. The construction of *Sanxian Chang* started in 1964 as one of the strategies to tackle the difficulty in the international situation of China at that time. A brief introduction could refer to a report on the People's Daily, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200312/06/print20031206_129810.html, accessed 15 October, 2013.

¹⁸⁸ The information about wages came from my landlady, Hu Wanli, in Zhaitan She had worked for such an armaments factory for several years from the age of 15.

¹⁸⁹ See the minutes of 'Zhengzu Xuexiban,' 整组学习班 (The Study Class on Rectifying the Party Organisation), 3 April 1971, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol. 23, 5–8. According to the record, in the class, each party member was expected to give criticism and self-criticism so as to correct inappropriate behaviour and mental attitudes among the party members.

¹⁹⁰ See the minutes of 'Zhiwei Kuoda Hui,' 支委扩大会 (The Enlarged Meeting of the Party Branch Committee), 20 March 1972, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol. 25, 4–5.

was made up of a wide range of crops. Wheat and rice played the most significant role in the diet, as they did in cultivation. Other common food grain crops included barley, soybeans, potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn, and broad beans. However, these crops were usually served as supplements to wheat and rice. Their cultivation was somewhat erratic, which means that they were not planted regularly and carefully, and were not incorporated into the production plan either. These crops were usually planted on small plots of dry land or on the edge of the rice paddy. In the overall composition of food grain, their role was minor in both sown area and production. For this reason, the following tables do not list details of these crops, only wheat and rice.

Table 9 Yield of Major Grain in Zhaitan 1963–1978¹⁹¹

Year	Wheat		Rice		Grain	
	Sown Area (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)	Sown Area (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)	Sown Area (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)
1963	505	60,862	1,253.7	561,679	1,789.2	626,452
1964	390	51,059	1,271.3	659,380	1,716.3	723,000
1965	354	49,305	1,378.4	597,856	1,732.4	705,761
1966	179	25,136	1,590	622,917	1,947	672,268
1967	134	18,797	1,371	680,751	1,818.4	754,240
1968	165	30,922	1,357	697,499	2,012	779,767
1969	184	27,966	1,445	700,248	2,034	760,373
1970	189	27,100	1,641	844,900	1,969	892,900
1971	117	18,000	1,919	1,131,900	2,313	1,219,500
1972	27	2,890	2,029	1,011,820	2,368	1,086,590
1973	61	1,500	1,876.5	1,124,400	2,005	1,186,200
1974	105	19,400	2,005	1,075,100	2,233	1,129,100
1975	74	18,148	1,983.8	1,263,238	-	1,301,695
1976	29	3,000	2,053	1,433,900	2,170	1,461,900
1977	2	200	2,072	1,462,900	2,155	1,485,300
1978	18	610	2,077	1,412,000	2,187	1,440,500

Note: the sown area is the area of the land growing crops rather than the physical area of the land. Under the double cropping, the sown area is the sum of the land growing the two crops. For example, the sown area for the rice under double cropping was the sum of the land area growing the early rice

¹⁹¹ Data source: ‘Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,’ 1963–1978.

and the land area growing the late rice, while the sown area for the wheat was simply the land area growing the wheat.

Table 10 The Proportion of Wheat and Rice in the Food Grain 1963–1978

Year	Wheat		Rice	
	Sown Area (%)	Production (%)	Sown Area (%)	Production (%)
1963	28.22	9.72	70.07	89.66
1964	22.72	7.06	74.07	91.20
1965	20.43	6.99	79.57	84.71
1966	9.19	3.74	81.66	92.66
1967	7.37	2.49	75.40	90.26
1968	8.20	3.97	67.45	89.45
1969	9.05	3.68	71.04	92.09
1970	9.60	3.04	83.34	94.62
1971	5.06	1.48	82.97	92.82
1972	1.14	0.27	85.68	93.12
1973	3.04	0.13	93.59	94.79
1974	4.70	1.72	89.79	95.22
1975	-	1.39	-	97.05
1976	1.34	0.21	94.61	98.08
1977	0.09	0.01	96.15	98.49
1978	0.82	0.04	94.97	98.02

According to Table 10, the sown area of rice expanded substantially in the 1970s, and, in the late 1970s, it accounted for almost 95 per cent of the total sown area of food grain. In terms of production, in 1971 it exceeded 1 million *jin*. Records were maintained for several years, and from 1976 production rose to 1.4 million *jin*. At the same time, the proportion of rice in the gross production of grain had also seen a substantial rise. By 1971, the share of rice in the gross production of food grain varied from 84 per cent to 94 percent year on year. From 1971, the share increased steadily. In the last three years of collective production, rice production accounted for over 98 per cent of the gross grain production.

In contrast with the expansion of rice cultivation, however, the cultivation of wheat reveals an adverse trend. From 1963 to 1970, the sown area of wheat dropped from 505 to 189 *mu*, and its contribution to the gross grain yield decreased from about 10 per cent to 3 per

cent. In the 1970s, corresponding with the continued expansion of rice cultivation, the share of wheat was reduced further. In 1977, only 2 *mu* land was sown with wheat, and only 200 *jin* of wheat was produced, which was minimal and almost negligible.

Table 9 also clearly indicates that although the share of wheat dropped remarkably, the gross grain production had increased substantially. From 1970, the gross grain growth became even more rapid, and in 1971, the gross yield of food grain passed 1 million *jin*. In 1978, just before the demise of the collective system, grain production stood at over 1.4 million *jin*, double the production of 1963. This demonstrates that the growth of the gross production of food grain can be mainly attributed to the expansion of the sown area of rice and thus the growth of rice production. In particular, it may be related to the introduction of continuous double rice cropping. To confirm this, we need to further analyse the change of the rice-growing structure. Table 11 provides further details.

Table 11 shows that there were four kinds of rice cultivated in Zhaitan during this period. Among them, middle season rice and single late rice were produced under single cropping. They were usually cultivated after the wheat and rapeseed were harvested. The early season rice and double late rice were produced in the double cropping rice rotation; the latter was sown immediately after the harvest of the former. Hence, if the double cropping of rice was carried out into Zhaitan, there would be two kinds of crop rotation in the village in one year, either early season rice–double late rice–other supplementary crops (such as the potato or vegetables), or wheat (rapeseed)–single late rice–middle season rice.

According to this arrangement, on one piece of land, merely one crop rotation could be implemented, so the expansion of early season rice had to correspond to the decrease of wheat in terms of the sown area. This explains why the sown area of wheat dropped remarkably after 1966: it was because in that year there was a notable increase in the sown area of early season rice.

Table 11 Structure of Rice Production in Zhaitan 1963–1978 ¹⁹²

Year	Total		Early Season Rice		Middle Season Rice		Single Late Rice		Double Late Rice	
	Sown Area (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)	Sown Area (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)	Sown Area (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)	Sown Area (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)	Sown Area (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)
1963	1,253.70	561,679.00	66.20	23,566.00	207.40	103,774.00	913.40	422,495.00	48.30	11,844.00
1964	1,271.30	659,380.00	66.40	23,999.00	556.10	322,605.00	582.50	284,855.00	66.30	27,921.00
1965	1,378.40	597,856.00	198.40	95,440.00	627.60	342,548.00	354.00	117,504.00	198.40	42,364.00
1966	1,590.00	622,917.00	780.00	356,816.00	216.00	111,050.00	184.00	82,100.00	410.00	72,951.00
1967	1,371.00	680,751.00	522.00	272,925.00	475.00	282,293.00	183.00	80,800.00	191.00	44,733.00
1968	1,357.00	697,499.00	724.00	367,792.00	245.00	144,120.00	211.00	121,618.00	177.00	63,969.00
1969	1,445.00	700,248.00	726.00	313,053.00	137.00	80,814.00	321.00	193,885.00	261.00	112,496.00
1970	1,641.00	844,900.00	624.00	295,600.00	221.00	145,600.00	335.00	224,700.00	461.00	179,000.00
1971	1,919.00	1,131,900.00	800.00	510,300.00	299.00	251,500.00	44.00	25,700.00	776.00	344,400.00
1972	2,029.00	1,011,820.00	1,051.00	670,660.00	67.00	49,460.00	11.00	9,940.00	900.00	281,760.00
1973	1,876.50	1,124,400.00	844.20	527,600.00	157.80	118,400.00	110.40	73,800.00	764.10	404,600.00
1974	2,005.00	1,075,100.00	917.00	608,900.00	92.00	53,000.00	76.00	47,000.00	920.00	366,200.00
1975	1,983.80	1,263,238.00	878.70	662,524.00	106.70	79,548.00	75.80	52,838.00	922.80	468,330.00
1976	2,053.00	1,433,900.00	883.00	721,500.00	110.00	92,100.00	57.00	41,400.00	1,003.00	578,900.00
1977	2,072.00	1,462,900.00	914.00	694,700.00	95.00	93,500.00	37.00	35,000.00	1,026.00	639,700.00
1978	2,077.00	1,412,000.00	905.00	765,300.00	102.00	90,500.00	59.00	37,700.00	1,011.00	518,500.00

Regarding the rice cultivation, the significance of continuous double cropping was that the sowing and harvesting of early season rice was brought forward, thus after the harvest of early season rice, the land could grow double late rice again. This made the expansion of double late rice possible, and thus the gross production of one piece of land could be considerably increased.

According to Table 11, in 1971 when continuous double cropping of rice was conducted in Zhaitan, the sown area of single cropping rice—the middle season rice and single late rice—diminished drastically, which provided more space for planting double cropping rice. During the year, while the early season rice increased to 800 *mu*, the sown area of double late rice rose to 776 *mu*, an increase of 68 per cent. Furthermore, Table 11 clearly shows that since 1971, while the sown area of early season rice remained relatively stable at a certain range, the sown area of double late rice expanded. In the years 1976–1978, it exceeded 1,003 *mu*. The extension of continuous double cropping rice, i.e. the rotation of early season rice and

¹⁹² Data source: 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 1963–1978.

double late rice, brought a substantial increase to the gross grain production per unit. Table 12 compares the grain production per unit between different crop rotations.

Table 12 Grain Production Per Unit of Different Crop Rotations 1963–1978 (*jin/mu*)

Year	Rotation 1			Rotation 2			Rotation 3		
	Wheat	Middle Season Rice	Total	Wheat	Single Late Rice	Total	Early Season Rice	Double Late Rice	Total
1963	120.52	500.36	620.88	120.52	462.55	583.07	355.98	245.22	601.20
1964	130.92	580.12	711.04	130.92	489.02	619.94	361.43	421.13	782.56
1965	139.28	545.81	685.09	139.28	331.93	471.21	481.05	213.53	694.58
1966	140.42	514.12	654.54	140.42	446.20	586.62	457.46	177.93	635.39
1967	140.28	594.30	734.58	140.28	441.53	581.81	522.84	234.20	757.05
1968	187.41	588.24	775.65	187.41	576.39	763.79	508.00	361.41	869.41
1969	151.99	589.88	741.87	151.99	604.00	755.99	431.20	431.02	862.22
1970	143.39	658.82	802.21	143.39	670.75	814.13	473.72	388.29	862.00
1971	153.85	841.14	994.98	153.85	584.09	737.94	637.88	443.81	1,081.69
1972	107.04	738.21	845.25	107.04	903.64	1,010.67	638.12	313.07	951.18
1973	24.59	750.32	774.91	24.59	668.48	693.07	624.97	529.51	1,154.48
1974	184.76	576.09	760.85	184.76	618.42	803.18	664.01	398.04	1,062.06
1975	245.24	745.53	990.77	245.24	697.07	942.31	753.98	507.51	1,261.49
1976	103.45	837.27	940.72	103.45	726.32	829.76	817.10	577.17	1,394.27
1977	100.00	984.21	1,084.21	100.00	945.95	1,045.95	760.07	623.49	1,383.56
1978	33.89	887.25	921.14	33.89	638.98	672.87	845.64	512.86	1,358.49

Note: Rotation 1 represents the crop rotation of wheat plus middle season rice; Rotation 2 represents the rotation of wheat plus single late rice; Rotation 3 represents the rotation of continuous double rice cropping. The data in the table was calculated from Tables 9 and 10.

According to Table 12, the production per unit of wheat was much lower than that of rice, and it saw no improvement during the collective period. The production per unit of single cropped rice was slightly higher than that of the rice under double cropping, and the production per unit of the double late rice was the lowest. By 1971, there was little difference in the grain production per unit between different crop combinations. However, from 1971 the combination of double cropped rice showed a substantial advantage over the combinations of wheat and single cropped rice, except in 1972 when the production per unit of double late rice

reduced remarkably.¹⁹³ The success of double cropped rice in the 1970s was overtly linked with the application of continuous double cropping of rice by which the double late rice largely replaced the lower-yield wheat and thus enhanced the gross yield on one piece of land.

In sum, the analysis of the grain production and the grain structure shows that the application of continuous double cropping of rice, which, as indicated in the last section, was the result of a stable and growing supply of labour, changed the proportions of the different food grains. By diminishing the lower-yield wheat and extending the sown area of double cropping rice, the yield per unit of land was improved and thus the gross output of food grain made a remarkable progress in the 1970s.

Chemical Fertiliser

Nevertheless, though the new cropping system played an essential role in the improvement of the yield of food grain, it was not the sole contributor. As Table 11 also shows, from 1963 to 1978 all the rice had shown an improvement in production per unit, and in the 1970s the improvement became even more substantial. As the continuous double cropping of rice only affected the production per unit land of double late rice, there must have been other contributors to the overall improvement. Records on chemical fertilisers in the annual statistical report provide another explanation.

The reports recorded the use of chemical fertiliser from 1970. The data from the 1960s was not available, but we may refer to the numbers in the late 1950s. In 1956, the amount of chemical fertiliser used was only 3,867 *jin*,¹⁹⁴ but in 1970, the usage had increased to 47,700 *jin*. In 1977, the input of fertiliser further increased to 215,400 *jin*, almost 55 times the usage of 1956.¹⁹⁵ As the rice was the most important crop during this period in terms of sown area, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of the chemical fertiliser was utilised in the cultivation of rice, and thus contributed to the substantial increase in rice output.

¹⁹³ For the reduction of production of double late rice in 1972, no further information was available to explain it. Consider that the production per unit of all the other rice grew more or less in the year, I think it reasonable to relate it to the weather conditions in the late half of 1972, since the growth of all the other rice started from the early half of the year except the double late rice.

¹⁹⁴ Refer to Table 5.

¹⁹⁵ Data source: 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 1970–1978.

The mass mobilisation and centralised management of the labour force did not only benefit the construction and maintenance of irrigation systems, but also made the division of labour possible, which helped to reinforce the sidelines and to develop more businesses within the collective. During the ‘Learn from Dazhai’ period, ‘all-round development’ was one of the slogans that was widely ‘propagated’. In Zhaitan, this instruction not only meant the development of grain production, but also concerned the development of sidelines such as silkworm farming, pig farming, forestry and brigade-operated businesses.

Increased Mulberry Tree Plantation and Improved Cocoon Production

Apart from the progress in crop farming, the farming of silkworms was another labour-intensive business and also achieved a very significant improvement. Records on the cultivation of silkworms and its performance were rather scarce, but the annual statistic reports provided some information on the output of this sideline. Table 13 shows that efforts to expand silkworm farming began in 1965. In that year, 91 *mu* land was newly reclaimed for the planting of mulberry trees, and in the next year, 63 *mu* of extra land was used for mulberry tree plantation, further strengthening the farming of silkworms. Six years later, expansion was initiated again. The area of the plantation was up to 252 *mu* in 1973.

