

# **PROCESSES OF ENLIGHTENMENT**

## **Farmer Initiatives in Rural Development in China**

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Proefschrift  
ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor  
op gezag van de rector magnificus  
van Wageningen Universiteit,  
prof. dr. ir. L. Speelman  
in het openbaar te verdedigen  
op vrijdag 11 oktober 2002  
des namiddags te vier uur in de Aula

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Farmer Initiatives in Rural Development in China

ISBN: 90-5808-730-1  
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**For Zihan**

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## ***MEASURES***

1 hectare = 15 mu

1 U\$ = 8.30 RMB Yuan (approximately in 2001)



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a Chinese idiom says, 'each drop of bounty received, will be returned in a flowing spring'. From the beginnings of my research proposal to the successful completion of my thesis, I have received bounty from many individuals and institutions whose contribution cannot be measured. To all of them I extend my heartfelt thanks for their help and encouragement in conducting and completing this research. I am aware that it is a risky venture to write acknowledgements because for certain one will surely overlook someone's important contribution. Despite this risk, however, I would like to give special recognition to the following.

After completing my Master's degree in 1996, I approached Professor Norman Long, whose academic achievements are internationally well known in my field of study and whose work I admire. In his office I expressed my intention of pursuing Ph.D. studies under his supervision and he responded positively. After that, the research proposal was comprehensively formulated, fieldwork was successfully conducted, and the thesis satisfactorily completed. During this process, although I was sometimes confronted with great challenges, my general impression has been of a smooth process, which to a great extent has been due to the inspiration of my promoter, Prof. Norman Long, and to the support and encouragement received from him and Ann, his wife. They have both provided me with warm friendship, hospitality and all kinds of support both during my periods in Wageningen, as well as in the field. Norman's rich intellectual knowledge has secured the academic quality of my research and this thesis. Ann's contribution in the editing of my thesis has not only made the thesis professional in terms of the English language, but also strengthened the consistency of the thesis in academic terms.

I owe special thanks to Jos Michel, who provided invaluable support in all administrative matters relating both to the Department of Sociology of Rural Development and more generally, the University. I am very grateful to EZE (Evangelische Zentralstelle Fuer Entwicklungshilfe E.V.) for the financial support given to a small development project in the research community which undoubtedly facilitated the conduct of the research. In addition, I feel indebted to many local friends, officials, farmers and particularly to the twenty selected case farmers. They received me with generosity, patience, friendship and great hospitality. They spent a lot of time in genuine interaction with me, which grounded the research in a way that would otherwise have been impossible.

The research was conducted while implementing a small-scale rural development project in the research community by a team from my institute. This team included colleagues and postgraduate students. I thank them for their support and cooperation. Their presence in the field made my time in the area all the more pleasurable. I would

especially like to mention my colleague researcher, Wang Yihuan, who was at the time also undertaking Ph.D. research in the same community. I am indeed grateful that I was able to do my research along with her. Her spiritual support has always encouraged me to strive for high academic qualifications in my professional career. During our cooperation in the field, we had a lot of useful exchange about research matters, and of course at times a lot of disagreements, which created many ups and downs for me, and probably for her too. However, I believe all this has become the unforgettable substance of our time together. Students who provided support during my research included Shen Yajing, Xiang Ying, Xu Xiuli, Wang Zhongping and many others.

Last, but not least, I owe so much to my family. My wife, Han Yanping, has continuously supported and encouraged me in this research, as she does in all areas of my life. Our lovely son, Zihan, was born the year I started my Ph.D. study. My wife has consequently had to take on much of the responsibility for Zihan's care, particularly during the many times I was in the field and away on other business. She has created a comfortable and harmonious family environment to support my professional development. As one Chinese song says, in my career achievement, half is owing to my wife. Although I regret not having been able to spend as much time as I would have liked with my son, I must tell him how important he is in my life and in his mother's too.

# CHAPTER 1

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## RELEVANCE OF THE RESEARCH

### Theme of the Research

My research concerns development initiatives in rural communities. It starts from a belief that it is farmer initiatives that intrinsically drive local development. More generally, social change emerges from the differential responses (that are mostly embedded in various social practices) to changing social, economic, cultural and political conditions. These processes are dynamic and evolve recursively. In retrospect, the origin of my interest in rural initiatives arises from observations of different kinds of innovations in rural community and household development in several regions of rural China, especially in Pocang Township, Yixian County, Hebei Province, where the four selected research villages are located. In this area, where we find similar socio-economic and cultural environments and land tenure systems, some farmers had started various new livelihood activities. These included the planting of fruit trees, raising livestock, growing Chinese medicinal plants, afforestation by contracting a large area of mountain land, the establishing of shops, small scale industrial enterprises, and so on. I consider these farmers to be ‘pioneer’ or what has been called in the Netherlands ‘vanguard’ farmers, who take initiatives, have strategic ideas (sometimes with entrepreneurial characteristics), and who have been successful in enriching their social and economic lives compared to other farmers in the same socio-economic and cultural context (see van der Ploeg 1990 for an account of this). These farmers have strong social influence and ‘demonstration’ effects on other farmers. I am particularly interested in knowing the rationale of why in a village with a similar structural context, there are differences between ‘vanguard’ and ‘non-vanguard’ farmers, as well as differences in the processes by which the initiatives of these farmers are developed, incubated and ongoingly shaped. In addition, my professional work in the field of rural development research and practice has revealed the ubiquity of farmer initiatives in all agrarian sectors and all rural communities.

I define a farmer initiative as the impetus that sufficiently and necessarily drives a farmer (or group of farmers) to formulate a realistic strategic plan, and to implement it in an attempt to create space for manoeuvre and to pursue change through changing social conditions. The term ‘rural initiative’ (which has a context focus) and ‘farmer initiative’ (which has an actor focus) are used interchangeably in this research. Here I use the notion of ‘plan’ to refer not to a written document, but to the kind of ideas, frameworks, or ideological concepts that farmers possess. In the context of community development, a farmer initiative may be interpreted as a kind of impetus that continually drives the farmer to plan and implement new activities and to get engaged in new areas of community and household economic development. In addition to the kinds of initiatives mentioned above, we must also recognise that the impetus to redistribute land

in a particular village, to improve community infrastructure by cooperating with other villages in the area; or to start diversified crop farming come frequently from farmers themselves.

I have learnt from experience in rural community development that for a farmer to undertake, for example, the contracting of a large mountain area to plant with a particular species of tree, has a lot to do with information flows (for example, a son in the military may pass on information about a particular species of tree that is economically or medically useful), with social networks (a farmer's relationships with village committee members, forestry technicians, timber companies, or government officials, etc.), with knowledge and experience (e.g. experience of tree planting during the Commune period), with the day-to-day interactions and exchange of views with family members and other actors (which will enhance or weaken a farmer's impetus for further action on ideas) and with day-to-day livelihood practice (that may also strengthen or weaken the impetus for action) and so forth.

My research avoids becoming too deeply involved in epistemological questions concerning the psychology and biology of cognition and does not therefore devote much effort to analysing cognitive processes of human thought associated with the original generation of farmer ideas. Instead, I concentrate on empirical studies and the analysis of farmer initiatives embedded in community development actions. Farmer initiatives, as I emphasised above, emerge from farmers' experiences, knowledge, events, social networks, and from interactions among themselves, a wider network of actors and the broader socio-economic environment. In other words, farmers develop particular initiatives through the interaction of these factors. Thus farmer initiatives are also processes of enlightenment. Here enlightenment (*qi fa*)<sup>1</sup> is an emergent property. In the Chinese context it not only refers to being inspired by ideas from others, but more importantly, by experience and interaction with others, with events, and so on. Moreover, farmer initiatives are continuously shaped and re-shaped during the course of action. Thus the incubation and configuration of initiatives are ongoing processes, consisting of the strategic generation of ideas, the consolidation of social relations, and the continuous shaping of these initiatives through social action. However, farmer initiatives cannot easily be divided into these three parts or stages. On the contrary, they largely overlap and are integrally related in such a way that they cannot easily be separated from the entire process.

The central focus of this study is therefore to document and analyse how farmer initiatives are developed, generated and ongoingly shaped. Farmer initiatives are dynamic social construction processes. The challenge is to conceptualise and elucidate the processes of interaction between actors (also factors) and how particular farmer initiatives are incubated and socially shaped in action/ practice. The research will pay specific attention to how particular networks of social relationships develop, how various sets of connections are maintained, consolidated, or manipulated, and how various types of information flow between zones or sectors of the social networks of farmers living in these four communities in Yixian County. Such networks are one of the essential catalysts for the incubation and development of initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> All Chinese terms in the thesis are written in the Chinese phonetic alphabet (pinyin).