Although the output of cocoons increased over this period, its pace was obviously not in step with the expansion of the mulberry tree plantation. From 1967 to 1968, when the available mulberry tree plantation was expanded by 214 per cent, the production of cocoons did not increase proportionally. It was from 1968 to 1969 that the production of cocoons increased substantially, by 51 per cent to 7364 *jin*, and further jumped to more than 10,000 *jin* in 1971. In five years of 1968–1973, while the number of mulberry trees was fixed, the output of cocoons tripled. From 1972, the production of cocoons remained stable at the level of over 14,000 *jin*.

Table 13 Silkworm Farming in Zhaitan 1963–1978¹⁹⁶

Year	Mulberry Fields		Silkworm Seed (<i>zhang</i>) ^c	Cocoon Production (<i>jin</i>)	Output Per Unit (<i>jin/zhang</i>)
	Planting Area (<i>mu</i>) ^a	Picking Area (<i>mu</i>) ^b			
1963	72	72		3,901	
1964	72	72		4,909	
1965	163	72		4,747	
1966	226	72		3,881	
1967	226	72		3,250	
1968	226	226		4,865	
1969	226	226		7,364	
1970	226	226		9,300	
1971	226	226		10,300	
1972	226	226	266	14,150	53.20
1973	252	226	293.5	14,655	49.93
1974	254	232	310	17,700	57.10
1975			305.5	14,520	47.53
1976	252	241	258	15,200	58.91
1977	252	241	254	14,100	55.51
1978	231	224	233	14,400	61.80

^a The planting area was the field in which the mulberry trees were grown. It included the field that was newly reclaimed and that just grew young mulberry trees. As it usually took three to four years for these young trees to grow enough to provide leaves for raising silkworms, the planting area of mulberry trees was usually different from the picking area.

^b As per the note above, the picking area was the field whose mulberry trees were ready to be picked to feed the silkworm.

^c *Zhang* (张, piece) is the unit of measurement for silkworm eggs. Before modern technology was used in the cultivation of silkworm eggs, peasants used to have the silk moth lay the eggs on paper. Therefore, the measurement of the eggs was based on the amount of paper they took up; there was a standard for the amount of the eggs on one piece of paper. The peasants in Zhaitan were used to the unit *zhang*, but they did not know exactly how many eggs it meant. Under modern cultivation, it seems that one *zhang* means at least 25,000 eggs.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Data Source: 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 1963–1978.

¹⁹⁷ See 'Hunan Canzhong Fanyu Gaikuang,' 湖南蚕种繁育概况 (The General Condition of the Cultivation of Silkworm Eggs in Hunan Province),

Encouraged Pig Farming

Noticeable progress also took place in pig farming. The number of pigs raised in Zhaitan increased by 307 percent from 1963 to 1978 (See Table 14). The growth took place particularly in the 1970s. This achievement, however, was not only the result of the growing labour force and the improvement of grain supply, but also was connected with the incentives of the collective.

As the main source of meat, pigs were one of the major targets of governmental procurement. After the GLF, most of these pigs were reared by individual families. After receiving the procurement target from the government, the cadres usually advised peasants to buy a piglet and rear it. When the pig was grown, it had to be sold to the government at the specified price. According to the policy, peasants might raise as many pigs as they wanted, as long as they met the procurement targets. However, raising pigs was a risky and heavy task. Since grain was still valuable and the appetite of the pigs was large, people had to feed them a mixed diet made up of grain, vegetables and fresh grass. This caused extra food consumption and extra work for the people. For example, in order to get fresh grass, people had to get up very early every day to go to the field and cut the grass. In addition to the risk and work involved in the rearing period, the procurement price was usually much lower than the market price. In the 1970s, the procurement price of one pig was fixed at around 45 *yuan*, and the selling price at the local supply and marketing cooperative was 0.73 *yuan/jin*. As a pig had to weigh at least 130 *jin* to meet the procurement standard, the procurement price per unit was no more than 0.35 *yuan/jin*, around half of the selling price.¹⁹⁸ Hence this business was not welcomed by the peasants initially.

http://www.hncks.com/web/cskxyjs/cpzxx/qt/content_82676.html, accessed 31 December 2013; 'Hebeisheng Difang Biaozhun Sangcanzhong Zhiliang yu Jianyan,' 河北省地方标准桑蚕种质量与检验 (The Quality and Examination Standard for the Local Silkworm Eggs in Hebei Province), <http://www.lfly.gov.cn/pub2/Article/kpyd/lybz/200904/64.html>, accessed 31 December, 2013.

¹⁹⁸ This information was from Hu Wanli, and the former head of Hulu Ling team, Hu Liyao.

Table 14 Pig Farming in Zhaitan 1963–1978¹⁹⁹

Year	Annual Husbandry	Sold	Butchered	Dead	Stock	Collective	Individual
1963	357	-	-	-	183	-	183
1964	560	74	160	-	326	-	326
1965	664	306	199	-	334	-	334
1966	685	309	221	-	333	-	333
1967	658	242	336	-	318	-	318
1968	576	-	-	-	336	-	-
1969	566	-	-	-	338	-	-
1970	591	-	-	-	297	-	-
1971	605	-	-	-	324	-	-
1972	611	-	283	-	326	2	-
1973	905	165	27	-	435	14	423
1974	945	178	298	42	427	17	410
1975	1071	223	280	-	543	5	538
1976	1270	253	265	-	743	20	723
1977	1332	219	286	-	827	14	813
1978	1454	256	349	-	849	-	849

Note: Column 2 = the sum of columns 3–6. Column 3 was the number of pigs sold to the state; Column 4 was the number of pigs butchered for villagers' own consumption; Column 5 was the number of pigs that died during the year from various causes; Column 6 was the number of pigs in stock at the end of the year, including the immature pig and breeders. Except for Column 2 and Column 6, the record was incomplete in the annual reports.

Table 14 shows that from 1963 to 1972, except for the growth shown in 1964, there was no increase in the number of pigs raised in the village. In order to encourage pig farming, in the 1970s production teams started to provide subsidies to peasants who raised pigs. The form the subsidies took varied from team to team. Some teams provided feed to the families raising

¹⁹⁹ Data Source: 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 1963–1978.

pigs directly, but a popular form was to allocate a certain area of land, called *Maozhu Di* (毛猪地, land for pigs), to the households that were raising pigs. This land was initially intended to produce feed for the pigs, but in reality peasants who received such land had complete freedom in deciding how to use it, and all the output of the land was under the full control of the peasants and was tax-free.²⁰⁰ This policy seemed to have a very positive effect on pig farming. According to Table 13, the number of pigs raised in Zhaitan dramatically improved from 1973. By 1978, the number was more than double that of 1972. In contrast with the increase in the amount of pigs raised, the amount of pigs butchered for consumption did not change over the same period. This simply suggests that the purpose of peasants raising more pigs was to improve their income rather than their diet.

Returning Farmland to Forest

The afforestation plan was started in the late 1960s. Due to the Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s and the subsequent land reclamation, most of the mountainside close to the village became bare, and people had great difficulty even in obtaining firewood in the nearby hills. Therefore, when the ‘Learn from Dazhai’ movement was launched in the village, in order to achieve the targets of transforming the mountain and controlling the water, the brigade initiated a project for returning the farmland to the forest. In the name of ‘presenting loyalty to Chairman Mao’, the cadres initially decided to produce a ‘Loyalty Forest’ (忠字林, *Zhongzi Lin*)²⁰¹ which required each team to plant non-timber forest trees such as mulberry, Chinese chestnut and tung oil trees.²⁰² Over the course of the year, five teams were involved

²⁰⁰ This information was from the conversations with my landlady, Hu Wanli, and the former production team heads, Hu Liyao and Hu Weikun, and it was confirmed by an investigation table produced in 1976, which shows that in 1976, all the production teams provided subsidies to the households raising pigs. See ‘Yang Zhu, Qin Zhengce Luoshi Qingkuang Tongji Biao,’ 养猪、禽政策落实情况统计表 (A Statistical Table on the Implementation of Policies on Raising Pigs and Poultry), 1976, in *Changqi Dang’an*, Vol.30, 37.

²⁰¹ Since January 1967, a movement calling for personal worship of Mao Zedong became popular in China. A variety of actions were taken to express people’s loyalty to Mao, including writing, posting and reciting quotations from Mao, posting the image of Mao on a wall at home and paying tribute to it, wearing a Mao badge, and so on. At the same time, people created a series of particular forms in different fields to present their loyalty. In terms of the art, the most famous form was the Loyalty Dance which was composed of some simple and symbolised moves, but in agriculture it was popular to build a Loyalty Forest as tribute to the leadership of Mao.

²⁰² See minutes of ‘Dahui Geweihui Kuoda Xuexiban,’ 大队革委会扩大学习班 (The Enlarged Class of the Brigade Revolutionary Committee), 15–16 March, 1969, in *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol, 4–7.

in the forestry movement, and 233 *mu* land was afforested with trees. In the next year, 1970, all the production teams were involved and produced 127 *mu* of extra forest.²⁰³

In the same year, a team was organised to set up and manage a collective forestry plantation. The plantation had 23 staff and fixed assets of 10,000 *yuan* at the beginning. It was not only involved in the afforestation on the mountains, but also operated as an independent economic unit in the collective. The major work of these staff was to plant trees and to maintain the plantation, but they also planted medicinal herbs, tea trees and a small amount of corn for sale and consumption. As there were few materials left on the operation of the forestry plantation, it is hardly possible to evaluate its performance. The record on the annual statistical report was also incomplete. We only know that by 1974, the forest team was expanded to 26 staff and the area of forestry plantation increased to 543 *mu*.²⁰⁴ A registration form from 1977 shows that by this year the plantation had 140,000 pine trees and 400 Mao Bamboo, and produced 7,000 *jin* corn and medical herbs at a value of up to 400 *yuan*.²⁰⁵ And by 1977, the forest had covered 1,314 *mu* of the village land. Hence, though the economic effect of the forestry plantation and the afforestation remains unknown, the effect on the ecology was obviously positive.

All-round Development and a Self-sufficient Collective System

In the late period of the collective system, the brigade in Zhaitan had managed to set up a rather comprehensive social and economic system, the purpose of which was partly to follow instructions from the government and partly to meet the routine needs of the collective members themselves. In addition to production and the allocation of output, the collective also played a role in research on agricultural technology and health care, which had a significant effect on the cultivation of crops and the health of the local people.

In 1973, it seems that agricultural technology became one of the most important issues for the collective. In this year, each production team in Zhaitan set up a specific group

²⁰³ See 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 1969–1970.

²⁰⁴ See 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 1974.

²⁰⁵ See 'Shedui Qiye Dengjibiao,' 社队企业登记表 (The Registration Form on the Enterprises Owned by the Commune and the Brigade), uncategorized document preserved in Zhaitan village archives.

responsible for the technical aspects of rice cultivation. The 10 teams had 40 technicians—usually the better-educated members of the team—and 2 *mu* land was set aside as an experimental field. The major work of technicians was to select seeds and cultivate rice seedlings. Some teams even engaged in research on pesticide production.²⁰⁶

As one of the major achievements of the collective economy, the cooperative medical system in Zhaitan was set up in the 1970s. In 1971, each member paid 0.5 *yuan* to join the cooperative medical service,²⁰⁷ though in 1972 the cost increased to 1 *yuan*.²⁰⁸ According to the meeting in 1972, when the medical fee of peasant was under 2 *yuan*, the fee would be fully reimbursed; when it was 3–5 *yuan*, 70 per cent of the fee would be reimbursed; when it was 5–10 *yuan*, 60 per cent would be reimbursed; for 10–20 *yuan*, 40 per cent would be reimbursed; and for any cost over 20 *yuan*, 30 per cent would be reimbursed.²⁰⁹ The funding for the reimbursement was paid from the public welfare fund, which was deducted from the income of the team at the end of each year. The work of the doctors was counted into their annual work points and paid by the production teams. According to the minutes of one meeting, there were two doctors in the village in that year.²¹⁰ Both of them were so-called ‘barefoot doctors’ who had received only minimal medical training. One was the daughter-in-law of the former head of village, who had learned medicine by herself, and the other was the son of an old doctor in the village. In 1972, an extra midwife was trained and became involved in the work as well.²¹¹

In addition to routine surgery, a significant aspect of the work of the rural doctors was to provide information on epidemics, particularly parasite infection, which was widespread in rural areas, so that they could help the government take measures to control the disease.²¹² The minutes of the meeting on 11 December 1971 revealed that the doctors were rather busy

²⁰⁶ See ‘Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,’ 1973.

²⁰⁷ See the minutes of ‘Kuoda Ganbu Huiyi,’ 扩大干部会议 (The Enlarged Cadres’ Meeting), 14 June 1971, in *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol. 23, 35–36.

²⁰⁸ See the minutes of ‘Zhaokai Zhengfu Duizhang Yiguan Renyuan Lianxi Huiyi,’ 召开正副队长医管人员联席会议 (The Joint Meeting of Production Team Heads and Medical Staff), 27 June 1972, in *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol. 26, 31.

²⁰⁹ See the minutes of ‘Zhaokai Zhengfu Duizhang Yiguan Renyuan Lianxi Huiyi’.

²¹⁰ See the minutes of ‘Zhinbu Kuoda Huiyi,’ 支部扩大会议 (The Enlarged Party Branch Meeting), 11 December 1971, in *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol. 23, 74.

²¹¹ See the minutes of ‘Zhaokai Zhengfu Duizhang Yiguan Renyuan Lianxi Huiyi’.

²¹² See the minutes of ‘Zhaokai Shengchاندui Lingdao Zuzhang Huiyi,’ 召开生产队领导小组会议 (The Meeting of Production Team Leadership), 1 September 1971, in *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol. 23, 57.

in the village. By the end of 1971, one doctor earned 360 work points, the other earned 240 points, which means that the doctors had worked for at least 360 days and at least 240 days respectively.

Furthermore, other scattered evidence shows that the collective had endeavoured to develop a more self-sufficient economy to meet the demands of its members. From 1970, it seemed that each production team had a construction group to provide construction services to the team members, and the income from this service seemed to be considerable, although the record was incomplete. For example, in 1973, the total income of the brigade from construction was 1,234 *yuan*, while in 1974 it went up to 11,700 *yuan*.²¹³

The Dilemma of Collective Economy

From 1963 to 1978, as illustrated in the above section, the collective economy of Zhaitan made substantial progress in many traditional businesses, especially in terms of the gross output. However, while the fast-growing population and labour force brought positive effects on the collective economy, it also led it into a dilemma. In this section, I will illustrate the difficulties inherent in the collective economy of Zhaitan over the 15 years.

Gross Output against Output Per Capita

In contrast with the progress in the output of grain and the improvement in the productivity of the land, the output per capita in Zhaitan was not so impressive. Take the output of food grain as an example, since in this period the production and allocation of food grain was still the most significant area in the economy. According to Table 8, the gross production of food grain in Zhaitan in 1978 was over 1.4 million *jin*, more than double the yield in 1963. But this progress was not proportional to the growth of the labour force and population. Table 15 takes the year of 1963 as a benchmark to show the growth indices of gross output and output per capita over the years 1963–1978.

²¹³ See 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 1973 and 1974.

Table 15 Growth indices of Population and Output of Grain 1963–1978²¹⁴

Year	Population	Labour Force	Gross Output	Output per Capita	Output per Labourer
1963	100	100	100	100	100
1964	103	100	115	113	115
1965	105	113	113	107	100
1966	108	113	107	99	95
1967	110	125	120	109	96
1968	112	130	124	112	96
1969	116	140	121	104	87
1970	119	142	143	120	100
1971	121	171	195	161	114
1972	122	171	173	142	101
1973	124	177	189	153	107
1974	124	172	180	145	105
1975	123	178	208	169	117
1976	124	168	233	189	139
1977	124	169	237	191	140
1978	125	170	230	184	135

Table 15 reveals that as the gross output of grain increased by 130 per cent over the 15 years, the labour force of the village increased by 70 per cent. Thus, from 1963 to 1978, the productivity of labourer increased by 35 per cent. The main advance in labourer productivity took place in the late 1970s, which is consistent with the input of chemical fertiliser. This further suggests that the improvement in the gross production of grain was largely brought about by the more intensive utilisation of the labour force, while the progress in productivity was likely related to the increased input of chemical fertiliser.