## Relevance and Research Question

I start my argument by clarifying the notion of 'initiative'. My use of the term 'farmer initiative' does not necessarily equate with the popularly used term of 'entrepreneurship' in development sociology, nor with the notion of 'innovation'. Entrepreneurship *per se* focuses more on the characteristics, abilities and behaviour embedded in a person's actions as entrepreneur. A person's entrepreneurship is manifested both through the initiation of an enterprise, and also through its managerial operation, that is the day-to-day transactions with the wider socio-economic environment and business partners that evolve over time. While the taking of initiatives (like those of profit making and strategic management) is inherent to entrepreneurial activity there are many initiatives that people take that do not result in what one would designate economic or political entrepreneurship. Moreover, some types of initiatives are surely not those needed for enterprise development. That is to say, initiatives are emergent impulses that can drive people to formulate strategic plans, and motivate and encourage people to act in order to pursue change in a broader social context than simply the economic or political field as implied by the concept of entrepreneurship. For instance, farmers who take initiatives with regard to land redistribution in a community do not inevitably exhibit characteristics that would be regarded as essential for entrepreneurship. Hence we need to go beyond the scope of the study of rural entrepreneurship, which has attracted a lot of attention in sociological research, to embrace more broadly the wide range of rural initiatives that help us to disclose a broader conception of social change. Yet having said this, it is important to stress that certain of the concepts generated by studies of entrepreneurship may nonetheless be useful or of heuristic value in developing approaches and methodologies to further explore the theme of rural initiatives.

Another aspect which calls for clarification is the reminiscence that talking about farmer initiatives has for sociological studies of 'innovation' or the 'innovation process'. However, I would argue that a sociological study of rural initiatives as proposed in my research is fundamentally different. In the first place, innovation is frequently interpreted as a new 'something' introduced from outside, by outsiders such as experts in research institutes and by extensionists. From this perspective, the innovation process is a social dynamic impregnated with interactions between 'the introduced' and the social context, implying that 'external' creation/ invention is an integral part of the entire innovation process; whereas from my point of view rural initiatives undertaken by farmers are driving forces developed inherently from within. That is, they are farmer-centred, emerge internally, and are the farmers' own 'property'. Thus, the idea of the innovation process typically represents exogenous development, technocratic, and external determinist ways of thinking, whilst processes of rural initiatives view development as more endogenously oriented and internally decisive. Secondly, the innovation process is normally seen as problem or need-driven, that stimulates research and development activities designed to create innovations for solving specific problems (Rogers 1983:135); or it consists of a 'technology-push' or a 'market-pull' model (Freeman 1979). In contrast, rural initiatives, I suggest, are not aimed simply at solving a problem or meeting a demand. Instead, they represent farmers' attempts to initiate change without necessarily being confronted with a particular problem or demand,

although this might be the case. Nevertheless, these ‘push’ and ‘pull’ models of innovation may provide a hint for further probing as to whether or not there exists a broader set of factors contributing to rural initiative processes. Thirdly, I consider that initiatives are essential to the so-called innovation process. For instance, when introducing a new package of forestry techniques to a rural community, the farmer innovators who actively incorporate the package into their practices must themselves take initiatives in order to participate in the innovation process, rather than simply being forced by government to do so. There is also the point that there are farmers who lack the initiative to participate in the innovation process, and who manifest indifference to such a technical package or simply reject it. For these reasons, therefore, the sociological study of rural initiatives is of great importance in elucidating why some farmers take initiatives to participate while others do not. Such a study could thus be beneficial to practitioners engaged in innovation practices in various sectors, so that they may better understand the differentiated behaviour of farmers or of groups of people in the innovation process.

Let me now explore further the necessity and urgency of initiating such research in order to advance the development of rural development sociology, particularly in the context of the Chinese case. Theoretically I have argued that rural social change is fundamentally the outcome of rural initiatives and must thereby be closely linked to them. The process of social construction involved in rural initiatives requires an interpretation of the ‘logic’ or rationale of processes of social encounter, intersection, interface and interaction that often remain only implicit in sociological studies. Such an approach repudiates exogenous views of development characteristic of modernisation theory, dependency theory, and planned intervention models and focuses instead on endogenous development, and one way of doing this is to enter explicitly into the vital terrain of farmer initiatives.

Placed within the Chinese rural context, a sociological study of this kind is endowed with special significance. This is for two reasons. First, rarely are mainstream concepts of rural development sociology derived from or tested in the Chinese context. Second, the Chinese historical and socio-cultural context and its ideological content offers at this present juncture an opportunity not only to fill the vacuum of rural development sociology in China, but also, more generally, to redress possible distortions associated with certain brands of development theory.

*The research question can then be formulated as follows:*

How are farmers’ initiatives incubated and shaped in their community and household development actions/practice, and why have certain rural actors developed initiatives whilst others have not?

### **Analytical Framework**

Prior to exploring the methodology applied in my field study and analysis, let me here elucidate some theoretical issues upon which my research is based. I first start from the dialectics of internal and external factors. The incubation and development of farmer initiatives entails internal factors such as social attributes (age, sex, culture, education, minority group or ethnic status etc.) and ideological and social commitments (membership of specialised associations or of a political elite, or of various social

networks etc.), as well as the mutual influence of various actors within the community. External factors include wider socio-economic and cultural variables and the so-called planned interventions associated policy and development programmes. In understanding this process, internal factors are of decisive importance since, as Long argues (1984:2), 'all forms of external intervention necessarily enter the existing life-worlds of the individuals and groups affected and thus, as it were, pass through certain social and cultural filters'. Hence the development of farmers' initiatives are permeated by interactions within but also between internal and external factors, as well as those that take place between the social actors themselves. It is for this reason that I call rural initiatives processes of social construction.

A second theoretical issue concerns the generation of strategic ideas. Compared with the other dimensions of rural initiatives, idea generation confronts one with most of the theoretical difficulties, since it is not easy to make concrete the processes and factors - historical, psychological and biological - that are determinants of human thought. However, to simplify matters, I will limit my efforts to investigating the relationship between human thoughts/strategic ideas and the social context within which they arise (cf. Berger and Luckmann 1967). This is supported by the root proposition derived by Marx that 'man's consciousness is determined by his social being', and also by his other concern that human thought is founded in human activity and in the social relations brought about by this activity (see also Vigotsky's activity theory of cognition, 1978). The latter coincides with my argument that rural initiatives (including ideational aspects) emerge from day-to-day experiences and practices and through social interactions and networks. Since we are to a degree conscious that our day-to-day actions, experiences and socialisation consist of a world of 'multiple realities', we acquire the capacity to move through different spheres of reality, as Berger and Luckmann suggest. More importantly, because we learn to deal with the contradictory and ambiguous nature of the encounters and dynamic interactions between these different spheres of reality, rural initiatives are essentially the outcome or effects of the interaction at these various interfaces (cf. Long and Long 1992). Strategic ideas are likely, for example, to emerge from the interfaces in farmers' own everyday lives as well as through experiencing other realities through watching a movie, reflecting on past events, and having conversations with others or reading a book. Moreover, they are often generated at the interface between a farmer's close or 'manipulative' zones and his own more distant or 'unmanipulative' zones of knowledge or reality. They are fundamentally a kind of non-recipe type of knowledge.

In line with Berger and Luckman (1967: 61), rural initiatives can be viewed as special kinds of social products or processes constructed or produced by farmers and/or others actors that involve the three moments of externalisation (the externalising of ideas through the sharing of these with others), objectivation (signifying how objects and things are attributed with social meaning), and internalisation (transformation of ideas/practices in ways that make them congruent with our own experience and desires). A recent book by D'Andrade (1995: 182) supports this conceptual approach, suggesting that cultural representations/schemas have significant effects on perception, memory, reasoning and behaviour, but not through a simple grid of cultural categories. It is ongoing social practice and experience that counts, not the simple idea of how existing cultural frameworks shape strategies and response.

The third theoretical issue concerns 'the debate about the nature of human agency and 'ordering' processes in social life' (Long and van der Ploeg 1995). A foundation for this type of approach was the work of Goffman (1974), who made a significant contribution to the understanding of the organisation of experience from a social interactional point of view - something clearly evident in his book on *Frame Analysis*. Much later, John Law formulated an approach to the contingent ordering of human affairs in his study of *Organizing Modernity* (1994). Law rejects the widely used term 'order'. Instead, he favours the notion of 'ordering', and writes of 'modes of ordering'. This notion is somewhat akin to Foucault's (1981) notion of discourse made up of 'forms of strategic arranging that are intentional but do not necessarily have a subject'. Law differs, however, in arguing that such modes of ordering do in fact have something to say about the character of agency and organisational relations (Law 1994: 20-21).

These general concepts of 'framing' and 'ordering' can, I believe, be relevant theoretically for exploring the 'mechanisms' or 'tools' through, or by virtue of which, farmers' initiatives are constructed and produced. It has to be noted that 'organising', 'ordering' and 'framing' are ongoing processes during which 'de-organising', 'de-ordering' and 'de-framing', as well as 're-organising', 're-ordering' and 're-framing' also inevitably occur. The processes of 'organising-ordering-framing', 'de-organising-de-ordering-de-framing' and 're-organising-re-ordering-re-framing' coexist and are mutually manifested. My research gives attention to all these possible processes.

In conformity with the understanding of the three above-mentioned theoretical issues, I will mainly apply actor-oriented and interface approach in my analysis. The existence of diverse rural initiatives in a community is one aspect that manifests differential responses to similar structural circumstances, even if the conditions appear relatively homogeneous. This is one of the advantages of an actor approach (Long and Long 1992: 21). The approach starts from the conviction that, although it may be true that certain important structural changes result from the impact of outside forces (due for example to the incorporation into networks of market and state), it is theoretically unsatisfactory to base one's analysis on the concept of external determination. All forms of external intervention are mediated and transformed by the social actors and structures affected. 'It is therefore important to adopt a more dynamic approach to come to grips with processes of social change, which recognises the interplay and mutual determination [here I would add 'transformation' or 'reshaping'] of internal and external factors and relationships', as well as the central role played by human action and consciousness (Long 1984: 2, Long 1993: 20).

Central to an actor-oriented approach is the concept of human agency, which 'attributes to the actor (individual or social group) the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme conditions of coercion' (Long 1989: 223, Long and Long 1992: 22). That is to say, human agency has two elements - knowledgeability and capability (Giddens 1987). It is important to stress that 'agency' is not simply an attribute of the individual actor, since, as Hindess (1986) argues, single individuals are not the only entities that reach decisions and act accordingly. 'Agency is composed of social relations and can only become effective through them. Agency depends crucially upon the emergence of a network of actors



who become partially, though hardly ever completely, enrolled in the 'project' of some other person or persons' (Long and Long 1992: 23). Effective agency then requires the strategic generation/manipulation of a network of social relations and the channelling of specific items (such as claims, orders, goods, instruments and information) through certain 'nodal points' of interaction (Clegg 1989: 199).

Adopting an actor-oriented approach to the study of the development of rural initiatives implies a focus on the dynamic interactions between actors as well as on the internal and external factors/variables implicated in these processes. Long's interface concept will be adopted to penetrate and understand these social construction processes in order to further elucidate and conceptualise the processes of interaction of actors (also factors), showing how a particular rural initiative is developed. Long (1989) defines social interface as 'a critical point of intersection between different social systems ('spheres' in a later version), fields or levels of social order where structural discontinuities, based upon differences of normative value and social interest, are most likely to be found'. Interfaces are 'characterised by discrepancies in values, interests, knowledge and power. Interface typically occurs at points where different, and often conflicting, life-worlds or social fields intersect. More concretely, they characterise social situations wherein the interactions between actors become oriented around the problem of devising ways of 'bridging', accommodating to, or struggling against each other's social and cognitive worlds. Although the word 'interface' tends to convey the image of some kind of two-sided articulation or confrontation, interface situations are much more complex and multiple in nature' (Long 1994). This approach can best explain the connection between actors' life-worlds and their initiatives/development processes. Yet, as afore-analysed, the sophisticated logic of processes of encounter, intersection, interface and interaction still remain somewhat implicit in much current research. This study is an attempt to further reveal their mysteries.

## **Methodology**

My methodological starting point is not with pre-set models or recipes that define a set of techniques simply to be applied in the field. The research distances itself from the idea of applying simple positivist methods of research made up of a 'tool box' of techniques to be used for data collection, hypothesis testing and the isolation of the determinants of social behaviour. Instead, I adopt an open-ended, ethnographic approach to unravel the complexities of meaning and social action, through the development of a conceptual framework that accords priority to the understanding of everyday life situations. This is of course 'not to ignore the repercussions of the 'macro' but rather to grasp the larger impact signalled by small things' (Long and Long 1992: xi, 6). In adopting this strategy, it is important that I treat myself as an active social agent who struggles to understand the social construction processes of farmer initiatives through entering their life-worlds, and to acknowledge that they in turn have shaped my own research strategies, thus moulding the contours and outcomes of the research process itself. (*ibid.*: iv). Ethnographic research in particular, is 'a reflexive process of uncertain and provisional imputation, and it is more about seeing, hearing, noticing, sensing, smelling, and then raking over what has been noticed, and trying to make sense out of it. And, to be sure, also recognising the 'non-sense' in it too' (Law 1994:50).

I used a kind of 'documentary method' (Garfinkel 1967) - a reflective journal or diary - to comprehensively document the minutiae of my contacts and my own everyday life related to the entire research process. This served as first-hand information for further empirically-grounded analysis. This is to say, I recorded in detail all actions taken, events that occurred, understandings and responses, and interactions between actors associated with all aspects of my research from the very beginning (including those in the period of making contacts and preparing for the field study). I participated in events and actions at local community level and tried to understand the specific social meanings and ideas attributed to those events and actions by those involved.

As a method or tool for socialising myself in the world of farmers, I used conversation as a means of entering and engaging with their everyday life worlds. Here both 'talk' and 'language' were important. As Goffman (1966) suggests, talk is the basic medium of focused encounters and conversation is the prototype of the exchange of utterances involved in talk. Distinguishing 'talk' from 'language' is important for the analysis. 'Language' suggests a formal system of signs and rules, whereas 'talk' carries more the flavour of the situated nature of utterances and gestures embedded within the routine enactment of encounters. With the advantage of knowing the local dialect very well, I was able to adopt a 'chat-style' with farmers that enabled them to freely express themselves. I give special attention to everyday spoken language in order to convey the special social connotations or emotions that are embedded in their everyday language use.

Before starting fieldwork I already had a sufficient understanding of the macro socio-economic and cultural background of the Province as well as the County, since I had been involved in studies of the German KfW-financed Afforestation Project there. Thus, having made initial contacts with county officials and local village committees I was able to approach the villages directly without stopping first to seek permission at provincial, county or township level. Observation of farmers' development practices and chat-style discussions with villagers were my entry point for understanding the community in general and for grasping the distinct changes that had taken place in recent years in relation to community and household development. Following this I selected a number of cases of farmers' initiatives relating to community and household development in order to reconstruct the entire process by which these undertakings had been developed, and to record the circumstances in which they were embedded. Having done so, I chose a more limited number of cases of contrasting types of rural initiatives in relation to community and household development for extended study. In each of these extended case studies I trace back historically the process of generation, consolidation and ongoing shaping of the particular development initiatives undertaken by the farmer (or farmers). I identify the actors and socio-economic and cultural variables associated with the incubation and development of the initiatives. I ascertain the domains of social action as well as other internal and external factors that contribute to the emergence of the initiative. I identify the network of relationships (especially strong and weak ties) that facilitate the incubation and development of the initiative and more importantly, dissect the encounters, intersections, interfaces and interactions at each stage or point in the process. During the case study process I constructed individual life-histories, recorded ideological beliefs, investigated occupational or economic careers, composed family genealogies, gathered information on community

norms and collected a body of secondary data relating to policy documents and reports on institutional performance etc. This body of material facilitated the construction of a number of key extended case studies. The qualitative data from the case studies are combined with other data derived from situational analysis, event analysis, questionnaire surveys, quantitative surveys, and by participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques. The participatory methods were extensively applied in the process of constructing the profile of the research community.

### **Implications of the Research in China**

After China adopted a policy of 'Opening Outside' in 1978, many international and bilateral rural-related development projects have been implemented in China. In the wake of these projects, many new-to-China concepts and techniques have been introduced to domestic development practitioners, such as 'community development', 'participatory project planning and management', 'environmental issues', 'gender and development', 'empowerment approaches', 'sustainable development' and so on. Meanwhile, many national development projects have incorporated these concepts and methods into their design and implementation. However, development agencies are increasingly confronted with the problem of attaining sustainability for their projects, and thus are struggling to balance the hardware investment with software investment by improving the framework for projects and by maximising so-called 'people's participation'. Unfortunately this improved software investment has not helped much to ensure the sustainability of projects. Thus, as Long pointed out in the early 1980s, 'we need to address the difficulties of working from below in situations where the state [or development agencies] has assumed a 'directive' role in planning rural development' (Long 1980, Long and Winder 1981: 87).

Here I suggest development practitioners need to deconstruct their thinking and conceptualisation. By saying this I mean that we have fundamentally to challenge the taken-for-granted ways or approaches of project work. How otherwise can we theoretically explain the demonstrable fact that all the recently 'developed' rural villages in China are those that have never received or have received little outside support in terms of programme intervention? Development actions or efforts at the current stage are still conceptually dominated by linear interventionist thinking that assumes that rural community development primarily depends upon outside intervention and automatically follows a predetermined path. In other words, development practitioners have placed outside intervention, whatever the hardware or software support, at the centre of the entire development process. This project-centric approach has failed to understand the complexities of rural communities, and has resulted in conflicts and sharp discontinuities in the 'imagined worlds' and 'identities' of rural communities between development practitioners and local actors. For example, important local farmer initiatives *de facto* play a central and leading role in farmers' day-to-day lives and their attempts to create space for manoeuvre and change. Yet this important subject has not so far been accommodated in project planning, or in development policy formulations. Thus, by analysing farmer initiatives and empirically demonstrating their significance in community development and in broader social change, this research hopes to help development practitioners and policy makers to respect, facilitate and utilise the dynamics of farmer initiatives in rural community

development. In this way it aims to make a contribution to current development practice as well as future development policy formulation in China.