On the other hand, as the growth in population was lower than that of the labour force, the growth of output per capita was more rapid than the growth of output per labour force. If the taxes and fees paid by the collective remained stable, in terms of output distribution, the food grain allocated to each person should have seen some degree of improvement. Unfortunately the data on allocation during this period was not maintained, so I am not able to precisely evaluate the extent to which the food supply in the village improved, but in the

²¹⁴ The figures were calculated based on the data of ‘Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,’ 1963–1978.

annual statistical reports of 1974, 1976, 1977 and 1978 there were some records on the allocation inside the brigade. The grain allocated per capita in the four years was 560, 658, 679 and 654 *jin* respectively.²¹⁵ Given the proportion of rice in the food grain (see Table 9), it is reasonable to conclude that in the four years the rice allocated per capita per annum would have been around 533.23, 645.37, 668.75 and 641.05 *jin* respectively. According to the assessment in the last chapter that one adult person consumed 1.5 *jin* rice per day, the food shortage in Zhaitan should have been solved in the late 1970s.

In spite of the improvement in food allocation, however, the cash income of the family was still low. Table 16 simply shows the allocation situation in Zhaitan over the four years.

Table 16 Output Distribution of Zhaitan²¹⁶

Year	Labour Force ^a	Work Days	Work Days per Labour Force (day)	Grain Allocation Per Capita (<i>jin</i>)	Cash Income Per Capita (<i>yuan</i>) ^b	Cash Income per Work Day (<i>yuan</i>) ^b
1974	780.00	167,708.00	215.01	560.00	71.66	0.33
1976	764.00	186,616.00	244.26	658.00	86.45	0.35
1977	769.00	192,511.00	250.34	679.00	84.02	0.34
1978	752.00	190,408.00	253.20	654.00	82.74	0.33

Note: ^a Here the labour force was the number of people who attended the collective work, not the total work force available in the brigade.

^b The cash per capita was the net average income of each peasant in the collective. It was the balance of the labour reward after deducting the value of grain allocated to the peasant.

The workload of each labour force presented in the table shows that in the late collective period collective work was still quite busy. People had to devote most of their labour to collective work. However, in terms of cash income, the reward for each work day was very low, and far lower than the wage for working outside. For example, in the 1970s, while a worker working for the collective for one day would earn less than 0.4 *yuan*, the wage for a tailor was 1.1 *yuan* per day, and the wage for a carpenter was 1.3 *yuan* per day,²¹⁷ and even an unskilled worker in the armaments factory could earn 1.2 *yuan* per day. This gap may be

²¹⁵ See 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 1974, 1976, 1977 and 1978.

²¹⁶ Data source: 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 1974, 1976, 1977, and 1978.

²¹⁷ This information was from the conversation with the former head of Shangjin Team, Hu Weikun in March 2013.

the real reason for the constant outflow of labourer. The low income also caused a number of families to fall into debt. According to the same reports, in 1976 81 out of 371 households were in debt; in 1977, 125 families were in debt; and in 1978, there were still 76 households that owed the collective. In earlier statistics from 1972, 245 of 346 families were in debt in 1970 and 1971. The total amount of debt in the two years was 24,210 and 24,739 *yuan* respectively, which means each family owed the collective an average of almost 100 *yuan*.²¹⁸

The Embarrassment of Labourer Management

During the collective period, the labour force was always the most important resource in Zhaitan because of the scarcity of capital and technology, and its management thus became the foremost thing in the collective economy. With the increasing labour force, management gradually became difficult. In the minutes of village leadership meetings in the 1970s, the command of *Laoli Jizhong* (劳力集中, to gather the labour force) appeared frequently. In order to gather the labour force, requests for the return of labourers from outside were delivered repeatedly, and were not only to comply with government policy, but may also reflect the real demand for labour for collective work, particularly in the rice cropping seasons and the construction of irrigation.

The other side of the situation is revealed by the repeated references in the minutes of collective cadre meetings to the prevalence of gambling²¹⁹ in the village from the late 1960s, i.e. in spite of all efforts to lead the labour force into the development of the collective economy, there was still a substantial number of labourers remaining idle for whatever reason. On 17 December 1967, the problem of gambling was first presented in a leadership meeting. The record stated, ‘Currently, a strange tendency rose. That is gambling. You [i.e. the cadres attending the meeting] should go back to persuade them [i.e. the people involved] not to gamble. If they insist, the Communist Party should find out. If there is any consequence, they

²¹⁸ See ‘Zhaitan Dadui Sheyuan Chaozhi ji Chubeiliang Qingkuang Modi Biao,’ 宅坦大队社员超支及储备粮情况摸底表 (The Investigation Table on Debts of Brigade Members and the Grain Reserve of Zhaitan), in *Changqi Dang’an*, Vol.24, 7.

²¹⁹ See the self-criticism of Hu Ji’an on the minutes of ‘Zhengdang Huiyi,’ 整党会议 (The Meeting for Rectifying the Party), 16 December 1968, in *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol. 18, 93.

should answer for it.’²²⁰ This alert seems not to have been taken seriously, as the problem lasted until the end of the collective period.

In addition, the meeting minutes also revealed that, although it was strictly prohibited, people, especially those with craft skills, still managed to go out of the village to seek work opportunities. And sometimes it became hard to mobilise such people to take part in the collective work. Take the restoration of Shentang Reservoir in January 1975 as an example. In January 1975, following the directive of the commune, the cadres of Zhaitan brigade decided to go all out to construct irrigation facilities and plant trees. They urged all the labour force working outside, with the exception of those involved in the construction of the railway and roads, to return within four days; otherwise, they would be fined 1.6 *yuan* per day of absence.²²¹ However, 9 days later the labour force involved in the construction of the reservoir was still not sufficient and far less than the expected. This situation was presented seriously at the meeting of the party branch. The cadres questioned if people were against the construction of the reservoir, and they decided to check family by family to find out if there was any labourer standing aside.²²² This fact reflects that the collective management of labour was in fact not as effective as expected. It may be attributed to the scarcity of incentives.

As the last section suggested, the low reward for labour in the collective made such work less attractive, and thus people preferred to stand aside or work outside, even at the risk of criticism and fines. This caused a dilemma for the labour management. The collective needed a larger work force to improve its production given the limited resources in terms of capital and machinery. But since it was hard to improve productivity under such conditions, a greater work force merely meant lower income per capita. Thus people did not intend to work on collective production, and the collective project suffered a shortage of workers. Eventually it would weaken the collective economy and further reduce the reward and income of collective

²²⁰ The title of the meeting had faded, but the attendants and minutes remained. See the meeting minutes of 17 December 1967, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol. 16, 30.

²²¹ See the minutes of ‘Zhiweihui,’ 支委会 (The Meeting of Party Branch Committee), 5 January 1975, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol. 35, 1.

²²² See the minutes of ‘Jinwan Zhaokai Zhibu Huiyi,’ 今晚召开支部会议 (The Meeting of the Party Branch Committee), 14 January 1975, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol. 35, 2–4.

members. Although some skilled persons might be able to make up for the loss by working outside, in the context of a command economy, this behaviour was not sustainable.

Conclusion

The data from Zhaitan shows that in spite of slight progress with regards to farming machinery and agricultural technology in the 1970s, the labour force remained as the major resource for agricultural production and rural construction throughout this period. From the late 1960s, projects and businesses based on more intensive labour utilisation were developed considerably, for example the construction of reservoirs, the introduction of continuous double cropping of rice, the expansion of silkworm cultivation and so on. Furthermore, with the fast natural growth of population as well as the labour force, the collective was also able to develop a more diversified economy. This trend was particularly reinforced by the 'Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture' movement that began in the late 1960s.

On the other hand, the experience of Zhaitan during the collective period of 1963–1978 also demonstrates that the rapid and continuous growth of the population and workforce, combined with the scarcity of capital and technology, meant that the intensive input of labour actually resulted in low labour productivity. The food grain supply in the village was much improved due to the substantial increase in the gross output of grain, but the financial condition of families was still poor since the labour reward was very low. This triggered the outflow of labour force and increased the difficulty of labour management. Under the strict controls on the labour flow, this problem seemed to be hard to solve until the post-1978 reform.

Chapter 5

The Post-Collective Era: Structural Change in Agriculture and the Diversification of the Economy

The death of Mao Zedong in 1976 was a turning point in both Chinese politics and society. It brought down the Maoists in the party, marked by the fall of the ‘Gang of Four’, and it terminated the Cultural Revolution.²²³ After two years of struggle and adjustment within the senior leadership of the CCP, reform became the major issue in China from 1978. In its initial stage, it largely focused on rural areas, but was soon extended to cover other sectors of the national economy. In the first decade of reform, the collective economy disintegrated and the three-tier commune system was abandoned. Land was contracted to families, and the rural economy returned to a pattern based on individual households. By changing the compulsory purchase system for produce and loosening the restrictions on rural markets, the crop pattern changed noticeably, and the income from sidelines and private businesses became a more substantial part of family income. From the late 1980s, as the focus of reform transferred to urban areas, particularly state-owned enterprises, the changes in rural areas began to diminish.²²⁴ The most recent progress made was in the reform of agricultural taxes and the initiation of the ‘New Rural Construction’ project in the early 2000s. In the context of the fast industrialisation and urbanisation that has taken place in China over the last decade, the effects of these measures remain uncertain.

The reform carried out from 1978 embraced a broad range of issues, but these may be summarised under two headings: changes in the organisational system of production and

²²³ Mao died on 9 September 1976, and the ‘Gang of Four’, considered to be responsible for the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, was arrested shortly after, in early October. Though the successor of Mao, Hua Guofeng, persisted in Mao’s legacy, his power was much restricted by the old leadership of the CCP who had been suppressed during the Cultural Revolution. In 1977, as Deng Xiaoping resumed his position in the party, Hua was gradually excluded from the power centre. In June 1981, Hua resigned from all positions and formally left the political stage of China. However, despite the political struggle after Mao’s death, the senior leadership of the CCP was committed to recover social and economic order as soon as possible after the fall of the ‘Gang of Four’. For the chronology of the CCP, refer to <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64164/>, accessed 20 December, 2013. For a more detailed description and analysis, see also Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*, 376–407.

²²⁴ Regarding the political economy of Chinese reform from 1978 to 1990s, an insightful analysis is Jean-Jacques Laffont and Yingyi Qian, ‘The Dynamics of Reform and Development in China: A political Economy Perspective,’ *European Economic Review* 43 (1999): 1105–1114. Another intensive work on the political economy of reform is Susan L. Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

allocation, and measures geared towards the development of the market economy. The progress and consequences of both have been discussed fully.²²⁵ From the economists' point of view, each peasant is rational and has the initiative and ability to arrange his economic activity to maximise his interests. Decollectivisation, represented by the establishment of the Household Responsibility System (hereafter HRS), was valued as the dominant source of the output growth in agriculture from 1978 to 1984, since it provided peasants with sufficient autonomy in their family production.²²⁶ In addition, the loosening of quota systems and rural markets was regarded as the most significant policy in improving the family income of peasants and changing the structure of the rural economy.²²⁷

In this chapter, I will examine the progress of Zhaitan village from 1978 to 1992 with regards to rural reform. The condition of the village after 1992 will briefly be mentioned at the end of the thesis. This is not only because of the limitation of primary sources, but also because it usually takes time to observe and analyse the outcome of the latest trends. The analysis of the years 1978–1992 presented here was largely based on three sources: the annual agricultural statistics of Zhaitan, the minutes of meetings of the village leadership, and the annual procurement quota of the village during this period. Differing from the mainstream opinions held on the HRS, I will demonstrate that the HRS was not the primary source of the achievements made in rural areas in the years after 1978 given that the major difficulty faced by the household economy in Zhaitan was the limited land and the growing population. Compared to the collective era, the output of agriculture did increase more rapidly during the first few years of the reform, but this was the result of a combination of a series of factors, such as the increased utilisation of chemical fertilisers and the change of state procurement policy. In the second stage of the reform, grain production started to decrease, and the share of rice declined remarkably as well. As cash crops and sidelines continued to increase, more of the labour force transferred from agriculture to non-agricultural sectors. This was attributed

²²⁵ For details and comments on the course and outcome of the reform from the late 1970s to the 1980s, see Dwight Perkins, 'Completing China's Move to the Market,' and Lin, 'Rural Reforms and Agricultural Growth,' in *Growth without Miracles*, ed. Ross Garnaut and Yiping Huang (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2001), 37–40, and 137–152. In addition, *The China Quarterly*, 106 (1988), had a special issue on the rural reform of China.

²²⁶ Lin, 'Rural Reforms and Agricultural Growth,' 137–152.,

²²⁷ Robert F. Ash, 'The Evolution of Agricultural Policy,' *The China Quarterly*, 106 (1988): 540.

to the resumption of rural markets and the further reform of the procurement system for rural commodities.

This chapter will be divided into six sections. The first section provides an overall context for rural reform after 1978 in China. The second section introduces the practice of the decollectivisation reform in Zhaitan. The third section focuses on the outcome of this reform in Zhaitan. The fourth presents the input of agriculture and the reasons behind the change, and the fifth section shows the diversion of the labour force from agriculture to non-agricultural sectors. The last section is the conclusion.

Rural Reform: General Background

As in the widely quoted words of Chen Yun, the reform of China was to ‘cross the river by feeling for stones at each step’ (摸着石头过河, *Mozhe Shitou Guohe*).²²⁸ Each decision was cautious and many policies were released only after regional tests had been carried out, or were based on substantial practices. The process of rural reform from 1978 was an example. It proceeded in two stages. In the first stage, from 1978 to 1984, the policies concentrated on redressing the problems caused by the Cultural Revolution and developing the stagnant rural economy. Apart from the price reform of the quota system, during this period the most significant institutional change was the demise of the collective economy and the practice of the HRS. Unlike most of previous movements after 1949, this process was not designed by the central government from the beginning, but was dynamic and interactive, emanating from vibrant practices at the grass-roots level and active responses from the central government. The reform of this stage brought noticeable improvements in the agricultural output, but also caused considerable change to the crop structure. One of the most noticeable changes was the decline of grain production. In the second stage, in order to balance the security of grain production with the increase in the peasants’ income, the market of agricultural commodities

²²⁸ The word was from the speech of Chenyun at a work meeting of the Central Committee of CCP in December, 1980. Chen was one of members of the standing committee of the political bureau at that time and one of the most important reformists after 1978. See ‘Jingji Xingshi yu Jingyan Jiaoxun,’ 经济形势与经验教训 (The Economic Circumstance and the Experience and Lessons), in *Chenyun Wenxuan* 陈云文选, Vol.3, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/69112/83035/83317/83597/5738412.html>, accessed 20 December 2013.

was further freed up and the produce procurement system was replaced by voluntary contracts.