To the surprise of outsiders, rural development sociology was not officially established in the higher education system of China until 1998, nor were development-related subjects such as gender studies recognised. Hence a central task for myself and my colleague Ph.D. candidates in Wageningen is to introduce the subject of rural development sociology to the Chinese universities, starting with China Agricultural University. Our research and other related co-operative research projects in China provide a valuable foundation for building the curriculum. My employer, the College of Rural Development (CORD), is an actor-oriented rural development institute in China Agricultural University that has been engaged in rural development-related research, training/education and project consultancy for the last ten years. CORD (all of whose staff have been trained in development-related subjects in Western Countries) is unique in China. It is strong in the professional and practical fields of project planning, project studies, project management, participatory training and extension, participatory rural survey work etc., but less strong in advanced rural research. Hence, the firm policy of the College is to encourage staff members to pursue Ph.D. research at Universities like Wageningen in order to enhance China Agricultural University's professional and academic capacity in this field.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter two provides a critical review of the theoretical state of the art on issues related to the research outlined in this first chapter. Chapter three records the entire process of selecting the research community and entering into the community, in particular documenting the dynamic interactions that took place. Chapter four presents the profile of the research community and, more importantly, displays the whole process of constructing the community profile, providing information on rural actors' life worlds and community dynamics. In this way the chapter allows readers to view the research community as a living picture. Chapter five explores the multifarious farmer development initiatives of the twenty farmers selected for case studies, presents a brief summary of each case, and a preliminary analysis of the major types of farmer development initiatives and the critical factors involved. Chapter six presents an in-depth analysis of the questionnaire survey designed to further explore the details of each of the critical factors, and to identify the social and cultural components of farmer initiatives. Chapter seven shows the empirical process of how various farmer development initiatives have been constructed, giving a few entire cases and parts of some selected cases so that readers are able to conceptualise the real life environments in which these farmer initiatives develop. Chapter eight provides a discussion of the main conclusions drawn from the research.

## CHAPTER 2

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### THEORETICAL REVIEW

This chapter offers a brief overview of some earlier theoretical work on the idea of initiative in social life. It also sketches rural communities in China from a historical perspective and raises issues relating to rural community development and finally discusses the notion of participation in general.

#### **The issue of ‘initiative’ and farmers’ initiatives in a Chinese context**

Although there exists a large body of literature on the organising practices of farmers in the face of state and non-state development intervention, and on patterns of community organisation more generally, it is surprising that so little analytical attention has been given to the notion of ‘initiative’ and to rural or farmer initiatives in particular. This gives one the impression that the concept of ‘initiative’ and its implications for rural development and change have not yet been seriously taken up as a subject for sociological study.

#### *Rural initiative*

The issue of rural initiative emerges explicitly in the mid-1960s, but ironically, the term was first understood as an external input into rural community development. This was espoused by, among others, the first two practitioners to use the term of initiative in a formal publication entitled *The Community Development Process, The Rediscovery of Local Initiative* (Biddle and Biddle 1965), which designated the ‘outside’ development officer in American communities as the ‘local’ initiator of development, although without any sense of the local. He is also called a ‘community developer’ or ‘encourager’, and is rather the instigator of processes that call upon others (farmers etc.) to become innovators. He takes the initiative so that others will follow his example. The authors suggest that the developer would help the community to form a basic and then a larger nucleus, and would also provide detailed steps on how to form such nuclei. Development agencies and personnel frequently demonstrated similar understandings of (local) initiative for development, that is, as initiatives from outside, even today.

Such understanding is obviously dominated by the structuralist theories and interventionist models that have dominated the terrain of social science and development studies since the mid-1950s. This kind of interpretation of local initiative has basically four shortcomings. In the first place, development and social change are viewed as emanating from external forces (the developer and his programme), and the developer is envisaged as dominating and leading community development processes. This automatically falls into the impasse of ‘centre-periphery’ (i.e. developer-farmer) thinking. Secondly, community development is visualised in terms of certain prefabricated structures (the nuclei) and a predetermined path (the detailed steps).

Thirdly, such a formulation does not escape the managerialist and interventionist undertones inherent in development. That is, they tend to evoke the image of 'more knowledgeable and powerful outsiders (developers)' helping 'the powerless and less discerning local folk' (Long and Villarreal 1993: 160). Fourthly, it confounds two types of initiatives by overstating the external initiative while entirely neglecting the most important one - the dynamic initiatives of rural farmers themselves from within the community.

Another type of notion on local initiative is the view that village or community social organisations are needed to stimulate farmer activities. This is represented in Kalshoven's paper 'Social Structure and Local Initiative in Rural Thailand' (Kalshoven 1965:3). His paper depicts how, when formal agricultural services were not considered sufficiently effective for introducing and getting farmers to accept new rice varieties in Thailand in the 1950s, a rice committee for every village was suggested, which could introduce and demonstrate the new varieties to the villagers. He then goes on to argue that the vast increase in rice production in Thailand was not the result of the innovations as such, i.e. the new rice varieties, but of using old methods and traditional models of social organisation and groupings, such as the Buddhist monkhood, the temple committee, the group of village headmen and the village school teachers. In this case, the people themselves provided all the initiative and work needed for the kind of development that made Thailand a leading rice producer (*ibid.* 1965:4). Although to some extent Kalshoven focuses on internal factors affecting community development, his study still exhibits certain major limitations in relation to local initiative. On the one hand, he stresses planned intervention, that is, the social groupings that facilitate the acceptance by farmers of government policy or specific development programmes, rather than on how farmers search for room for their own born-from-within 'projects' (see for a fuller explication of this concept, van der Ploeg and A. Long 1993). On the other hand, he confines local initiative to symbolic forms and social organisation and ignores the dynamics of individual farmer initiatives (i.e. it is the analysis is not sufficiently actor-oriented).

Other development-related references that touch on the term of 'initiative' usually have other foci to that of elaborating the subject of initiative *per se*. Reviewing this previous work leaves one with the impression that, due to the dominance of structural theory and interventionist thinking, the subject of rural initiative as a serious subject for study was strangled in its infancy in the 1960s. And there does not seem to have been much progress since, although there are abundant discussions about the need for 'bottom up' and 'farmer first' intervention strategies. In order to revitalise this sphere of research and debate, there is a need to reflect also on works that could be closely related and conducive to the further exploration of the subject of rural initiatives but which for various reasons have until relatively recently remained on the sidelines. Here I have in mind such studies dealing with entrepreneurship, network and information flows, and knowledge processes.

### *Entrepreneurship*

The aspect of entrepreneurship that attracted most attention in earlier studies was that concerned broadly with the motivation of the entrepreneur. A brief review of works on

entrepreneurship clearly signifies that the topic has constantly been discussed within the framework of business and enterprise, with close emphasis on such aspects as motivation, innovation, creation, profit and risk analysis. According to Long (1977: 105), these studies also examine the issue of social recruitment i.e. the social origins of entrepreneurs. However, Long's own studies in highland Peru 'shifted away from the identification of one or two so-called key factors to the study of the processes by which entrepreneurs attempt to deal with various internal and external organisational problems that arise in the establishment and development of their enterprises' (*ibid.*: 142).

Two interesting attempts to develop an analytical perspective that address these organisational dimensions are the transactional approach developed by Barth (1963, 1967), and the decision-making approach (see Moerman 1968, Long 1970, Ortiz 1973). Among transactional studies - and unlike Bohannan (1955) who stresses barriers between spheres of exchange (commodities, marriages and prestige) - Barth (1967) focuses on the possibilities for breaking through such barriers. He argues that 'it is the entrepreneur who discovers new channels for conversion and who breaks through between spheres' (Long 1977: 111). Although this approach smacks of an economic way of thinking, I think it is helpful for inducing social researchers to seek a deeper understanding of rural initiatives in many aspects (not only the economic) that spark farmers to act for broader change in the rural community. This is due to the fact that processes of rural initiative likewise entail dynamic transactions that involve 'conveyance' within one sphere, and 'conversion' (Bohannan 1955) or 'breakthrough' between spheres. These spheres include social, economic, cultural and ethnic criteria but also a range of non-exchangeable values. As regards the decision-making approach, albeit essentially actor-oriented, it often rests upon (unwarranted) general assumptions about actor-rationality and choice-making. Moreover, entrepreneurship is seen as a process of decision-making aimed ultimately at profit maximisation or economic expansion. This makes the model problematic for understanding of a range of rural initiatives whose means and ends diverge significantly.

### *Networks and information flows*

Amongst the bulk of network and information flow studies that exist, I believe Long's 'Multiple Enterprise in the Central Highlands of Peru' (1979) to be highly relevant to my search for an understanding of rural initiatives. Discussing the significance of social networks, Long (1979:125) suggests that 'a person's ability to combine different branches of economic activity and to develop certain types of entrepreneurial careers is crucially affected by the content of his existing personal network'. The function of networks are two-fold, on the one hand, the network of relationships can 'provide access to essential resources, the flow of information and other participants' support'; on the other hand; it may also 'carry negative consequences for career mobility'. In a Brazilian study quoted by Long, Anthony Leeds (1964) suggests that for each person there are specific 'springboards' or 'trampolines' that can project him/her into new branches of activity and into new levels of control and influence. But, perhaps, one of the more interesting findings in these early network studies, is that in analysing the flow of information one must distinguish between two zones or sectors of social networks, i.e. the tightly organised set of ties (or what have been called 'strong' ties, and the more extended and loosely knit network of dyadic relationships, called 'weak' (Granovetter

1973). The latter contends that information ‘travels more quickly if it travels through weak ties that link together clusters of relatively dense sets of relationships. Moreover, the more weak ties a person has, the more information he is likely to receive’ (Long 1979: 123-158). Although this network analysis is also placed within a kind of business/enterprise development context, many of the findings, I believe, are heuristically relevant to the study of the incubation and development of rural initiatives. In the first place, one can deduce that a farmer’s initiatives towards various aims or objectives are largely affected by the content of his networks. Secondly, the processes of initiative (incubation and development) are always closely associated with the process of information flow and information processing. Thirdly, the differential and complex personal strong and weak ties lead to variation in information and also the interpretation put on information received by different farmers, which then contributes differently to the generation of multifarious rural farmer initiatives.