Decollectivisation

In the latter half of the 1970s, although the management of the collective system became more difficult under the increasing pressure of the population, the system remained stable overall. Mao's death was the most crucial political incident in China since the mid 1960s, but this did not terminate the operation of the collective system. In 1978, at the historic Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee, the party turned its focus onto the development of agriculture, but the resolution still emphasised that the three-tier ownership system of the collective economy should be maintained and carried out firmly.²²⁹ However, from the winter of that year, some production teams in Anhui province started to contract the output to groups and individuals in order to improve agricultural productivity.²³⁰ Land, draft animals and farm tools were allocated among households, and peasants were responsible for the output specified in the contract. While some teams still carried on using the work point system to distribute the produce and income, some teams abandoned this complicated system. Peasants had the right to dispose of all the products left after paying the relevant taxes and quotas to the government and the collective as specified in the contract. By the end of 1979, 16 per cent of production teams in Anhui Province were practising this new institution.²³¹

In spite of the rapid development of the responsibility system in rural areas, the official attitude remained cautious. The new institution seemed to be a kind of return to the responsibility field system carried out in 1962, which had been a temporary measure to relieve the famine in some areas that were suffering a severe crisis. But after the famine, the

²²⁹ See 'Zhongguo Gongchandang Dishiyijie Zhongyang Weiyuanhui Disanci Quanti Huiyi Gongbao,' 中国共产党第十一届中央委员会第三次全体会议公报 (The Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh CPC Central Committee), 22 December 1978, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64563/65371/4441902.html>, accessed 22 December, 2013,

²³⁰ See Chen Jiyun 陈吉元 *et al.*, ed., *Zhongguo Nongcun Shehui Jingji Bianqian 1949–1989* 中国农村社会经济变迁 (The Transition of Chinese Rural Society and Economy) (Taiyuan: Shanxi Jingji Chubanshe, 1993), 480–482.

²³¹ See Ash, 'The Evolution of Agricultural Policy,' 534.

policy was soon abandoned for its ‘capitalist nature’,²³² and its supporters were criticised. Hence, when the message of the change was spread, it immediately stirred a heated debate not only within the Party but also among the whole of society.²³³ In these circumstances, at the Fourth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP in September 1979, the resolution made a compromise. While underlining again that the collective system was still the basis of agricultural production, it also sanctioned that in the remote mountainous areas production teams could practise the responsibility system.²³⁴ But the policy was updated quickly. From the latter half of 1980, the responsibility system was formally encouraged by the resolution of the Central Committee of the CCP,²³⁵ and the contracting of output to households was also acknowledged. Hence, the practice of the responsibility system correspondingly spread widely throughout the nation. By the end of 1980, about 30 per cent of production teams had adopted the HRS, and by the beginning of 1982, 90 per cent of production teams were carrying out some form of responsibility system.²³⁶ Thus, in 1983, the stand of the Central Committee of the CCP was affirmed. On the No. 1 Document²³⁷ of that year, this system was formally defined and praised as a ‘great creation of Chinese

²³² See ‘Zhonggong Anhui Shengwei Guanyu Gaizheng Zerentian Banfa de Jueyi,’ 中共安徽省委关于改正责任田办法的决议 (The Resolution of Anhui Provincial Committee of the CCP on Correcting the ‘Responsibility Field’), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 698.

²³³ For example, on 15 March 1979, the official organ of CCP, the People’s Daily, published a reader’s letter on its front page, which said that the responsibility system would undermine the fundamental system of the People’s Commune and thus shake the socialist system. Attached to the letter, the editor’s comment upheld its opinion, criticised the responsibility system and asked for immediate correction. See Zhanghao 张浩, ‘Sanji Suoyou Dui wei Jichu Yinggai Wending,’ 三级所有, 队为基础应该稳定 (The Three-Tier System Based on Production Team Should Be Stabilised), in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian*, 968-969.

²³⁴ See ‘Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Jiakuai Nongye Fazhan Ruogan Wenti de Jueding,’ 中共中央关于加快农业发展若干问题的决定 (The Resolution of the Central Committee of the CCP on Several Issues about Speeding Up the Agricultural Development), 28 September, 1979, <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/zhuanti/jd/493900.htm>, accessed 21 December, 2013.

²³⁵ See ‘Guanyu Jinyibu Jiaqiang he Wanshan Nongye Shengchan Zerenzhi de Jige Wenti,’ 关于进一步加强和完善农业生产责任制的几个问题 (Several problems on further strengthening and perfecting the agricultural production responsibility system), released on 27 September 1980 by the Central Committee of CCP. The document was also called No.75 document, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64186/66701/4495427.html>, accessed 21 December, 2013.

²³⁶ Source: Ash, ‘The Evolution of Agricultural Policy,’ 534-535.

²³⁷ The No.1 Document is the first document signed and released by the Central Committee of the CCP in a year. It usually embraces the foremost issues of the year, regarded as the guidelines for the focuses of the CCP for the year.

peasants’.²³⁸ By the end of the year, almost all of the agricultural production units, including the state-operated farms, had been transformed based on the HRS. Subsequent to the dissolution of the collective economy, the commune system was abandoned. The governmental institutions at the township level were resumed; the ‘brigade’ was cancelled and replaced by the administrative village, while the production team became the villagers group.

Reform of the Procurement System

The price reform on rural commodities commenced from 1979, based on the resolution of the 1978 Central Committee meeting of the CCP. By 1984, there had been two forms of compulsory purchase on rural commodities: the unified purchase (统购, *Tonggou*) and the above-quota purchase (超购, *Chaogou*). Both prices were lower than the market price, but the above-quota purchase price was higher than the unified purchase price, as a reward to those who sold more commodities than the quota of unified purchase to the government. In 1979, to improve the income of the peasants, the unified purchase price for grain was raised by 20 per cent, and the above-quota purchase price was raised by a further 50 per cent.²³⁹ The price of other commodities, such as cotton, sugar, oil crops and animal products, were also increased. After reaching the purchase target, the products were free to be sold at the market or to the state-owned institutions at prices that were reached through negotiations between the peasants and the state. In 1985, the No.1 Document further stated the abolition of the compulsory purchase system for the majority of rural commodities. For grain and cotton, a contract system was implemented which allowed commercial departments to draw up contracts with peasants before they planted the seeds to purchase the products at a specified price after the harvest. According to the document, the contract could be made voluntarily and freely between peasants and any institutions operating, processing and consuming these products, but the price was fixed.²⁴⁰ In addition, other products such as pigs, vegetables and

²³⁸ See ‘Dangqian Nongcun Jingji Zhengce de Ruogan Wenti,’ 当前农村经济政策的若干问题 (Several Problems on Current Rural Economic Policies), released on 2 January 1983, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/135439/8134114.html>, accessed 21 December, 2013,

²³⁹ See ‘Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Jiakuai Nongye Fazhan Ruogan Wenti de Jueding.’

²⁴⁰ See ‘Zhonggong Zhongyang Guowuyuan Guanyu Jinyibu Huoyue Nongcun Jingji de Shixiang Zhengce,’ 中共中央、国务院关于进一步活跃农村经济的十项政策 (Ten Policies of the Central

aquatic products, were permitted to be exchanged freely on the market, while not being obliged to abide by quotas and contracts. However, while this policy brought obvious benefits to the economy of the peasants, it caused concern on the side of grain production. Freed from the grain production quota, it was common for those regions at a disadvantage in grain production to divert their efforts and resources to other products that were more profitable. This concern was attested by the grain production of 1985, which had declined by 7 per cent from 1984.²⁴¹ In 1986, to secure an adequate grain supply, the contracted purchase was announced as a task of the state, hence the contract was effectively no longer made at the will of the peasants. In order to encourage the production of grain, favourable policies were also published. For example, peasants who signed contracts on grain purchase were given priority in obtaining a loan and chemical fertiliser from state-owned institutions.²⁴²

Despite the persistent and cautious control of grain, the market-oriented reforms in agriculture proceeded quite quickly overall. In 1978, a mere 8 per cent of rural commodities were exchanged on the market but, by 1990, this ratio had risen to about 80 per cent, and about half of the grain was exchanged on the market.²⁴³

The Reforms in Zhaitan: Resolution of the Collective System

The reforms in Zhaitan began with the experiment in changing the agricultural organisation in 1978. At the end of 1978, as the news that Fengyang County²⁴⁴ had introduced the HRS spread to Zhaitan, some production teams decided to imitate the practice, contracting work to the group, while linking the reward to production. In March 1979, as the

Committee of the CCP and the State Council on Further Reviving Rural Economy), 1 January 1985, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/135439/8134263.html>, accessed 21 December, 2013.

²⁴¹ See Guojia Tongjiju Nongcun Shehui Jingji Diaochasi 国家统计局农村社会经济调查司, *Gaige Kaifang Sanshinian Nongye Tongji Ziliao Huibian* 改革开放三十年农业统计资料汇编 1978-2007 (Compilation of Rural Statistical Data Over the 30 Years of Reform) (Beijing: Zhongguo Tongji Chubanshe, 2009), 17.

²⁴² See 'Zhonggong Zhongyang Guowuyuan Guanyu Yijiubaliunian Nongcun Gongzuo de Bushu' 中共中央、国务院关于1986年农村工作的部署 (The Arrangement of the Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council on Rural work of 1986), 1 January 1986, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/135439/8134318.html>, accessed 21 December, 2013.

²⁴³ Perkins, 'Completing China's Move to the Market,' 38.

²⁴⁴ Fengyang is a county in the north of Anhui Province. It had been well known for its poverty, which used to result in large amounts of beggars. At the end of 1978, a production team in the county, Xiaogang, started to contract its output to households. The news was spread throughout the country and the practice is regarded as a landmark in Chinese rural reform.

attitude of the senior leadership of the CCP regarding the reforms was still uncertain and the spring sowing was about to start, the reforms were prevented from being extended. The production teams that had already completed the reforms were allowed to maintain them, but the teams that had not implemented them were prevented from further practice.²⁴⁵ According to a symposium attended by brigade cadres of Zhaitan and the party secretary of the township, the responsibility system implemented by some production teams of Zhaitan included the following points:²⁴⁶

1. The team was divided into three groups, and all the land of the production team was divided into pieces. The output of each piece of land was fixed according to the overall target of the team. The reward for each group was linked to the production of the land. If the production of one group overtook the target, extra work points would be awarded to the group—10 work points for 100 *jīn* of extra production (of grain). If all three groups exceeded their targets, the award would be made up 50 per cent of grain and 50 per cent of work points. If the group failed to meet the target, work points would be deducted from the group—6 work points for 100 *jīn* production.

2. Each piece of work had a fixed number of work points attached to it. The number of work points obtained by each labourer was counted, according to the work points of the work that they completed, regardless of gender.

3. The production plan, crop arrangement and allocation was decided by the production team, but managed by the group.

4. The seeds were cultivated by the team, then allocated to and managed by the group. The team was also responsible for the allocation of fertiliser among groups, but the utilisation of fertiliser was decided by the group. If there was a shortage, it was the responsibility of the

²⁴⁵ See the minutes of ‘Geweī Kuoda Huiyi,’ 革委扩大会议 (The Enlarged Meeting of the Revolutionary Committee), 20 March 1979, in *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol.50, 9–10.

²⁴⁶ Regarding the practice of the responsibility system, I also interviewed some former cadres in the village. However, their description of the process was slightly different from the records of the meetings. What they talked about was more likely to be the HRS, conducted from 1981 but, prior to allocating all the production means to the household and contracting the output to the household, there was a more moderate reform which contracted the work to groups while remaining the collective allocation. Since the meeting recorded during this period was rather complete, I decided to adopt the written record rather than the oral history.

group to seek supplementary supplies. Large machines, such as tractors, and the irrigation system were still centrally managed by the team.²⁴⁷

Though still under the framework of the collective system, this reform strengthened the link between the labour undertaken and the reward received. The division of targets and resources into groups also made production more controllable, compared to the production team method, and this practice seemed to be well received. From the beginning of 1980, even though the official attitude was still not affirmed, the brigade cadres started to discuss how to improve the responsibility system and how to perfect the contracts.²⁴⁸ Three production teams—Hengjie, Shangjing and Kanshang—had even started to practice the HRS.²⁴⁹ After September 1980, since restrictions on the responsibility system were further loosened by the No.75 Document, different forms of the responsibility system rapidly emerged amongst the production teams of Zhaitan.²⁵⁰ Nevertheless, as the party committee of Jixi County decided to carry out the HRS soon afterwards, the brigade cadres of Zhaitan started to extend the HRS to all the production teams. All of the brigade cadres then went down to assist in the allocation of work to production teams.²⁵¹

The allocation of land was generally based on the number of family members. There were three forms of allocation: fixing the amount of land to each family, regardless of any future change of members; reserving a certain amount of spare land for any future change in population; not reserving any spare land, but making rules in case of future change.²⁵² Together with the allocation of land, the collective assets were also distributed to the household. The allocation methods varied from one asset to another. The large farming tools were shared by several households, while the small tools, of which there were enough to

²⁴⁷ See the minutes of ‘Zuotan Hui’ 座谈会 (The Symposium), 17 July 1979. *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol. 50, 23: 24.

²⁴⁸ See the minutes of ‘Ganbu Kuoda Huiyi,’ 干部扩大会议 (The Enlarged Cadres’ Meeting), 29 January 1980, and the minutes of ‘Zhaokai Shengchan Duizhang Huiyi,’ 召开生产队长会议 (The Meeting of Production Team Heads), 27 February 1980, in *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol.55, 4–6.

²⁴⁹ See the minutes of ‘Zhiwei Hui,’ 支委会 (The Meeting of Party Branch Committee), 18 November 1980, in *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol. 54, 12.

²⁵⁰ See the minutes of ‘Zhiwei Huiyi,’ 支委会议 (The Meeting of Party Branch Committee), 5 September 1981, in *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol. 61, 14.

²⁵¹ See the minutes of ‘Zhiwei Huiyi,’ 支委会议 (The Meeting of Party Branch Committee), 21 November 1981, in *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol. 61, 29–31. This meeting was a summary of the progress of HRS in Zhaitan.

²⁵² *ibid.*

enable distribution, were shared by each household. Those assets that were difficult to allocate, such as collective buildings and facilities, were evaluated and sold. The money was shared by all of the team members. For some assets that were hard to evaluate and highly desired, but the amount of which was insufficient for allocation—for example, fish ponds—people drew lots to decide who should retain them in order to ensure equitable distribution.²⁵³ By September 1981, each production team had almost completed their allocation.

At the end of 1981, households started to sign production contracts based on the land allocated to them, and this had been completed by the end of 1982. The village archives preserved two volumes of contracts, one for the Lulou Team in 1982 and the other for the Hengjie Team in 1983, which provided particular information on the land, production targets and the burden of the households. Take Hu Weiqian of the Hengjie Team as an example: in 1983, the family had five members and was contracted for 4.14 *mu* of paddy fields. During the year, the contracted rice production of this household was 4,077.9 *jin* of grain in kind or 473.04 *yuan* in value. The family needed to pay 208.4 *jin* of grain or 24.18 *yuan* in cash as tax. They also had to sell 267.9 *jin* of grain to the state to meet the above-quota grain target. In addition, the family also had to meet the purchase targets for other commodities. They had to sell 25.7 *jin* of rapeseed out of the 78.2 *jin* contracted production of rapeseed. The contracted tea production was set at 18.2 *jin*, and the family had to sell 1 *jin* to the government. Furthermore, the family had to sell 20.7 *jin* of cocoons and raise 5 pigs during the year. In spite of the obligation to the country, the family also needed to pay 11.62 *yuan* in cash to the collective, which was composed of 5.18 *yuan* to the public welfare fund, 2.04 *yuan* to the comfort fund for the relatives of deceased soldiers, 3.77 *yuan* in cadres' wages, and a 0.63 *yuan* administrative fee.²⁵⁴ As all the output and burdens were clear, it became easy for the family to calculate their profit and to make the arrangements.

On the other hand, under the practice of the HRS, although the brigade continued to own the land and the mountain, the resources controlled by the collective were much reduced. During the collective era, the majority of the output was disposed of by the production team,

²⁵³ The information was from an interview with Hu Xuetian, the former team cadre of Hengjie, on 13 March 2013.

²⁵⁴ See 'Nongye Jingji Hetongshu,' 农业经济合同书 (Agricultural Economy contracts), in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol. 107, 2–4.

and the household was below the collective in the order of output allocation. Since the reform of the HRS, although the household was still literally behind the state and the collective in allocation, the output was in effect disposed of by the household. For this reason, an immediate question after the reform was how to afford public services such as medical services, education and irrigation. In January 1981, the collective funding for the cooperative medical service was terminated. Doctors had to take full responsibility for profit and loss. Education faced the same situation: classes were contracted, and rural teachers no longer received subsidies from the production team. Except for subsidies from the government, their wages were paid by the students.²⁵⁵ As for the wages of the cadres, which had been regarded as one of the collective expenses and directly deducted from the collective income, from 1981 they were paid by the brigade enterprises, rather than by the peasants. Regarding irrigation, however, the minutes from the meetings of village cadres show that, since the reforms, this issue had gradually disappeared from the agenda of the meetings, and there was rarely any construction carried out on water facilities throughout the 1980s. One keeper of the reservoir was retained, whose duty was to pipe the water from the reservoir to the field at the request of the peasants. A charge was levied for this service, and this formed the keeper's private income.

The demise of the collective economy was followed by the dissolution of the commune. The amended 1982 Constitution of China re-specified the administrative hierarchy of China, in which the township became the authority at the lowest level. Based on the constitution, the commune system was gradually abandoned in China. The reform of Zhaitan was completed in August 1983 by restructuring the leadership of the village. The brigade was replaced by the administrative village, and a new villagers' committee was organised to perform the administrative functions. The committee was composed of seven members, who were required to be relatively young, educated and able to lead the village in developing the economy. The committee was nominally elected by the villagers, but was still under the leadership of the village party branch, like all governmental departments of China. In addition, a new institution, 'the economic management committee', was set up to take charge of the

²⁵⁵ See the minutes of 'Zhaokai Guanwei Huiyi,' 召开管委会议 (The Meeting of The Management Committee), 2 January 1981, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol.62, 1.

economic business of the village; its members were appointed by the party branch and the villagers' committee. On the production team level, except for one team, which was split into two, all the other production teams largely maintained their original territory and people, but their name was changed to 'villagers' group' (*Cunmin Xiaozu*, 村民小组).²⁵⁶

The economic and institutional reform of Zhaitan was largely completed in 1983. There was an adjustment to the land allocated to the households in that year, which was the last change made for the next 15 years. In 1984, according to the No. 1 Document of that year, the land contracted by each household was fixed and the contract period was extended to 15 years.²⁵⁷ This policy was based on the viewpoint that a secure property right helps to improve the investment of peasants, particularly in the land. For example, Perkins was worried that, in spite of the practice of the HRS, the insecure property right of peasants made peasants reluctant to invest in the land.²⁵⁸ Following this thought, it follows that a stable and long-term contract means more secure rights to the land output, thus increasing input on the land. However, take irrigation, which is directly attached to the land, as an example: neither the national data nor the regional data supported the vision. At the national level, the area of irrigated land over 1979–1989 never exceeded the level of 1978.²⁵⁹ At the provincial level, the irrigated land of Anhui Province decreased from 1981 to 1989.²⁶⁰ At the village level, the data of Zhaitan show a similar trend. This suggests that a more secured production system based on the household did not necessarily result in an increase in peasants' input. In the next sections, I will demonstrate this using the statistical data of Zhaitan.

²⁵⁶ See the minutes of 'Zhiwei Huiyi,' 支委会议 (The Meeting of the Party Branch Committee), 21 August 1983, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol. 101, 17–18.

²⁵⁷ See 'Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Yijiubasinian Nongcun Gongzuo de Tongzhi,' 中共中央关于 1984 年农村工作的通知 (The Notice of the Central Committee of the CCP on the Rural work of 1984), 1 January 1984, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/135439/8134254.html>, accessed 21 December 2013.

²⁵⁸ Refer to Perkins, 'Completing China's Move to the Market,' 39–40.

²⁵⁹ See *Gaige Kaifang Sanshinian Nongye Tongji Ziliao Huibian*, 7.

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 128.

Output During the Reform in Zhaitan

In terms of the output, the practice of the HRS seemed to produce significant improvements in agriculture. In the years 1978–1984, the output from agriculture in China increased, with rapid growth in both staple grain and cash crops. The production of grain rose by 33.6 per cent, cotton by 189 per cent, oil crops by 128 per cent, sugar by 100 per cent, and tobacco by 44 per cent.²⁶¹ Apart from the overall boom in output, there was a remarkable change in the crop pattern. During this period, the share of cash crops increased substantially, while the share of grain declined. From 1978 to 1984 the sown area of grain decreased by 6 per cent, while the sown area of cotton rose by 42 per cent, the oil crops by 39 per cent, sugar by 39 per cent, and vegetables by 30 per cent.²⁶²

There are some similarities between the trend in Zhaitan and in the national data, but there are noticeable differences as well. During the first stage of the reform, 1978–1984, there was significant growth in the output of some crops, but there was no fundamental change in the crop structure in Zhaitan. The grain crops were still dominant, though the share of rice in the grain started to decline, and the sown area of wheat and potatoes was enlarged. No major progress took place in the cultivation of cash crops, except for the planting of rapeseed, which conventionally had been the most significant cash crop in the area. In contrast to crop cultivation, the traditional sidelines, such as the production of cocoons, tea and pigs, had increased. This indicated a transfer of effort to those businesses less dependent on the supply of land but more dependent on labour input, which might be related to local conditions, i.e. the tension between the limited arable land and the growing population. In the latter half of the 1980s, output from the land tended to stagnate, but the sidelines that were more market-oriented were developed further since the market behaviour was more encouraging.

In explaining the remarkable growth in agricultural output, as I mentioned before, the HRS was usually regarded as the most important institution, which made the link between rewards and labour more explicit so that peasants were motivated to input more labour and capital into agricultural production. I have reservations on this argument. Take the situation of irrigation after the reform as an example. From 1978 to 1984, although the output of rural

²⁶¹ Data calculated from: *ibid.*, 17–20.

²⁶² Data calculated from: *ibid.*, 13–16.

commodities showed noticeable progress, there was no improvement in the irrigation condition after the implementation of the HRS. The irrigated area of China had decreased slightly, by 1.1 per cent, from 1978 to 1984.²⁶³ Since irrigation used to be one of the kinds of work that required significant labour input, this drop indicated that after the reform, people put less work into irrigation, although it was one of the most important factors affecting agricultural output. This situation seems to contradict the presumption that the implementation of the HRS would definitely encourage input on agriculture. At the least, the collapse of the collective and the practice of the HRS had negative effects on input in rural irrigation. This case suggests that it might be too subjective to highlight the role of the HRS in rural development without taking other reforms of the same period into account.

As for the change in the rural economic structure, it should also be looked at in connection with the reform to the compulsory procurement system. The reduction in the purchase quota of agricultural products and the freeing up of the produce market made the diversion from the staple grain crops to more profitable cash crops possible. Given the high quota before the reform, after meeting the procurement target, the grain left for the household was just able to meet the daily need. Under the state control on grain supply, it was not realistic for peasants to give up supplying food grain by themselves and turn to cash crops, even if the production was on a household basis. Hence, changes in agriculture in the 1980s were likely to be the result of a series of policies and practices rather than the implementation of the HRS alone. The sources of Zhaitan provide an opportunity to analyse the details of the changes and the reasons behind these changes.

Changes in Grain Output After the Reform

The changes that took place in Zhaitan after the reform were complex. In terms of grain production, in 1979 the output of grain in Zhaitan showed a noticeable rise in contrast to the output of the final years of the collective period. During the next 6 years, except for a few years when the village suffered natural disasters, the gross output of food grain largely

²⁶³ Data calculated from: *ibid.*, 8.

remained level with the record of 1979. But, from 1986 onwards, food grain production decreased remarkably. By the end of the 1980s, it had declined to the level of the early 1970s.

Table 17 gives details of the food grain output of Zhaitan from 1974 to 1991. The data was extracted from the consecutive annual statistical reports mentioned in the last chapter.²⁶⁴ The reason why I chose the period 1974–1991 was simple. First, the annual statistical reports preserved in the village archives ended in 1991. Second, in terms of the reform itself, it largely took place during the 1980s. The 1990s generally continued the policies of the late 1980s, and there were no more substantial measures taken in rural areas in the 1990s. Hence it is not necessary to include the whole decade of the 1990s since the focus of the study is the change that occurred. In Table 17, I list the data for the years from 1974 to 1978, because this period represents the highest achievement of the collective economy in Zhaitan and, therefore, it could be compared with the years after the reform.

Table 17 shows that from 1978 to 1979, the food grain output of Zhaitan increased remarkably from 1,440,500 to 1,644,000 *jin* in total. Even considering the output loss caused by the drought in 1978, which was estimated to be 75,000 *jin*, there was still an 8.5 per cent increase. The output of 1982 was slightly higher than the record of 1979. The output in 1984 and 1985 dropped below 1.6 million, but was still higher than the record in the collective era. The production of 1980, 1981 and 1983 seems unusually low in the first period after the reform, which should be attributed to serious natural disasters. The disaster reports of 1980 indicated that the village suffered droughts and floods in this year.²⁶⁵ The disasters affected 728 *mu* of sown land and caused crop failures on 676 *mu* of sown land out of a total of 2,101 *mu*. The loss of output was estimated to be 380,000 *jin*.²⁶⁶ If the loss is taken into consideration, the adjusted output of 1980 would have been higher than the output of 1979.

²⁶⁴ According to the previous accountant of the Zhaitan brigade, after the demise of the collective system, the accountants of production teams were withdrawn and there was only one accountant at the village level. Thus the statistics were not as accurate as before. For some items that were not important, their production was often the estimation of the accountant, based on the condition of the year and the production of the previous year. This is the reason why some numbers were exactly the same as during the previous year. However, as there was no better data available, and this estimated number also formed one part of the national statistics, I decided to adopt them without making amendments or seeking alternatives.

²⁶⁵ 'Zhaitancun Guanyu Hongzai Hanzai Qingkuang de Huibao,' 宅坦村关于洪灾旱灾情况的汇报 (The Report on the Flood and Drought in Zhaitan), in *Changqi Dang'an*, Vol.43, 1–5.

²⁶⁶ See 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 1980.

The lower output in the years 1981 and 1983 was due to the same reason. The annual statistical report of 1981 reported that 215 *mu* of sown land suffered drought, flooding, disease, and insects. The disaster in 1983 was even more serious: the flood and the subsequent disease and insects affected 1,391 *mu* of sown land and caused crop failures on 974 *mu* of sown land. Nevertheless, under these circumstances, the output of the two years was still close to the record achieved in 1978.

Table 17 Grain Production of Zhaitan 1974–1991²⁶⁷

Year	Wheat		Rice		Potato		Soy bean		Gross Grain	
	Sown Area (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)	Sown Area (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)	Sown Area (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)	Sown Area (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)	Sown Area (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)
1974	105	19400	2005	1075100	24	8000	60	14700	2,233	1129100
1975	74	18148	1983.84	1263238	18.5	10995	38.5	9216.4	-	1301695
1976	29	3000	2053	1433900	16	7700	42	12100	2,170	1461900
1977	2	200	2072	1462900	13	4400	43	13000	2,155	1485300
1978	18	610	2077	1412000	10	3400	58	16500	2,187	1440500
1979	199	71200	1953	1540300	52	15600	64	15400	2274	1644000
1980	88	22400	1903	1210000	30	16200	60	12900	2101	1267300
1981	224	57900	1887	1336800	35	11400	61	14400	2224	1423800
1982	214	59500	1780	1550400	36	18600	50	15900	2080	1644400
1983	214	33100	1778.5	1338675	36	17800	52	12650	2080.5	1402225
1984	214	40880	1733	1498580	36	17800	52	12650	2035	1569910
1985	214	40880	1733	1474470	47	23500	63	15760	1947	1554610
1986	320	64000	1514.7	1218200	47	23500	63	12600	1944.7	1318300
1987	330	44800	1343	1223200	46	23000	64	12800	1793	1304700
1988	320	44800	1379	1128200	46	22000	64	9000	1819	1204900
1989	345	67000	1205	1186520	46	20000	64	9000	1670	1283720
1990	280	72000	1246	1040320	46	20000	64	9000	1656	1143720
1991	280	50000	1286	1164600	56	12400	64	5000	1706	1234000

Note: 1. apart from the crops listed on the table, the gross production of grain sometimes also included the beans and the corn. But as they were occasionally planted and the share was minimal, I decided to just neglect them.

2. Noticeable disasters took place in 1978, 1980 and 1983. This was based on the accounts of the disaster relief documents. In addition, the annual statistical reports of these years also recorded the disaster condition, such as the area of land suffering from the disaster and the loss of production.

²⁶⁷ Data source: 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 1974–1991. The forms of the reports were largely consecutive over years, just the word 'Dadui' (大队, brigade) in the title changed to be 'Cun' (村, village) from 1983, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol. 31, 34, 39, 42, 45, 48, 53, 59, 92, 99, 106, 116, 124, 130, 136, 142, 145, 150, and 155.

3. In around 1983, hybrid rice started to be planted in Zhaitan. As the yield of hybrid rice was higher than that of the normal rice, the sown area of this rice rose quickly. By 1991, almost three-fourth of the rice paddy had grown the hybrid rice.

In general, except for the years affected by disasters, in the first stage of the reform, i.e. from 1979 to 1984, the output of grain in Zhaitan was considerably higher than the output during the collective period. But this situation was not sustained as, during the next period (1985–1991), the trend in grain output shows a decline. In 1986, the grain output experienced a sudden drop from 1,554,610 to 1,318,300 *jin*, and from 1986 onwards, the grain output decreased continuously. By 1991 the output was even lower than in 1975.

Amongst grain crops, the production of different crops showed different trends. Over the period of 1979–1991, the change of rice output was largely consistent with the trend in the gross output of grain. Rice production rose by 9 per cent from 1978 to 1979, despite the crop failure in 1978, and 5 per cent compared to the output of 1977, when rice and grain production reached its highest level of the collective period. Except for the years affected by disaster, i.e. 1980, 1981 and 1983, rice output remained higher than the record of the collective era until 1986. In this year, the rice output showed a remarkable decline. By 1991, the output had dropped to 1.16 million *jin*, lower than the level of 1974. Furthermore, during this period, although rice was still dominant in the crop structure of grain, its share decreased in terms of the sown area. Table 16 shows that the sown area of rice started to decline in 1979. In 1978, the sown area of rice was 2077 *mu*, but in 1979 it was reduced to 1953 *mu*, and by 1991, it was only 1286 *mu*, a decrease of 38 per cent. In terms of the proportion of grain, by the end of the collective era, among the sown area of grain, 95 per cent was occupied by rice, but by 1991, the proportion dropped to 75 per cent (see Table 17).

In contrast, however, the supplementary grain crops, such as wheat and potato, had experienced remarkable expansion from the beginning of the reform. As the previous chapter mentioned, the practice of the continuous double cropping of rice in the 1970s had almost extruded the wheat from the field. But, from 1979, wheat was back as part of the crop rotation. In 1978, the sown area of wheat was only 18 *mu*, accounting for 0.82 per cent of the sown area of grain, while in 1979, the proportion rose to 8.75 per cent, and the sown area was

expanded to 199 *mu*.²⁶⁸ In the first half of the 1980s, the proportion of wheat was stable at 10 per cent, but in the latter half of the 1980s the sown area of wheat was further expanded, up to 345 *mu*, accounting for 20 per cent of all sown land in 1989. The cultivation of potatoes presents a similar trend to that of wheat. In 1978, only 10 *mu* of land grew potatoes, but in 1979, the sown area jumped to 52 *mu*. In the early 1980s, however, the figure decreased slightly, but it still tripled the record of 1978, and in the late 1980s, it continued to rise. By 1991, the share of the potato crop had risen to 3.28 per cent, compared with 0.46 per cent in 1978, in terms of the sown area. The details of the shares for different crops are shown in Table 18.