### *Knowledge processes*

Another perspective relevant to this proposed research concerns the study of knowledge processes. Instead of adopting a linkage approach or ‘transportational paradigm’ (Dissanayake 1986:280), Long and Villarreal (1993:145) suggest understanding knowledge processes by ‘adopting a more dynamic view that acknowledges the joint creation of knowledge by both disseminators and users’. This interpretation ‘depicts knowledge as arising from an encounter of horizons, since the processing and absorption of new items of information and new discursive or cognitive frames can only take place on the basis of already existing stocks of knowledge and evaluative modes, which are themselves reshaped by the communicative experience’. That is to say, ‘knowledge is built upon the accumulated social experience, commitments and culturally-acquired dispositions of the actors involved’. Processes of knowledge creation/dissemination simultaneously imply several interconnected elements, i.e. actor strategies; capacities for drawing upon existing knowledge repertoires; absorbing new information, accommodating to and validating it, and various transactions involving the exchange of specific material and symbolic benefits. ‘There are likely to be dissonances between the different categories of actors involved in the production, dissemination and utilisation of knowledge’. Hence, the study of knowledge processes should look at ‘discontinuities rather than simply linkage’, and at ‘transformation rather than transfer of meaning’. Moreover, ‘knowledge emerges as a product of the interaction and dialogue between specific actors. It is multilayered and fragmentary and diffuse rather than unitary and systematised’. Furthermore, ‘[K] knowledge processes are embedded in social processes and relationships that imply aspects of control, power, authority and legitimation’ (Long and Villarreal 1993: 140-162). Long and his colleagues’ innovative analyses of knowledge processes are already quite a departure from the once-dominant static views and approaches to knowledge dissemination and transfer. However, the sophisticated logic of processes of encounter, intersection, interface and interaction still remain implicit, thus, more effort is needed to uncover the mysteries. This knowledge process approach is of particular relevance to the study of rural farmer initiatives since I think initiatives, to some extent, can be viewed as the emergence of certain kinds of strategic knowledge. And more importantly, interface studies can instrumentally serve as an entry point for the understanding of the processes of rural farmer initiatives.



## **Social Relations, Social Capital and Rational Choice**

I now wish to identify several other sociological notions that may be useful for this study of farmer initiatives. Where relevant I indicate how they apply to the Chinese case.

### *Social relations*

The role of social relations in sociological analysis has always attracted attention. A good example is Granovetter's embeddedness theory (1985) that offers a social relational view of social action and institutions. The study of the types and contents of social relationships has thus become an important basis for the understanding of actors' behaviour in society. In China, Fei Xiaotong (1985) has used the term 'discrepancy pattern' (cha xu ge ju) to describe social relations in traditional Chinese society. This pattern is compared with that produced through throwing a stone into water, which generates waves, one circle after another. By analogy, every person is the centre of the circles generated by his/her social influence, and those who encounter these circular waves are thereby associated or connected with the person at the centre. The size and thrust of the circles generated at particular times and places will of course vary. Applied to the Chinese case, the 'stones' that generate and push the waves include two basic elements: kinship (lit. blood-connected, xue yuan) and geo-related (di yuan) connections, especially the former. Such connections constitute the foundations of social relations built round five aspects. The first is egoism, ego in such social relations always being the centre of relations and all values being oriented to this centre. The second concerns the relativity of the public and private spheres, collectivism and individualism, meaning that standing in any one of the circles, looking inwards, one faces the public and collective, whereas looking outwards, one confronts the private and individual. The third aspect is particularism, meaning that ethics and the law are, to a degree, elastic and thus vary according to personal relationships pertaining to the parties involved. Hence general criteria do not function completely: 'one has to make clear who the objects are and what the relations between them and oneself is, only then can one decide what kind of criteria will be used.' The fourth is the 'rulings' of men and women, meaning the force used to sustain social order is not the law per se but rather the historical traditions pertaining to how people's relations are organised. The fifth is the 'ruling' of elders who play a key role in the social operation of society. In sum, one can say that the institutional and power arrangements in traditional Chinese society were based fundamentally on the interplay of these modes of social relations.

However, Fei Xiaotong did not pursue these issues any further, and no other scholars developed this way of analysing traditional Chinese society until the 1970s when scholars in Hong Kong took it up again. The latter tried to use this notion of 'discrepancy pattern' to map the evolving patterns of social relations in modern Hong Kong. They introduced the important concept of 'instrumental discrepancy pattern' (gong ju xing cha xue ge ju). According to Li Peiliang (1993), this concept explains the effort people make to develop utilitarian social relations in this highly competitive modern society by drawing upon traditional cultural resources. Again, the concept is explained in relation to five aspects or propositions. First, social connections are

egocentric, i.e., they are established by being orienting towards the individuals at the centre. Second, when establishing relations, people primarily take future profit/returns into account, and in this way are able to integrate both kin and non-kin into the structure. Third, from the centre of the circle to the outside, the instrumental value of members decreases. Fourth, members at the centre aim to enhance their relations with other members. And fifth, the closer the social relations the greater the possibility that 'peripheral' members can be used by members at the centre for achieving their practical objectives, that is, they acquire high instrumental value.

On the basis of this, it is argued that the discrepancy pattern changes in the wake of social change, particularly when drastic social change affects production relations and the distribution of scarce resources. Rural society in China is presently undergoing a process of rapid transformation: the influence and role of clan/family (*jia zu*) is gradually weakening and the channels by which people obtain physical and social resources are changing in accordance with the emergence of new markets and patterns of demand and supply. Under such circumstances obtaining resources based on kinship and geo-connected relations is changing too, which has affected the modes of constructing relationships and networks.

This model of social relations in traditional Chinese society and the kinds of changes now taking place bears some similarity to more general sociological models based on the pattern of interpersonal relations within networks of various kinds. It also includes a spatial and power dimension that is reminiscent of western-formulated exchange theory (see Blau's *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, 1967)

#### *Social capital and the question of trust*

According to a critical review of the theory of social capital made by an American sociologist, Thomas Ford Brown (included in Li Huibin and Yang Xuedong's *Social Capital and Social Development* 2000), social capital constitutes a system of resource distribution within social networks in accordance with the specific relations between the individual egos that compose them. This notion of system includes three dimensions: elements, structure and environment. Within the system of social capital, the elements are defined as the individual persons that constitute the network, the structure, the pattern of relations that associates these individual egos, and the environment, the broad social ecology that contains the system. In explaining social capital, Brown identifies the elements, structure and environment at three analytical levels, i.e., the micro, meso and macro. The analysis of social capital at micro level is embedded in an ego perspective, and focuses on the potentiality of individual egos to mobilise resources through social networks. At the meso level, social capital is looked at from a structural perspective and refers to the structuring and modes of resource flow of particular networks. And at the macro level, the notion provides a 'containing' structural perspective that focuses on the broader social and economic components. Here attention is paid to the impact of 'outside' culture, politics and macro-economy on the social relations and structure of networks, and the dynamics of their construction and transformation. The most obvious characteristic of social capital is that it can bring benefits, but not necessarily or directly monetary value. Moreover, the formation and

structuring of social networks are built upon the trust that develops between actors within them. For this reason, we must also consider the issue of trust.

The sociologist, Zucker (1986), has systematically elucidated the major trust-producing mechanisms. She describes three types. The first is a product of reputation, that is the extent of trust depends on knowledge and understanding of the other's past behaviour and social standing, and certainly people with good reputations will win trust. The second is arises primarily by social similarity in family background, race/clan, values, etc. In general, the more the similarity, the more the trust. The logic behind this is that similar social backgrounds usually imply similar behavioural norms, mutual understandings, and ways of achieving consensus in social life and economic transactions. The third type of trust is produced by legal institutions, that is, it is based on impersonal social regulations and rules, such as professional qualifications, bureaucratic principles and formal procedures, the existence of intermediaries, and force of various laws and legal regulations. Zucker concentrates on the analysis of key issues relating to trust in economic activities in America from 1884 to 1920 (the critical period of American industrialisation). Her main conclusion is that because of massive immigration, population diversity and internal migration, as well as the general uncertainty of economic enterprise during that period, trust mechanisms based on personal reputation became uncertain and their effectiveness low. Hence, there developed a greater reliance on the efficacy of rational bureaucratic organisation, the popularisation of professional qualifications and the enhancement of rules and legislation to generate the necessary trust required for doing business and for reinforcing political and socio-economic solidarities.

Prior to Zucker's work, Max Weber (1930, republished 1951) had distinguished two modes of trust, i.e. the particularistic and general. He argued that the former is based on 'a community of kinship' and established on the basis of private relations, clan/family or quasi-clan/family relations; whereas the latter is founded on 'a continuum of belief'. According to this distinction, Weber considers traditional Chinese trust to be particularistic, in that one only trusts those with whom one has personal relations, not outsiders. This he suggests originates more generally from the characteristics of Chinese culture. Other scholars, however, have taken a different view. One maintains that, although Chinese culture and social relations have some of the characteristics of particularism, internally there are controlling and balancing mechanisms that prevent such particularism from over-extending itself. This provides room for instrumental rationality aimed at sustaining the effective operation of economic and political life and allows for the fact that Chinese culture itself is able to accommodate itself to notions of general trust. A second school of thought underlines the historical specificity of trust behaviour, and argues that during the process of modernisation, and through increasing contacts with the West, systems of general trust have become established in certain Chinese communities (especially overseas communities such as those in Hong Kong and Singapore). In these latter cases, an absence of relevant kin and family members as well as the need to reinforce solidarity along ethnic lines vis-à-vis other (often Western) groups may be significant factors.

Other scholars have applied Zucker's concepts more directly (e.g. Limlingan 1986, Whitley 1991, and Yoshihara 1988). This group takes the view that trust in Chinese

society is still mainly generated through personalised relationships and reputational criteria rather than through legal and institutional means. Whitley, for example, indicates that Chinese family/clan entrepreneurs normally try to build trust with key subordinates and business partners through their private relationships with them, emphasising how commitment develops during the course of personal relations (contacts). His argument differs somewhat from Zucker's in that this commitment connection is not so much based on the individuals' characteristics *per se* but stems from how the persons associate with each and develop specific modes of interacting. Thus Whitley is primarily concerned with the operating or managing of relationships, meaning by this the activities of establishing, developing, sustaining and utilising relationships. Due to the unique importance of managing relationships in Chinese society, this operation of relationships is probably the key to trust-producing mechanisms for Chinese people. As described by C.F. Yang (1995), the main function of social contacts and associations is to ensure that necessary levels of trust are built at different stages in the formation of relationships. Relationships imply mutual commitment and this commitment encourages people to perform in a trustworthy manner. Furthermore the reciprocity of commitment indeed lies at the core of relationships. If one does not carry out one's commitments, one will lose face, and will not only be blamed by others, but will pay a high price - through losing relationship networks and the social resources attached to them (Bian 1997). Therefore, since the commitment contained in a relationship plays such a large constraining role on individual behaviour, trust is established and secured in this way.

### *Rational choice*

Another model explaining behaviour is rational choice theory, a term first used in economics and later in the social sciences. It has therefore become a connecting point of the two disciplines. The assumptions on which rational choice theory is based are fourfold. First, individuals pursue a strategy of benefit maximisation for themselves. Second, in particular situations and circumstances, there are alternative strategies from which to select. Third, people have reasons to believe that different choices will lead to different results. Fourth, people subjectively have different preferences regarding these various choices. Thus rational choice can be summarised as being concerned with the optimisation and maximisation of utility, meaning rational actors tend to select the optimal strategy for maximising benefit and minimising cost.

Despite its widespread application, rational choice theory has been criticised not only by sociology, but also by the school of new institutionalism within economics. A major criticism concerns the notion of 'maximisation', which works on the assumption that people are completely rational. Only then can a person identify all relevant alternative options for achieving objectives, predict the results of implementing those alternative options, and after assessment, make an optimal choice. This model has been amended by the concept of 'bounded rationality', which accepts that people's behaviour is consciously rational, but that this rationality is limited (by the information available to them and by certain externalities). In Douglass C. North's view (in H. A. Simon's *The Foundation of Modern Decision Making Theory* translated by Yang, Li and Xu, Li, 1989), people's bounded rationality carries two implications. First, the environment is complicated. During non-personal transactions, people are confronted with a

complicated and uncertain environment, and the more transactions, the higher the uncertainty and the less complete the available information is. Second, people's ability to calculate and understand the environment is also limited, since it is not possible for them to know everything.

H. A. Simon (*ibid.*) himself in fact goes further and questions altogether the stress placed on 'economic man', that is, that people are both 'economic' and 'rational'. People's knowledge of their environment, even though not absolutely complete and comprehensive is nevertheless broad and often rich. In addition, they generally have relatively stable systems of preference, and strong calculative abilities with which to select the best option from a range of alternative options according to their preferences. Simon believes that what people are looking for during choice selection is not maximisation or optimisation, but instead satisfaction. Taking the example of searching for a needle in a haystack, Simon suggests replacing a completely rational 'economic man' by a bounded rational 'managing man'. The difference is that economic man tries to find the *sharpest* needle ( i.e. he pursues optimisation as being the best option from all alternative options), while the cousin of economic man, namely, 'managing man', is satisfied with any option that gets him any needle that can be used for sewing (i.e. he looks for an option that is satisfactory and good enough). Simon's concepts of bounded rationality and satisfaction therefore modify the extremes of traditional rational choice theory, and shorten the distance between the assumed preconditions of rational choice and real life.

These problems with rational choice theory lead M. Taylor (1989) to suggest that the application of rational choice theory is limited, and is only effective under the following conditions: (a) When alternatives are limited, meaning they are neither too many nor too few to make a choice; (b) When the reasons/determinants for choice are clear and substantive; (c) When the choice of action is important to an actor; (d) When other actors have made similar choices under similar situations and conditions, in other words, when there is previous experience for reference.

The above discussion of rational choice theory is useful for underlining the complexities involved in understanding people's strategising and decision-making practices. Whatever its limitations, such a theory can still be useful in thinking through how people go about defining problematic situations and formulating strategies for dealing with them. This, as I attempt to show in the forthcoming empirical case materials, is a complex process. It often does not depend on clear intentionalities from the point of view of the specific decision maker(s) but rather models the process by which people muddle through on the basis of imperfect information and the problematics of interlocking or conflicting interests and needs. Yet rational behaviour as depicted by 'hard' or 'soft' rational choice theory may be only a small part of social life. Seeking and mobilising certain resources and sets of networks is equally driven by habitual, routine forms of behaviour and by seemingly irrational emotive reactions as it is by rational choice. It therefore sits uneasily within an actor-oriented human agency approach mentioned in the first chapter. Hence my treatment of strategising, networking, and the mobilisation of social capital, together with the issues of cultural constraints in the case study chapters to follow, will not be confined to the rational

choice model. In a similar fashion we will need to rethink some of the assumptions connected with participatory research and development approaches.

### **Works in Relation to Rural Communities in China**

My research has been conducted in a specific context of rural China. To provide the reader with sufficient background information, I now review the major issues and their historical development relating to the rural sector in China. Li Guoqing gives an excellent review of these aspects in the introduction to *The Endogenous Village* (ed. Lu, Xueyi, 2001), which is one of the major references for the following review.

### **Overview of major issues on Chinese rural communities**

In 1978, China commenced rural policy reform by implementing land distribution and a household contract/responsibility production system. Since then 870 million rural Chinese have initiated great changes in Chinese society. As Fei Xiaotong suggests, 'if you do not know Chinese farmers then you do not know Chinese society'. The 'Resolutions on Major Issues on Agriculture and Rural Communities', released in 1998 by the Chinese Government, reviewed the practice and experience of rural reform over the past 20 years. The implications of this reform have been characterised in terms of the establishment of dual systems (i.e. the collective and the private) based on the household contract/responsibility production system, the fast growth of township and village industries and the vigorous development of small local towns. All these have changed completely the sole collective system and production structure operated before 1978. Accordingly, new rural economic structures have emerged in response to the new demands of a market economy. Large-scale population movement/migration based on employment requirements have initiated a process of disintegration of the urban-rural dual social system. The employment structure in China reflects a sharp decrease of employment in the first (or primary) sector - agriculture. In 1978, employment in the first industry amounted to 283 million, representing 70.5% of total national employment. As a comparison, at the end of 1997, employment in the first industry although it had increased to 347 million, represented only 49.9% of the national total. This indicates a decrease of 20% in the percentage employed in the first industry (primary industries) as against that of total national employment, breaking through the threshold of less than half of those employed being employed in agriculture (National Statistics Bureau 1998:343). Importantly, it is the rapid growth of township and village industries that has largely promoted change in rural employment. The number of rural enterprises climbed from six million in 1978 to 23 million in 1996, and the job opportunities offered by rural enterprises have increased from 28 million in 1978 to 135 million in 1997. This shows that there were about 130 million-plus rural surplus labourers who transferred from agriculture into second and the third industries (manufacturing and tertiary sectors), entailing six million every year (National Statistics Bureau 1998:90-91). This, to some extent, signified that economic development in China had reached the middle stage of industrialisation. The success of economic reforms has led to a substantial change in the political and social structure. After abandoning the commune system in 1984, rural areas started to practice villager self-governance, i.e. village administration moved towards more democratic forms with

regard to elections, decision making, management and monitoring. Political democracy at grassroots level was promoted, thus changing farmers' ideology and values. In summary, following the reform of 1978, the rural sector has been characterised by significant changes in three spheres, a household contract/responsibility production system, the rapid growth of rural enterprises, and the installation of village governance.

However, it must be clearly noted that economic reform has come before political reform in Chinese rural areas. Also it is now more and more evident that rural social structures have greatly restricted further development in this sector. Thus research on rural development requires focussing comprehensively on rural social/administrative structure and organisation and their effect on rural communities and the facilitation of rural endogenous development.