Table 18 Shares of the Different Grain Crops, Zhaitan, 1974–1991²⁶⁹

Year	Wheat	Rice	Potato	Soy Bean
1974	4.70%	89.79%	1.07%	2.69%
1975	-	-	-	-
1976	1.34%	94.61%	0.74%	1.94%
1977	0.09%	96.15%	0.60%	2.00%
1978	0.82%	94.97%	0.46%	2.65%
1979	8.75%	85.88%	2.29%	2.81%
1980	4.19%	90.58%	1.43%	2.86%
1981	10.07%	84.85%	1.57%	2.74%
1982	10.29%	85.58%	1.73%	2.40%
1983	10.29%	85.48%	1.73%	2.50%
1984	10.52%	85.16%	1.77%	2.56%
1985	10.99%	89.01%	2.41%	3.24%
1986	16.45%	77.89%	2.42%	3.24%
1987	18.40%	74.90%	2.57%	3.57%
1988	17.59%	75.81%	2.53%	3.52%
1989	20.66%	72.16%	2.75%	3.83%
1990	16.91%	75.24%	2.78%	3.86%
1991	16.41%	75.38%	3.28%	3.75%

²⁶⁸ The condition of 1979 was a little special. The drought in the summer of 1978 caused the serious failure of the rice crop. In order to make up for the loss of grain, after the rice was harvested, people were required to plant more wheat to meet the demand for grain. According to the directive of the Jixi County Committee of the CCP, the target for planting wheat in Zhaitan was 230 *mu*, but in reality the village managed to complete only 199 *mu*. The sowing of wheat took place in the winter of 1978, but the harvest took place in the early summer of 1979, thus the yield and sown area were counted into the data of 1979. See the minutes of ‘Zhibu Hui,’ 支部会 (The Meeting of the Party Branch Committee), 18 October 1978, in *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol.46, 58–59.

²⁶⁹ Data source: ‘Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,’ 1974–1991.

Note: The figures were calculated according to the sown areas of different crops, as listed in Table 16.

In summary, there was a substantial and immediate growth in the output of food grain in Zhaitan at the beginning of the reform period. Both rice and wheat saw remarkable increases in production. However, for the rice, the growth was a one-off because, from 1979 to 1984, there was no further improvement in rice production, and its sown area was steadily decreasing. From 1984, with a further decline in the sown area, rice production started to decline as well and, in the latter half of the 1980s, the decline had become substantial. Since rice was the most significant crop among the grain crops, the gross output of grain was restrained. In the early 1990s, both the rice output and the gross grain output were back to the levels of the early 1970s. However, in spite of the general decline in grain production, the cultivation of supplementary food grain, particularly wheat, was promoted. The sown area of wheat in the gross sown area of grain crops had increased from less than 1 per cent in 1978 to over 16 per cent in the early 1990s. This indicated a different trend in crop cultivation from the collective period, which needs to be explained.

Cash Crops and Sidelines

In contrast with the grain crops, all the major cash crop and sidelines in Zhaitan showed continuous growth over the same period (1974–1991). The annual statistics show that the cultivation of rapeseed, which had been the most significant cash crop in Zhaitan, expanded substantially. The sown area increased from 139 *mu* in 1978 to 263 *mu* in 1979, and at the same time the production rose from 11,300 to 23,600 *jin*. Unlike food grain, the expansion did not end in the latter half of the 1980s. By 1991, the sown area of rapeseed had increased to 350 *mu*, and production had increased to 48,000 *jin*, four times the production before the reform (see table 19).²⁷⁰ Besides the rapeseed, however, there were very few new cash crops

²⁷⁰ Both the sown area and the output of rapeseed experienced an obvious decline in 1991, compared with 1990. This may be the result of serious natural disasters between the winter of 1990 and the summer of 1991. The meeting minutes of cadres in 1991 show that in February 1991, the village had already received relief from the government, suggesting that the disaster must have occurred earlier. In the next months, the village continued to receive relief, and notices for distributing relief goods also mentioned serious hail damage in March and a flood lasting through the spring and summer of 1991. In these circumstances, the crop failure of rapeseed is understandable since this crop was planted in winter while harvested in early summer. The output of tea seemed to suffer from same problem, with a sharp decrease in output in 1991, because the harvest of tea was also in the spring. In contrast, the output of cocoons and pigs did not show unusual changes. This may be because both the silkworms and pigs

cultivated in the village. The statistics contained only a fragmentary record of other cash crops, such as peanuts, sesame, sugar, water melons and so on, but the scale was minimal and cultivation was neither stable nor consecutive. For example, in the first three years of the 1980s, some peasants planted peanuts in the field, but the sown area was only one or two *mu*, and it soon disappeared from the crop list of Zhaitan.

Furthermore, the traditional sidelines, such as silkworm farming, tea tree plantations and pig farming, developed considerably over the same period. Table 19 provides the details. The table shows that all three sidelines continued to grow during the reform period. Silkworm farming experienced a considerable increase from 1979 to 1990. This was firstly reflected by the expansion of the mulberry plantation. From 1979 to 1991, the size of the mulberry plantation increased by 43 per cent, from 231 *mu* to 330 *mu*, which indicates that the amount of silkworms raised by the villagers had increased markedly. As a result, over this period, the production of cocoons rose by 332 per cent, from 14,300 *jin* to 60,360 *jin*, especially in the early 1990s.²⁷¹

In addition, there was a considerable improvement in the production of tea. Although the production of tea was popular in the local area, in Zhaitan, it used to be paid less attention as most of the mountains suitable for growing tea trees were relatively far from the village. This was the case until the latter half of 1970s, when the construction of tea tree plantations became one of the highlights of the village's agricultural development plan.²⁷² In the reform period, the development of tea tree plantation was accelerated. From 1979 to 1980, 28 *mu* of tea tree plantations were newly reclaimed. From 1980 to 1981, nearly 100 *mu* of extra tea tree plantations were reclaimed. In 1981 the plantation area was up to 213 *mu* in total, and the

were raised indoors, and thus were not greatly impacted by the weather. See the minutes of 'Cunwei Kuoda Hui,' 村委扩大会 (The Enlarged Meeting of the Villagers Committee), 8 February 1991, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol. 152, 6; 'Guanyu Xiabo Jiuzaikuan Zhibiao de Tongzhi,' 关于下拨救灾款指标的通知 (A Notice of Distributing Relief Fund), in *Changqi Dang'an*, Vol.110, 14.

²⁷¹ The figures show that the expansion of mulberry plantation and the growth of cocoons did not occur at the same rate. This is because mulberry trees could sprout new leaves many times in one year. Thus, given the number of mulberry trees in one year, peasants could raise as many silkworms as possible. Therefore, the output of cocoons in a year not only depended on the area of the mulberry tree plantation, but also on the amount of silkworm eggs raised in one cycle and how many cycles of silkworms raised in a year.

²⁷² For example, in 1975, the brigade of Zhaitan presented a plan to construct a tea plantation of 1,000 *mu*. See the minutes of 'Zhaokai Kuoda Huiyi,' 召开扩大会议 (The Enlarged Meeting), in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol.36, 64.

output of tea passed 4,000 *jin*, tripling the record of 1978. Over the next ten years, while the area of the tea tree plantation remained stable, its production grew rapidly, reaching 10,000 *jin* in 1990, seven times the output of 1978.

Table 19 The Development of Cash Crops and Sidelines in Zhaitan, 1974–1991²⁷³

Year	Rapeseed		Silkworm		Tea		Pig	
	Sown Area (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)	Plantation of Mulberry Trees (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)	Plantation of Tea Trees (<i>mu</i>)	Production (<i>jin</i>)	Raised ²⁷⁴	Stock
1974	100	3700	254	17700	29	1700	945	427
1975	78	9005.3			29		1071	543
1976	127	12100	252	15200	65	1600	1270	743
1977	115	7900	252	14100	72	1300	1332	827
1978	139	11300	231	14400	72	1400	1454	849
1979	263	23600	231	14300	87	1900	1585	888
1980	130	9700	236	16900	115	3500	1507	861
1981	187	31100	241	14200	213	4300	1710	943
1982	221	38200	260	15800	213	4400	1743	948
1983	225.5	22946	260	15383	217	4350	1743	958
1984	322	28980	260	15400	217	4350	1741	958
1985	322	48300	269.5	18600	217	5220	-	958
1986	332	49800	269.5	19270	217	5400	-	950
1987	360	39600	274	23520	217	6000	-	940
1988	340	37600	279	25000	217	6000	-	950
1989	350	35000	297	29900	217	7000	-	950
1990	380	80000	317	49600	217	10000	-	960
1991	350	48000	330	60360	217	5100	-	970

The statistics on pig farming, which end in 1985, were not as complete as for other sidelines, but the existing data demonstrated similar trends to other sidelines. As the previous chapter mentioned, the encouragement policy of the production teams successfully promoted the development of pig farming in Zhaitan. Table 19 reveals that when the collective

²⁷³ Data source: ‘Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,’ 1974–1991.

²⁷⁴ From 1985, there were no statistics shown for the numbers of pigs raised during the year.

economy collapsed, this sideline continued to grow. By 1984, the number of pigs raised in the village had increased by 20 per cent from 1978, to a total of 1,741.

In addition to traditional sidelines, some new businesses started to emerge in the village. The annual statistical reports recorded the introduction of rabbit farming and bee farming from 1985. In 1985, 38 households were involved in rabbit farming, and 795 rabbits were raised. However, this business started earlier than the record shown on the statistical report. A report on the first villagers' assembly on 3rd September 1983 praised a few households for their achievement in developing the household economy.²⁷⁵ One example was that of Hu Liyao, the former head of the production team Hululing and also the former director of the revolutionary committee of the village. He was presented as a model, demonstrating the potential to make money by raising rabbits and fish.²⁷⁶ This suggests that the rabbit farming must have commenced earlier than 1983.

In summary, during the reform period, the cash crops and sidelines in Zhaitan continued the growth that had commenced during the late collective period, but in a more substantial way. The sown area of rapeseed expanded, as did the output. The plantation of mulberry trees was further enlarged, and the output of cocoons increased markedly compared to the collective era. The development of the tea tree plantations was even more considerable, since it was minimal during the collective period, but during the reform period it was expanded drastically. As tea tree plantations were usually to be found on hillsides, this indicates that, during the reform period, peasants tended to take greater advantage of land on the hillsides rather than merely concentrating on the arable land.

All the changes—both increases and decreases—in the agriculture of Zhaitan were the result of a variety of factors which involved not only the intervention of state policies but also the active choices of peasants to deviate from their traditional habits. The evidence gathered

²⁷⁵ See the minutes of 'Zhaokai Cunmin Daibiao Dahui,' 召开村民代表大会 (The Villager Congress), 3 September 1983, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol. 102, 27–32.

²⁷⁶ Hu Liyao was elected as the head of the Hulu Ling production team during the years 1971–1978. He is well known in the village for his capability. In 1976, at the age of just 30, he was promoted to be the director of the revolutionary committee of the village, equivalent to the head of a village nowadays. But, as his family was poor, since the end of the reform he immediately resigned from the position of leadership and focused on developing his family economy.

from Zhaitan also demonstrates that the viewpoint that the HRS was the main source of the growth in agricultural output growth during this period may not be applicable to Zhaitan.

One example is grain production. Although the growth in this area might be considered as a continuation of the growth that occurred during the late collective period, it came about more rapidly, particularly in the first year of the reform, i.e. 1979. As the responsibility system commenced in 1978, this seems to attest to the argument that it was the institutional change to the production unit that played a crucial role in the improvement of output. However, the experience of Zhaitan was different. As the last section mentioned, by 1979 the responsibility system had not yet been widely extended to the production teams in Zhaitan. Only two of the 11 production teams, Hengjie and Kanshang, completed the reform by 1979. The data on these two teams shows that neither was significant in terms of land resources or manpower. In 1979, the Hengjie team consisted of 28 households, 108 members, and 88 *mu* of arable land, which accounted for 6.9 per cent, 6.5 per cent and 7.5 per cent respectively of the total amount; the Kanshang team consisted of 47 households, 186 members, and 108.7 *mu* of arable land, which accounted for 11.6 per cent, 11.3 per cent and 9.2 percent of the total respectively.²⁷⁷ From 1978 to 1979, the grain production of Hengjie rose from 84,694 to 100,634 *jin*, and that of Kanshang from 176,074 to 179,146 *jin*. The combined growth of the two teams was 19,012 *jin*, and was responsible for 9.3 per cent of the total growth of the village. Therefore, of the remarkable growth of grain output from 1978 to 1979, the contribution of the responsibility system was at most 9.3 per cent. Much clearer evidence is provided by a comparison of the grain output between 1979 and 1982. By the end of 1981, all the production teams in Zhaitan practised the HRS, but the grain output in 1982 merely increased by 400 *jin* from the output of 1979. This fact suggests that the effect of the responsibility system on the grain output was minimal and that there must be other factors to be considered in the improvement of grain output.

For this reason, and also due to the complexity of the effects, as well as the limitations of the available data, which made it difficult to conclude which factor played the crucial role in the whole transition, in this section I will simply present all the factors that might have

²⁷⁷ See 'Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,' 1979.

affected agriculture in Zhaitan and analyse their possible outcomes, rather than quantifying the effectiveness of each factor.

Factors Behind the Changes in Agricultural Output

Agricultural Input During the Period of Reform

In explaining the changes in output of agriculture, I first examined the agricultural input during this period, since it was directly linked to the output in most years. As with the previous chapters, I have considered the input of labour, chemical fertilisers and irrigation. In addition, in 1983, a high-yield hybrid rice was introduced into Zhaitan and was widely grown in the village in the late 1980s. This new type of rice played a key role in the grain structure of the village, so I have also taken this into account.

According to Table 20, by 1981, with the increased workforce in the village, the labour force involved in agriculture had increased correspondingly. By 1984, the overwhelming majority (over 96 per cent) of the workforce in the village was in the agricultural sector. Between 1980 and 1984, the figure for the agricultural workforce was around 800, and this was also the period that had the largest workforce involved in agriculture. This situation was changed in 1985, when the agricultural workforce dropped substantially to less than 600, a mere 68 per cent of the total, due to the development of rural industry and other non-agricultural sectors, which I will explain later. From 1985 onwards, the proportion that made up the agricultural workforce generally remained at 66–68 per cent, in spite of the increase in the population and the total workforce.

Regarding the input of chemical fertilisers, there was a substantial increase during the years 1979–1984. From 1978 to 1979, the usage increased by 16 per cent, from 206,600 *jin* to 240,500 *jin* and, except in 1980, was maintained at over 240,000 *jin*. In 1985, the usage was drastically reduced to 163,500 *jin*, and then dropped further to 86,600 *jin* in 1986. From 1987, the input of chemical fertiliser gradually returned, but never rose back to the amounts used in the first half of the 1980s. This trend was very different from the general trend in the country. The national data shows that since 1978, the utilisation of chemical fertiliser had been increasing.²⁷⁸ I will analyse the reason for this disparity in the next section.

²⁷⁸ See *Gaige Kaifang Sanshinian Nongye Tongji Ziliao Huibian*, 8.