The market economy was first introduced into the rural sector through reforms in general economic planning and traditional economic operations, which secured steady growth of the rural economy. However, governmental policy on the rural sector itself and related institutional reforms have lagged behind. The external environment that largely affects the rural sector includes the penetration of state policies, the extension of urban functions to rural areas, and the expansion of national and regional marketing systems to the countryside. Due to the deficiency of marketing institutions in terms of the production and commoditisation of agricultural products, despite freedom of economic operation, farmers have lacked the necessary intermediaries linking farm production to the wider market. The benefits and interests of farmers have not been effectively protected, and this has eventually resulted in a slowing down of the growth of farmers' income. With regard to the dualism of the urban and rural sector, after the rural reforms, the barriers between the urban and rural sector started to collapse, and relations between rural and urban have now become more and more extensive. The development of the second and the third industries in urban cities, dominated by the construction industry and tertiary services, has created a great number of employment opportunities that have absorbed a massive rural floating population. In addition, because of improved urban functions in terms of the production and commoditisation of material products and of information and technology and various services, the urban sector's stimulating and driving effects on the rural sector in terms of economy, culture and livelihood have become more and more substantial. On the other hand, the growing consumer demands of the rural population have also become a driving force to the further growth of urban industries. Improvements in farmers' living standards and their increased participation in society have directly contributed to the stability of the entire society, including the larger cities. The rural sector has become an integral part of civil society. Currently, the lagging behind of urban reform as well as reform of state enterprises has to a great extent restrained the further reform of the rural sector. Future development in the Chinese rural sector will heavily depend on the complete restructuring of relations between the urban and rural sectors, on the development of national general industrial capacity, and also on the self-reliant endogenous development of rural areas. At this stage, one of China's important strategies for promoting rural social and economic development is to further advance the urbanisation process and promote small-scale urban centres.

Viewed from *within* the rural sector, there are also many social and economic issues to be tackled. The first relates to rural production and employment structure. Due to the vast development of the market economy and rural industries, more than 100 million rural surplus labour units have been transferred from the agricultural sector to the second and third industries during the past 20 years, entailing considerable restructuring of employment for rural inhabitants. Nevertheless, in 1997, labour in the agricultural sector still occupied 70.4% of the total rural labour force, while that of the second and the third industry occupied only 18.1% and 11.5% respectively. Rural surplus labour in 1997 amounted to 120 million, representing one third of the rural labour force, and it was expected to hit 200 million by the year 2000 (National Statistics Bureau 1998: 113-116). From a nation-wide point of view, in 1996, the products of the first industry shared 20% of GDP and those of the second industry shared 48.9%, whereas in the same year the employment ratio was 50.5% for the first sector and 23.5% for the second sector. This sharp gap between agricultural and industrial productivity became the fundamental reason for the income disparity between rural farmers and urban dwellers. Statistics show that income disparity among urban inhabitants against farmers in China narrowed from 2.6:1 in 1978, to 1.7:1 in 1984. However, it has again increased to a yearly average of 2.7:1 during the period 1992 to 1997. In China, the ratio of the agricultural labour force cannot be decreased by the development of rural industry alone, neither can the latter stop the increase in the absolute amount of rural surplus labour.

Urban reform started in China in 1984. The ratio of urban populations with citizenship (*shi min*) has increased from 18.5% in 1984 to 43.8% in 1997, and the ratio of non-agricultural population settled in urban areas has increased from 10.6% to 17.7% in that same period. However, due to the serious problem of an abundance of surplus labour, state enterprises have not been able to absorb this labour, which drifts from the rural areas at a rate of 60 million persons per year. The principle of economic modernisation or industrialisation is to shift the weight of the first industry within the entire industrial structure to the second and third sectors. To deal with the issue of rural surplus labour, the government must promote the development of economic entities of non-public ownership, including private enterprise and township and village-owned enterprises, so as to create more job opportunities. In the meantime, it has to be careful to prevent the agricultural economy from stagnating or declining. In addition, the preconditions for achieving regional social and economic stability include measures to advance the industrialisation of the agricultural sector, to adjust the structure of agriculture, and to support those self-reliant farmer households to enter the market economy. By doing this, it is expected to narrow the income gap between agriculture and other industries, and to further decrease the disparities amongst regions due to differences in industrial structure.

In comparison with the reform of the economic structure and system, reform and change in the political, and especially in the social and cultural spheres, is more difficult. Differences in terms of timing amongst the three spheres have always existed. This is related to three major issues. The first is connected to the local administration and management of rural areas. Prior to 1978, the commune (*gong she*), production brigade (*sheng chan da dui*), now called the village, and sub-brigade or production team (*sheng cha dui*), not only held power in terms of rural administration and finance, but also in



terms of the economic operation and management of production planning, management and product-sharing. Although this operational mechanism applied through administrative power was not ideally suited to the proper management of the rural economy, the intensive farming of arable land and team farming enhanced the geographical relations of local farmers, which further laid the physical and organisational foundation for the integration and conformity of village society. By contracting out the land following the rural reform, farmers were able to obtain the land as usufruct and household economic operations and production functions were restored to them. Thus the household has replaced the former production team (sub-brigade) as the basic unit of rural economic operations. Accordingly, village organisation has lost the function of economic planning as well as its controlling power in the management of rural inhabitants. Particularly in areas with very low collective economic capacity, village organisation has been drastically weakened. The process of stratification and the dividing up of land among farmers has been accelerated, but as yet there has been no formulated foundation for a new integration and conformity of social groups on a geographical basis, and thus a certain disordering of rural society has emerged. How the local township authority can now effectively manage rural society is viewed as one of the key issues in the rural sector in China.

The second issue connects to villagers' self-governance. Before the establishment of the new China in 1949, the powerful clan (lineage, or descent group, *zong zu*) system had the function of holding memorial ceremonies for the ancestors, for offering self and mutual help in daily life, for restraining the behaviour of clan members and for joint defence. The clan system had integrated social order within the group, but had also sustained geographical relations within the village community. During the commune period, the clan system was broken up, and the clan function was replaced by a local administrative organisation. After the collapse of the commune system and during implementation of the policy of villagers' self-governance, the clan organisation was restored to its original function in some rural areas. For instance 'the executive council for weddings and funerals (*hong bai xi shi li shi hui*)' and other similar organisations were operated on a purely non-governmental and self-governed basis, assuming the responsibility for self-help in events such as weddings and funerals. Due to the fact that social welfare and social security systems had not yet been established in rural areas, the importance and significance of self-help became more and more evident. Having obtained decision-making power over economic operations, and in the wake of the increase in their economic capacity and living standards, farmers increasingly realised the significance of exercising their legal rights and power. At the present time it is very important for the rural sector to realise villagers' self-management, self-help, self-reliance and self-governance. In 1982, the general constitution stipulated the establishment of villagers' committees to replace the brigade set-up under the commune system. After the Law on the Organisation of Villagers' Committees was officially released in 1998, the practice of villagers' self-governance advanced rapidly. It is becoming more and more obvious that the institutional foundation for local endogenous development can only be created by mobilising farmers' initiatives as agents of community development and by strengthening the self-management capacity of village elected cadres.

The third issue relates to culture and social consciousness. Due to the expansion of mass media and the movement of population resulting from a commodity economy, a great deal of information has been disseminated to rural areas. Thus, the village community is no longer a closed and self-sufficient society, and people's values, ideology and moral norms are becoming increasingly diversified. The rationality of objectives has been increased, and traditional and emotional influences have weakened. It is thus very important to re-evaluate and rethink the role of regional culture, clan culture and religious belief in the integration of the solidarity of rural society so as to explore the cultural dynamics that can promote community endogenous development. This will greatly contribute to the restructuring of the social order of rural society (Li Guoqing 1999).

It is a fact that rural social reform has lagged behind economic reform in China, and that the rural sector is confronted with issues concerning the interrelations between the rural areas and the cities. China has to further speed up urban reform, and to enhance the cities' stimulating and driving effects on rural areas so as to contribute to their development. The disordered population movement from rural to urban areas has led to the rapid expansion of urban populations and has posed some urban and rural problems. The process is likely to lead to the disintegration of village society due to the sparsity of population and to the concentration of an ageing population in the rural areas. Therefore, the self-reliant development of villages is closely interlinked with the stability of urban society. In the meantime, internally the rural sector is confronted with issues related to the structural adjustment of agricultural and rural industries, as well as to social and cultural constraints that have held back rural community development. The key for tackling such issues and problems lies in the establishment of a favourable societal structure for self-reliant village development. The challenge for rural development sociologists in China therefore, is to understand the social structure of village communities, to analyse the interrelation of village social structure and village endogenous development, to research appropriate modes of social structure that can facilitate rural development as well as to explore the factors that have hindered development.

#### *Rural household/family culture*

Prominent contributions to research on household/family culture in Chinese rural society include Lin Yaohua's *Golden Wings* and Wang Huning's *Family Culture in Chinese Rural Villages: an exploration on modernisation in Chinese society* (1991). The latter made an in-depth analysis of the background of restoration of the structure and functions and changes and counter-measures of family culture in Chinese rural villages around the 1980s. Wang regards the family culture of rural villages as a key subject for research on the modernisation of Chinese society. He argues that the family household is the basic unit of Chinese rural society, and that family culture in China has always played an essential role in rural villages and also in society at large. As the core of traditional culture, developed from remote antiquity, the family culture of rural villages has radiated its impact on all domains of Chinese society. Thus, he argues, the core spirit of village family culture has driven both traditional and modern society. Such radiation and impacts are reflected in social character, orthodox culture and political spirit (Wang Huning 1991: 40). The most important property of Chinese village family

culture is that household culture does not lead to the large extended family with members all living together, instead the family is divided and sub-family households groups are formed that live relatively close but separate from each other (*ibid.*: 22). The family household is the basic unit of Chinese rural society. This was analysed by Fei Zhengqing in his *America and China* (1987). In examining the character of Chinese society, Fei Zhengqing claims 'The Chinese family household is a unique small territory, like a micro federal state. The social unit is the family household not the individual human being. Family households are the accountable elements of local politics. Rural society is organised by the family system. Villages are composed of groups of households and family/clan units. Each household is not only a social unit, but also an economic unit' (Fei Zhengqing 1987: 17-20). Wang Huning also describes the relation between village and family culture. 'The relations of families and the various institutions, behaviour, ideologies and attitudes that are evolved from the family relations in the geographical area of a natural village (*zi ran cun*) or an administrative village (*xing zheng cun*) have constructed the notion of village family culture' (Wang Huning 1991: 7). Village family culture is the village traditional organisational as well as cultural characteristic.