Table 20 Input of Agriculture in Zhaitan 1974–1991²⁷⁹

Year	Workforce		Chemical Fertiliser (<i>jin</i>)	Ensured Irrigated Land (<i>mu</i>)	Hybrid Rice (<i>mu</i>) ^b
	Total	Agriculture ^a			
1974	780	-	36500	780	
1975	766	-	73400	770	
1976	764	705	131600	945	
1977	769	746	215400	945	
1978	772	765	206600	820	
1979	782	775	240500	830	
1980	811	801	218300	840	
1981	821	804	270900	715	
1982	822	797	248200	775	
1983	822	802	254800	780	45
1984	822	802	247000	780	55
1985	838	576	163500	780	73
1986	838	573	86600	780	80
1987	850	573	139000	780	400
1988	874	582	197000	780	600
1989	875	592	197000	780	700
1990	882	608	206000	830	800
1991	948	648	216000	840	900

Note: ^a The workforce figure from 1976 to 1991 is the sum of the male and female workforce involved only in agriculture, and does not include the workforce who were involved in other rural industries or who worked outside the area. Data for 1974 and 1975 was not available.

^b The figures for the hybrid rice represent the sown area.

In terms of irrigation, Table 20 shows that through the ‘Learn from Dazhai’ movement in the 1970s, irrigation conditions improved immensely. The land that had guaranteed irrigation, regardless of drought or floods, increased to 945 *mu* in 1976, out of the total 1,180 *mu*. But since 1978, the land with ensured irrigation started to decrease; in 1981, it stood at a mere 715 *mu*. In 1983, the condition improved slightly and the amount rose back to 780 *mu*, but there was no improvement from then on until the 1990s.

²⁷⁹ Data source: ‘Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,’ 1974–1991.

Therefore, the data from Zhaitan shows that the input of both labour and chemical fertilisers showed a noticeable rise in the years 1979–1984, which explains the overall growth of agricultural output in Zhaitan during the same period. From 1985, the input of both was reduced remarkably, which explained the substantial decrease in grain production during the same period, particularly in rice production, given the fact that the quantity of rice was overwhelming compared to the other crops, consuming the majority of labour and chemical fertiliser. Moreover, the contraction of the land that had ensured irrigation also demonstrated that, during the reform period, people changed their focus from rice to other crops or businesses that were not as sensitive to irrigation as rice was.

In addition, the seeming decline of rice cultivation in Zhaitan was also related to the extension of hybrid rice. According to the annual statistics of 1983–1991, the yield of the hybrid rice was usually 1,000–1,100 *jin* per *mu*, which was even higher than the rice yield under the double cropping system. As the new rice took the place of the old, the cropping pattern of rice also changed. Since the workload under the continuous double cropping of rice was heavy and the output was lower than the yield of single cropping hybrid rice, peasants gradually gave up continuous double cropping and carried out single cropping again. In 1988, the planned sown area for continuous double cropping of rice in Zhaitan was 790 *mu*, composed of 420 *mu* early rice and 370 *mu* late rice,²⁸⁰ this was less than half of the sown area in 1978, which was 1,916 *mu*. In contrast, the land used for single cropping of rice had risen to 680 *mu*, more than 4 times the area in 1978, which was only 161 *mu*. Of course, both the double cropping and single cropping methods planned to adopt the hybrid rice as the main crop so that the reduced sown area would have a relatively higher output. Considering the expanded cultivation of wheat during this period, the above change reflects another intention. When the peasants' grain supply was secured by the improved seed, people did not have the motivation to input labour to the rice production as intensively as before, since the workload for cultivating the rice was much heavier than other crops, especially under the continuous double cropping system. In contrast, peasants would rather spare their efforts to produce other

²⁸⁰ See 'Shangzhuang Xiang Baqinian Qiuzhong he BaBanian Sidao Zhongzhi Anpai Jihuabiao,' 上庄乡八七年秋种和八八年四稻种植安排计划表 (The Plan for Crop Cultivation of the Autumn of 1987 and Rice Cultivation in 1988), in *Changqi Dang'an*, Vol.95, 52.

types of grain, such as wheat, which was relatively low-yield, but involved less care and less labour input.

There are two possible reasons behind this switch from rice to wheat: economic and non-economic. In terms of the economic effect, to crop wheat might be more profitable than to crop rice, since wheat was easier to cultivate and the market price might also be higher. In terms of the non-economic reason, the return of wheat during the reform period may simply suggest that peasants were not only concerned about production but also desired variety in their diet, since wheat had been the most significant supplementary food in the village before the introduction of the continuous double cropping of rice. The data from the village seems to be more favourable to the second assumption. According to the annual statistics, the highest output of wheat in the village was 72,000 *jīn* in 1990, and in that year the population of the village was 1,752. It means that the amount of wheat allocated to each person for the year was a mere 41 *jīn* at most. Although information on the price of wheat during this period is not available, such a small output meant that wheat cultivation would not make any difference to the family economy. Peasants could make very little money by producing and selling such a small amount of wheat. This demonstrates that the wheat was merely planted for their own consumption.

The realisation of this change signifies the increased decision-making power of peasants during the reform period, which resulted from the reform of the compulsory purchase system, particularly the reduction of the rice quota. In fact, behind the changes in the input of labour and chemical fertilisers and the changes to the general crop structure, the reform of the state purchase system of rural commodities played a crucial role. The next section will further analyse the reason for the changes in input of labour and chemical fertilisers. In particular, I will examine the influence of the reform on the state procurement system in Zhaitan.

Policy Intervention Behind the Change

As mentioned in the above sections, agricultural input in Zhaitan presented a visible turning point in the mid-1980s. In the first half of the 1980s, the input of labour and chemical fertilisers rose to and remained at the highest level since the 1970s, while in the latter half of the 1980s both showed a remarkable drop. While the reason for the drop in the use of

chemical fertilisers might have other explanations, for which I presently have no evidence, the overall change in agricultural input was linked to the reform in the state procurement system.

The documents from Zhaitan reveal that, by the reform in 1979, the compulsory purchase quota was applicable to almost all the major agricultural products in Zhaitan, such as grain, oil, local products (tea and cocoons) and non-staple foods (pork, eggs and fish).²⁸¹ But, from 1979, with the freeing up of market exchange and the loosening of state purchase, the categories of purchase were gradually reduced. In 1985, except for grain and rapeseed, all the other agricultural products were exempted from the obligation.

In addition to the reduction of purchase categories, the purchase quota, particularly the grain quota, was reduced. In 1979, following the instruction of the central committee of the CCP, the grain quota for Zhaitan was reduced by 5,000 *jin*.²⁸² The documents preserved in the Village Archives show that, in the following four years, the quota was further reduced to less than 90,000 *jin*, nearly 55 per cent of the quota in 1979, and by 1991, the quota had been fixed at 71,051 *jin*.²⁸³

The reform of the state procurement system had obvious effects on the peasants' economic decisions. In terms of grain production, as the purchase targets were usually met by rice, the reduction of the grain quota meant that peasants did not have to input as many resources for rice production as they had previously. In other words, under the new system, it became easier for peasants to both support their own consumption and to meet the state purchase targets. Especially after the high-yield hybrid rice was introduced into the village, peasants could even reduce the sown area of rice to achieve both goals. This produced a picture we have seen before, for example, the decline of rice production and the increase of wheat cultivation.

²⁸¹ See 'Guanyu Xiada Qijiu Niandu Zhu Dan Yu Paigou Renwu de Tongzhi' 关于下达七九年度猪蛋鱼派购任务的通知 (The Notice on Delivering the Tasks of Purchasing Pigs, Eggs and Fishes), 26 March 1979, and 'Qijiu Niandu Gedahui Chaye Jiaoshou Renwu de Tongzhi,' 79 年度各大队茶叶交售任务的通知 (The Notice on the Tea Targets of Brigades in 1979), 2 May 1979, in *Changqi Dang'an*, Vol. 40, 1-3; 5.

²⁸² See 'Guanyu Tiaojian Liangshi Zhenggou 'Yiding Wunian' Baogan Renwu de Tongzhi,' 关于调减粮食征购'一定五年'包干任务的通知 (The Notice on Reducing the Compulsory Purchase Quota of the Grain and Fixing the Target for Five Years), in *Changqi Dang'an*, Vol.40, 4.

²⁸³ See 'Zhaitancun Jiuyi Niandu Liangyou Dinggou Renwu Qingce,' 宅坦村九一年度粮油订购任务清册 (The Detailed List of the Contracted Purchase for the Grain and Oil of Zhaitan in 1991), in *Changqi Dang'an*, Vol. 113.

As the purchase quotas for the cash crops and sidelines were gradually withdrawn, these businesses became more favourable to the peasants, compared to grain production, since they were the main sources of cash income for the household. This advantage became even more obvious in 1985, when a new tax policy was delivered that allowed peasants to pay the agricultural tax in cash, instead of in kind, i.e. in grain.²⁸⁴ This reform further released peasants from having to undertake grain production. Since the amount of arable land in Zhaitan had already been stretched to a greater extent during the collective era and was still limited due to the landscape, together with the perennial problem of irrigation, rice cultivation in Zhaitan, because of its heavy work and diseconomy of scale, seemed to be at less of an advantage in the competition for land and labour when set against other crops and businesses. Therefore, in reality, in the 1980s, beside the transfer of input from grain to the non-staple grain and sidelines, with the freeing up of private economy and the tide of developing rural industry, the workforce in the village also underwent a visible switch from agriculture to non-agricultural sectors.

Diversion to Non-Agricultural Sectors: The Labour Transfer

While carrying out reforms to promote agriculture, and in order to further improve the rural economy, the specialisation and commodification of rural products started to be emphasised by the central committee of the CCP. The No.1 Document from 1983 formally acknowledged the contribution of specialised and commercialised production in rural areas, and in 1984, the No.1 Document encouraged individual peasants to get involved in specialised production. At the same time, to facilitate the exchange of rural commodities, peasants were allowed involvement in long distance transportation to trade rural commodities.²⁸⁵ Combined with the reform of the procurement system, these measures eventually encouraged the diversion of the workforce to non-agricultural sectors. In Zhaitan, it was noticeable by the increasing number of workers in industry, construction and small

²⁸⁴ In May 1985, the State Council of China sanctioned the request of the Financial Department to collect the agricultural tax in cash instead of in grain in most areas. The reform was to promote the rural commodity economy and to foster the adjustment of economic structures in rural areas. For the details, see http://china.findlaw.cn/fagui/p_1/242133.html, accessed on 31 July 2014.

²⁸⁵ See 'Dangqian Nongcun Jingji Zhengce de Ruogan Wenti,' and 'Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Yijiubasinian Nongcun Gongzuo de Tongzhi.'

private businesses. Table 21 provides details of the workforce diversion during the years 1979–1991.

Table 21 Workforce and Distribution in Zhaitan, 1979–1991²⁸⁶

Year	Population	Workforce ^a						
		Total	Agriculture	Industry	Construction	Service Industry ^b	Others	
							Subtotal	Working Outside
1979	1651	782	775	3	-	-	4	4
1980	1667	811	801	4	-	-	6	6
1981	1689	821	808	2	0	4	7	4
1982	1696	822	797	1	1	17	6	1
1983	1698	822	802	3	0	14	3	1
1984	1735	822	802	1	0	16	3	1
1985	1754	838	576	47	78	41	48	-
1986	1757	838	573	78	88	42	57	-
1987	1789	850	573	85	90	42	60	10
1988	1806	874	582	91	93	41	67	10
1989	1811	875	592	87	93	38	65	15
1990	1782	882	610	81	93	36	62	14
1991	1779	948	648	97	100	38	65	20

Note: ^aThe workforce in the statistics (above) consisted of people who were available for work, i.e. males aged 16–59 and females aged 16–54, but in 1991 it also embraced the people who were outside these age ranges but worked regularly and were paid for their work.

^bThe workforce in the service industry was made up of people involved in transportation, retail, catering, education and the health service.

The table shows that the transfer of the workforce to non-agricultural sectors started in the early 1980s, and a more considerable diversion from agriculture developed from 1985. From 1981 to 1984, people who left agriculture were mainly engaged in the service industry, such as transportation, catering and trading. From 1984 to 1985, while the total workforce increased, the workforce involved in agriculture decreased drastically from 802 to 576. The number of people involved in industry, construction and the service industry increased substantially, with industry rising from one to 47, construction from none to 78 and the service industry from 16 to 41. From 1985 to 1991, the workers in industry and in

²⁸⁶ Data source: ‘Zhaitan Dadui Nongye Shengchan Tongji Nianbao,’ 1974–1991.

construction continued to increase, while the workforce in the service industry saw a slight drop. The latter is easy to understand, as the services were mainly provided to local people which means that the market was largely fixed and limited, and thus the positions provided by the market were also limited.

Under the transfer of the workforce, it was the resumption of privately owned businesses and the development of rural industries that played the most important role. The former was embodied in the privately operated shops, diners and the boom of independent craftsmen, while the latter was reflected by a number of multifarious factories and workshops. According to an investigation carried out on the industrial structure of Zhaitan in 1985, by June there was one diner, nine grocers, four tofu shops, two butchers, four barbers, three cobblers, one picture mounting and framing workshop, one grain and oil processing factory, one cardboard box workshop, and one cinema in the village. In addition, there were also seven people involved in the transportation industry, using tractors.²⁸⁷ This obviously was not the complete list of local businesses. A production plan for enterprises in the township reveals that, by February 1985, there were at least eight township-owned enterprises and seven jointly owned²⁸⁸ enterprises in addition to the village-owned enterprises, whose numbers were not specified. These enterprises were concerned with a wide variety of businesses, from traditional handicrafts to microbe production.²⁸⁹ From 1985, the number of enterprises seemed to be increasing. By 1992, there were 18 township-owned enterprises and eight jointly owned enterprises.²⁹⁰ In those seven years, while some enterprises disappeared, more were newly created.

Among the enterprises of Zhaitan, while some derived from agriculture and the demands of daily life, such as grain and oil processing and the construction team, some were based on

²⁸⁷ See 'Zhaitancun Chanye Jiegou Diaochabiao,' 宅坦村产业结构调查表 (The Investigation Form on the Industrial Structure of Zhaitan Village), June 1985, in *Yongjiu Dang'an*, Vol.123, 6–17.

²⁸⁸ Hereby 'jointly owned' means the enterprise was owned by a number of people, or co-owned by the township and the village.

²⁸⁹ See 'Shangzhuang Xiang Cun Lianban Qiye Yijiubawunian Shengchan Jihua,' 上庄乡、村、联办企业 1985 年生产计划 (The Production Plan for the Enterprises Owned by the Township and Villages, and the Jointly Owned Enterprises of Shangzhuang Township in 1985), in *Changqi Dang'an*, Vol.80, 1–10.

²⁹⁰ See 'Shangzhuangzhen Xiangzhen Qiye Yijiujiusannian Shengchan Jihua Fenpeibiao,' 上庄镇乡镇企业 1993 年生产计划分配表 (The Production Targets for the Township Owned Enterprises of Shangzhuang in 1993), in *Changqi Dang'an*, Vol.118, 8–10.

the handicraft traditions, such as the ink stick factory, some seemed to be unusual to the local people, such as the cardboard box workshop and the microbe factory. The former two could be attributed to the initiative of peasants in the post-collective era, but the latter should be attributed entirely to the effort of the village cadres.

According to the meeting minutes of 1984–1988, in the wake of the completion of the HRS, the cadres of Zhaitan worked actively to set up village-owned enterprises in order to tackle the possible financial difficulties of village organisations in the post-reform period and to improve employment in the village. The cadres travelled around the country to explore the market and to get in touch with people outside to seek their cooperation. The microbe factory was one of the products of this effort and was the result of cooperation between the village and an expert in biology who was born in the village.²⁹¹ Another factory, manufacturing magnet wire, was also inspired at a meeting in Shanghai by a person who was from Shanghai but had worked in one of the third-line factories in Jixi County.²⁹² Similar to what the forefathers of the village had done, this action also represented a kind of effort to strive for external resources to make up for the limitations of the local economy. But the difference here is that the industry introduced into the village eventually changed its economic structure. In the 1990s, new industries were continuously imported into local area, such as toy manufacturing and the manufacturing of artificial flowers.²⁹³ In the late 1990s, when toy manufacturing was at its height, only one factory employed more than 1,000 workers. These workers of course did not come from one village, but this industry did become one of the major channels for employment and thus an important source of income for a number of families.²⁹⁴

Conclusion

²⁹¹ See the minutes of ‘Liangwei Kuoda Huiyi,’ 两委扩大会议 (The Enlarged Meeting of the Villagers Committee and the Party Branch Committee), 2 September 1984, in *Yongjiu Dang’an*, Vol. 112, 25–26.

²⁹² This information was obtained from a conversation with Hu Wanli. The cadre who visited Shanghai and went for the meeting was her husband.

²⁹³ See ‘Shangzhuangzhen Xiangzhen Qiye Yijiujiusanian Shengchan Jihua Fenpeibiao’.

²⁹⁴ The information was collected by a visit to the local largest toy manufacturer in September 2011.

The reforms introduced during the 1980s constituted a dynamic process with continuous changes in multiple dimensions. In rural areas, the reforms included institutional changes in agricultural production, the loosening of the compulsory purchase system and the freeing up of the rural market.

The first reform was represented by the implementation of the Household Responsibility System (HRS), which caused the demise of the collective system and returned the decision-making power for production and allocation to each household. The second reform encompassed the change from compulsory targets to the voluntarily contracted purchase of grain, as well as the gradual withdrawal of other rural commodities, which lightened the burden of peasants and gave them more space to arrange the family economy according to their own condition. The third reform broke the state monopoly on the purchase and sale of commodities, which allowed individual peasants or households to get involved in and benefit from market activities by developing cash crops, sidelines and family businesses. Furthermore, the freeing up of the market also provided opportunities for the development of rural industries. The outcome of the reform was therefore the product of all three factors, rather than a single factor.

These reforms had two significant results in Zhaitan. In terms of agriculture, in the first stage of the reform, 1979–1984, agricultural output saw an all-round increase, which continued the growth established during the collective period, but also differed to some extent. A noticeable change was that in the grain crops, the share of wheat increased while the portion of rice decreased. This change became more considerable from 1985. In the latter half of the 1980s, with the introduction of high-yield rice, i.e. hybrid rice, the continuous double cropping of rice gradually declined and, as a result, the sown area of rice reduced markedly. In contrast, cash crops and sidelines expanded substantially over the same period. Taking into consideration the fact that the village had suffered from a limited amount of arable land, this trend indicates that, during the period of reform, exempted from the obligation of state purchase, peasants intended to use grain cultivation merely as a method to support their personal demand for food, rather than as a major source of income for the family. Thus they intended to enjoy a more varied diet, and their tolerance for the heavy work of rice cultivation decreased. The extension of a high-yield crop further ensured this intention.

Another significant outcome of the reform in Zhaitan was the diversion from agriculture to the non-agricultural sectors. From 1985, the village experienced a remarkable transfer of labour to industry, construction and the service industry. This corresponded with the development of private-owned businesses and township- and village-owned enterprises. In the mid-1980s, in addition to the businesses born from the demands of life or rooted in tradition, such as transportation, catering, traditional handicrafts, and grain and oil processing, some unusual factories were also set up in the village through the active effort of the village cadres. By stepping out of the mountains and establishing links with the outside world, the village cadres managed to introduce new industry to the village and contribute to the structural change of the local economy, although this action might have been forced initially by the financial difficulties experienced during the post-collective period.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Based on primary sources pertaining to the village of Zhaitan, this thesis studied the economic transition of households in a village in the south of Anhui Province throughout the revolutions, political movements and reforms of the twentieth century. The transition was divided into four periods, corresponding to the four main chapters in the text. The first period was before 1949, on which I depicted the household economy in the village as not yet having experienced large-scale intervention by state powers; the second period was from 1949 to 1962, when the Land Reform and the cooperative movement were the most significant revolutions in the rural area. The third period was 1963–1978, when the commune system was adjusted in response to the failure of the Great Leap Forward and carried out stably from then on. The last period was the reform period from late-1978 to 1992. During this period, the collective system was abandoned and state control over the rural economy was gradually loosened.

Although this historic context was shared by almost all the rural areas of China, different places had different experiences according to local conditions.²⁹⁵ For the village of Zhaitan, the regional characteristics, i.e. the mountainous landscape and the relatively short distance to the populous and prosperous Lower Yangzi, determined that the household economy of this village was noticeably different from that of the plain area and other mountainous areas in China. This was particularly true for the period before 1949; and after 1949, in spite of strong intervention from the state, the transition of the local household economy still showed some specific features.

Before 1949, the landscape and the location of the village were the decisive factors in forming the pattern of the local household economy. In terms of the landscape, as the village was surrounded by mountains, the land suitable for agriculture was very limited. Though the mountains could have been significant resources, the majority of them were not reclaimed for economic purposes until the last 30 years, due to the difficulty of reclamation, and

²⁹⁵ See Myers, ‘*Chinese Peasant Economy*’; Friedman, ‘*Chinese Village*’; Huang, ‘*Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta*’.

environmental concerns. In this situation, from the late nineteenth century, with the increase in population, the pressure faced by local residents to make a living from farming mounted given that there was no considerable improvement in farming technology. This difficulty caused two issues.

First, as the land arable was highly dispersed and the area of the land was very small, most families were hardly able to maintain even a very low standard of living through agriculture. Sidelines such as raising silkworms and pigs, although they had the potential to be profitable, were not widely developed, as most families were either short of extra land to plant mulberry trees or short of hands and capital to raise the pigs. On the other side, benefiting from the location of the region, a commercial trend developed in the village from the nineteenth century. Through the rivers across this region, people were able to leave the village for the cities and towns outside the mountains and go into business. This became another important income source for many families, and hence shaped the business sense among the villagers, which brought prosperity to local industry in the 1990s after state control on rural society and the economy was substantially reduced.

On the other hand, this pattern of the household economy, i.e. the combination of farming and sidelines or external businesses, although just able to maintain the basic living of most households, was vulnerable to external risks, since peasants could rarely obtain support from outside, whether in the form of technology, funding or other material aids. Before 1949, natural disasters and war were the two major threats to the household economy. In Chapter 2, I illustrated the influence of war and natural disasters on the family economy through a discussion of the practice of *Pingtiao* (平糶, selling rice at a price lower than the market rate during periods of inflation or starvation) in the 1940s. The primary sources preserved in the village archives demonstrated that, whilst it was usual for peasants to get into difficulty after natural disasters, war, not only cut off economic links between family members outside the village and those inside the village and thus worsened the economic condition of the family, but it also brought disruptions to the social order and extra burdens to the household economy. In these circumstances, only institutions based on lineage, represented by the ancestral hall, took responsibility for tackling the difficulties by providing relief and negotiating with external intruders using its own income from the land and other properties. This aid, however,

was usually modest and subject to the economic condition of the ancestral hall itself, which also deteriorated in the 1940s since it suffered from the same difficulties as the households in the village.

Partly because of this situation—i.e. the overall poverty and vulnerability of rural households—and partly because of more sophisticated social and political reasons, a series of revolutions and movements were launched in rural areas after the Chinese Communist Party came to power. In the 1950s, the most significant revolutions were the land reform in the newly liberated areas and the collectivisation movement across the country. However, as a crucial method in consolidating the newly established government of CCP, the land reform had greater political than economic significance, particularly for the households of Zhaitan. This was demonstrated by the data from Zhaitan. The information on the land and capital owned by the households of Zhaitan after the land reform showed that, except for the poorest peasants, who benefited the most from the redistribution of property, the condition of most households were not considerably improved. The land owned by the household was still scarce and fragmented. Given the scarcity of other capital and the extremely undeveloped industry and technology, the change of land ownership did not help to tackle the difficulties of the household economy.

On the contrary, though criticised as less economically efficient because of the inappropriate size of farms, the lack of labour incentives, the improper allocation of resources and the employment of administrative methods,²⁹⁶ the collectivisation movement in Zhaitan seemed to have a positive effect on the economy. In the 1950s, when chemical fertilisers and modern machinery was not widely used in the village and the agrarian capital was generally very limited, labour was the most significant resource in the agricultural and household economy. The work points records during the cooperative period in Zhaitan showed that the cooperative was able to manage the workforce centrally and thus strengthen the more labour-consuming businesses such as silkworm farming and rice cropping. The accounting books demonstrated that this intensive input of labour significantly boosted the production of

²⁹⁶ See Michael, 'Agricultural Productivity under Socialism,' 979–989; Kung, 'Egalitarianism, Subsistence Provision, and Work Incentives in China's Agricultural Collectives,' 175–187; Lin, 'Collectivisation and China's Agricultural Crisis in 1959–1961,' 1228–1252.

crops and sidelines, especially the cocoons and rice, by 1957. In terms of labour reward, though the labour reward per unit—the value of each work point—decreased from 1956 to 1957, the overall economic condition improved.

As the cooperative experiment was soon replaced by the more radical movement of people's communes and the Great Leap Forward, my evaluation of it could hardly be sufficient without taking the next stage of the collective economy, the years 1963–1978, into consideration. The latter was a stabilised version of the former in terms of production management and the allocation system, although the latter was incorporated into a strictly controlled command system.

In 1963–1978 the data from the annual statistical reports on agriculture in Zhaitan showed that over this period, with the continuous increase of the labour force, the mass mobilisation of labour was still the main method of improving agriculture and the economy. As the tension between the arable land and the population of the village increased, the cropping system and sidelines that need more intensive labour input were developed. A noticeable example was the extension of continuous double cropping of rice in the village in the early 1970s, which substantially increased the sown area of rice and improved rice production. By the end of 1978, in spite of the state quota on the purchasing of rice, the grain production in the village was able to meet the need of peasants, and thus eventually tackled the food shortage that had been a problem for the village since the nineteenth century. In addition to grain production, almost all the crops and sidelines in the village increased significantly in the 1970s. The irrigated land was also substantially expanded by the consistent and intensive work of labourers.

The high level of achievement in the agricultural output of Zhaitan under the collective framework indicates that the collective system was not as inefficient as imagined. In effect, given that capital in the rural area was extremely scarce, and the industry was extremely undeveloped and so was unable to support agriculture with technology and modern machinery, and since the rural economy based on the individual household had proved to be incapable of meeting the basic need of peasants, the transformation of the economic organisation was perhaps the only option for the authority. The collective system could pool the existing

resources and make full use of those resources that were relatively abundant to make progress. For Zhaitan, this resource was the labour force.

In the collective period, though the deficiency of the economy was still noticeable, particularly in the slow progress of the cash income, it was hardly to be attributed to the collective production itself. My research shows that the external restrictions from the state command played an important role in this situation. The restrictions were embodied in two policies especially: the control on the flow of population, and the compulsory purchase system for rural produce.

The restriction on migration during the collective period deprived the rural work force of the possibility of working outside the village to earn extra income for their family, and, at the same time, raised the population pressure in the village. A direct effect was the decline of cash income, which caused many families in the village to fall into debt, though in this period the grain allocated to each person was raised. Hence, in the latter half of 1970s, in spite of the strict restriction on the outflow of labour, many peasants still left the village to seek work opportunities, even at the risk of being punished by the cadres.

The compulsory purchase system was another setback to the development of the rural household economy. The first serious outcome of this policy was the Great Famine in 1959–1961. Through my visits to local residents and research on the records of the allocation of food during the famine, I found that the famine in 1960 and 1961 was not only the result of crop failure, which was attributed to the GLF, but also the consequence of the high grain quota in 1959 and 1960. Together, the grain quota and the tax paid in rice in 1959 accounted for nearly half of the production for that year, thus causing a serious shortage of food stock at the end of 1959 and triggering starvation at the beginning of 1960.

In addition to this extreme case, a more significant effect of the compulsory purchase policy was its restriction on decisions about production. As the quota for agricultural products was usually delivered top–down, based on the national economic plan for the year, it scarcely took regional differences into consideration. This meant that peasants sometimes had to produce goods that were not suitable to the local conditions, or had to focus on the targeted crops rather than arrange production according to their own needs, in order to reach the state

targets. In Zhaitan, the consequences of this policy become overt when the economic structure of the collective period is compared with that of the post-collective period.

In the post-collective era, i.e. the reform period after 1978, there was significant reform of the state purchase system. From 1979, the quotas for rural commodities were gradually reduced or withdrawn, and the compulsory grain target was changed to the voluntarily contracted purchase. Combined with the freeing up of the rural market, this reform prompted substantial changes in the economic structure of Zhaitan.

In agriculture, a noticeable change occurred in the structure of grain crops. After the reform, the share of rice, whether in sown area or production, was considerably reduced, especially after the compulsory quota was withdrawn in 1985. Instead, the portion of wheat increased even though its productivity was much lower than that of rice. In addition, the gross sown area of grain crops also declined, while the cash crops were expanded. In the non-agricultural sectors, from 1985, industry, construction and the service industry were noticeably developed, and there was a considerable transfer of labour from agriculture to these sectors. From 1985, nearly one-third of the village labour force was involved in industry, construction and the service industry. This trend indicates that as long as they were exempted from the obligation of state purchase, peasants intended to arrange production and resources around their own needs and the market.

For this reason, during the transition from the collective system to the post-collective system, the significant change in the household economy should be attributed to the combination of a series of reforms of China since 1978, most of which were related to the reform on the command economy. The collective production system was not the major obstacle to the growth of rural economy before 1978, and neither was the demise of the collective system the major contributor to the growth of the rural household economy after 1978.

Though the collapse of the collective system, represented by the implementation of the Household Responsibility System, led to the rural household becoming the basic unit of rural economy once again, the external circumstances of this change were completely different from the period before collectivisation. What made the difference was the development of the industry. The improved industry of China not only increased the supply of chemical fertilisers,

insecticides and more powerful machinery, but created more jobs for the rural workforce. For villages such as Zhaitan that suffered from high population pressure, the latter was even more significant. Starting from the mid-1980s, the work force involved in industry in Zhaitan had increased. In the latter half of the 1980s, apart from the businesses born from traditional handicrafts and those closely related to the daily needs of the people, the village also had some factories that not only relied on external techniques but were also oriented to the external market. In the 1990s, local people also managed to introduce more new enterprises into the area, for example, the toy manufacturers and the artificial flower manufacturers, both of which were oriented to overseas markets. In the last decade, although the local toy industry experienced a decline due to the financial crisis in the late 1990s, urbanisation and growing industry outside the village continuously speeded the transfer of the rural labour force from the village.²⁹⁷

With this tide of migration, particularly the migration of the workforce, the household economy and lifestyle in Zhaitan seems to return to its pre-1949 mode, meaning that the young people work outside and their elderly parents remain in the village with the children. In this situation, the tension between the land and population has dissolved, and the economic condition of the household has greatly improved. For most households in Zhaitan, agriculture seems to have become the sideline, while the income from members working outside constitutes the main source of income for the family.

In the course of the transition of the household economy in Zhaitan, the conflict between the growing population and the limited arable land was the main problem faced by the villagers. Before the 1949, the solution was to go into businesses outside the village; in the 30 years after 1949, under the framework of the collective system and the control of state command, the peasants managed to develop labour intensive production to meet the needs of growing population; in the reform period after 1978, with the overall withdrawal of state intervention in rural areas, the tension was finally released through the market and the development of industry. The experience of Zhaitan reveals that the change of land ownership

²⁹⁷ The information came from interviews with the owners of local enterprises.

did not make a difference to the economic condition of most households if the land area was far less than was needed, and that the collective system in agriculture was able to boost agricultural production, and thus had a positive effect on the condition of each household through the central management of the labour force and the land. Last, but not least, the overall promotion of the rural household economy is reliant on the development of industry so as to complete the transfer of the rural workforce away from agriculture.

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