After the establishment of the new China in 1949, there have been four political movements that have affected village and family relations. The first was the land reform (1950-1952), which formulated organisational principles that went beyond the family institution. The generation of strong class-consciousness led to the weakening of family consciousness. The family/clan kinship authority was superseded by the newly developed administrative authority. The second political movement was the collectivisation movement (1951-1958). Agricultural co-operation on collective land required farmers to participate in collective organisation beyond the family household unit. This weakened the production function of family households. The third political movement was the establishment of the commune system (1958-1978). This system formulated an organisational structure at three levels' of ownership (commune, brigade and sub-brigade) with the sub-brigade at the base. In this system, the village societal institution was closely linked with state administrative power and family household functions were greatly undermined leading to a radical transformation of original family authority. Of the four political movements, this last affected village family culture the most. However, the geographical stability of the inhabitants' lives established the potential foundation for developing kinship relations. The fourth political movement – the rural reform from 1978 to the present – during which village family culture was restored and the production function of rural family households again became determinant (Wang Huning 1991).

Other studies have been undertaken that compare the changing interrelations between family and village before and after the 1978 rural reforms. Prior to these reforms, under the management system of commune, brigade and sub-brigade, the latter was the basic unit for organising production. Local cadres organised production activities and labourers always worked together. In this case, the family household was the first life environment of rural community members, and institutionalised collective work became the second. This second environment was responsible for major production cooperation, information exchange, entertainment, and adjustment mentality, attitudes and feelings. The second environment influenced and controlled the first through information

dissemination. The family household shared only limited functions of some small-scale production, the living and care of the old and the children of the family. Differences between commune members still existed but the vagueness of benefit relations for them, that is the difficulties of relating personal input into collective activities with personal and communal benefit, and the egalitarianism and the spirit of mutual help based on collective morality and beliefs reduced differentiation markedly.

After the reforms of 1978, and in the wake of implementing the contracting of land to individual households, the organisational structure of the entire society has been transformed. The first environment of the family household has now become responsible for the major functions of production, living, and fostering the next generation, whereas institutionalised collective work, the second environment, has been replaced by relations between township and village, between relatives, and between neighbours. Due to imbalances of resource distribution in terms of the expansion of social relations and to differences of economic capacity, these new relationships between township, villagers and neighbours has become more differentiated and diverse for the different actors. In such a social structure, the success of family household economic life largely depends on household members, and the changing nature of relations of the second environment, now centred upon the family household, has magnified such dependence (Wang Huning 1991: 62).

The household contract/production responsibility system has greatly motivated production initiatives among farmers, and has contributed significantly to the development of rural productive forces. In the meantime, rural social institutions have been transformed in five respects. First, the holding of township and village property has shifted from the collective to the household. Such a shift of property rights has resulted in the separation of ownership and usufruct, which was an important foundation for the restoration of village family culture. Moreover, the former collective social institutions for adjusting collective properties have become unsuited to the structural change in society. The collective work mechanism has broken down. Public commune power has lost its material foundation and related responsibilities. Second, after the transformation of economic relations and mode of work organisation, the basic socio-economic unit has likewise shifted from the brigade and sub-brigade to the household. The behaviour of local inhabitants both inside and outside the village is no longer village-orientated. The family household has become the basis of farmers' activities and thus the former commune institution has lost its influence and control over the new behaviour, and in this way its power has been sharply weakened. Third, the organisational mechanism of township and village has been transformed and again the main operation and activities of the village continuum are no longer managed by the collective but by rural households. Collective and public organisation has become loosened and weakened, whereas family organisation has become intensified and strengthened. This has led to the malfunctioning of village organisation and the emergence of village disorder in many rural areas. Fourth, the social position of farmers has shifted from a relatively steady one to a more changing one. Thus, regulating by social institution has become more difficult. Fifth, the former cultural environment of strong political and collectivist ideology has been diluted and become more family oriented. In fact the foundation of the collective economy exists now in name only due to the implementation of the household contract/production responsibility system. The

official formal institutional requirements of purchasing farmers' grain products at a fixed price, local levies, family planning, land administration and so on, conflict with the farmers' own interests. On the other hand, forms of social security such as the collective health care services provided by the collective welfare system have declined. The increasing consciousness and authority of kin and family/clan has undermined official administrative power, thus making social control more and more difficult (Wang Huning 1991).

Wang Huning argues that, although there are positive aspects to village family culture at the current stage, the essence of this culture - kinship, living in a compact community, hierarchy, custom, agro-farming, self-reliance, closeness and stability - mostly do not harmonise with the attributes of modern social culture (sociality, industrialisation, openness, and wide-ranging reform). He believes that the rationale for the existence of village family culture (such as production level, resource capacity, social control, reproduction system and cultural aspects) has also been changing as rapidly as the empirical factors that accelerate its dissolution. He concludes that the demise of village family culture was a historical trend, and its present 'restoration' is only a particular phenomenon. He even provides three kinds of measures that will accelerate the demise of village family culture. Wang Huning is right to stress the importance of village family culture, and his analysis of first the decrease and later the increase of the power of family culture and the social institutions around rural reform are also reasonable. However, since his research angle is to explore conditions that might promote the modernisation process in rural areas as well as in China as a whole, and he believes that modernisation will lead firstly to the replacement of custom by legal principles, he has generally concluded that village family culture will have to wane in the wake of the modernisation process. Obviously, he has used linear modernisation criteria to assess village family culture, and has exaggerated its negative aspects. In fact, during the modernisation process as well as in post-modern society, family culture has an important role to play.

### **Community research**

Most studies of Chinese rural society, such as Fei Xiaotong's *Peasant Life in China*, Fei Xiaotong and Zhang Zhiyi's *Three Villages in Yunnan*, are focused on the village community. The former sketches the social structure and operation of a rural community and delineates a comprehensive picture by systematic integration of various interrelated factors. The latter puts forward a research methodology comparing village types in order to develop a typology of rural communities in China based on the relationship between structure and condition. He argues that where conditions are comparable, the structures are therefore comparable. 'For a particular community, if we can clearly dissect the various interrelations in the societal structure, and know exactly the conditions based on which the structures are generated, we can say, just like knowing the viscera and the physiological circulation of a sparrow, we have a concrete specimen. After that, we study other areas with similar and different conditions, then compare with the existing specimen, and categorise the similar ones into a group and the different ones into another group. So we get different types or models. This can also be called 'types comparison' (Fei Xiaotong 1990: 7-8). The method of types comparison is important for researching Chinese rural communities, otherwise, it would

be very difficult to study the nearly 800,000 administrative villages in China. It should be noted that community research in China has been well known in international sociology and anthropology circles. Malinowski called community research in China the 'Chinese School of Sociology' (Fei Xiaotong 1986).

#### *Rural market continuum versus village/community continuum*

Many western scholars have studied Chinese rural societal systems from a broader view than that of the village. For example, the American scholar of Chinese socio-economic history, William Skinner, examined the rural marketing and trading system and looked at the marketing system's impact on village economic and social structure, formulating a particular market continuum theory. In Skinner's *Rural Market and Social Structure of China* (1965), he denies the significance of viewing the village as the basic rural unit in China, believing instead that it is the market system that shapes all characteristics of peasant or traditional farming society. He thus takes the market as a kind of social system in which the peasant village is located at the periphery of a hierarchical system of markets. He argues that the 'peripheral' location of peasants is not determined by the geographical space of their villages, but rather by the relation of the village to the wider marketing and trading system (Skinner 1965: 40). The local market has fulfilled the demand for regular trading of peasant households. It is both the starting point for agricultural and handicraft products entering the market system, but also the terminal point of consumption products from market to peasants. As a kind of social system, the market place and system of markets constitute the basic socio-spatial boundaries within which farmers develop social relations and which generally satisfies peasants' demand for labour and capital. On the other hand, the local market also constructs the social scope of marriage, and is closely related to entertainment activities. Some local organisations, such as the temple fair committee for example, are established based on the local market, which is also the core of communication between peasants and the higher level. Skinner's market continuum theory has been of great influence in the field of Chinese socio-economic history. However, it has also brought a lot of critical discussion, mainly focused on the independence of the market periphery, the interrelation of urban and rural aspects within the market periphery, as well as the corresponding relation between the market and administrative system. At a later stage, therefore, Skinner himself admits that the social organisation of the village is a more complex subject than he gives credit to. However, despite its limits, his market continuum theory reminds us that when looking at the Chinese rural village one must give due weight to the market as an important external factor that affects village development.

Another Chinese scholar, Huang Zongzhi, uses the tradition in peasant studies of distinguishing three types of approach: formalism, substantivism and Marxism. Represented by Theodore W. Schultz and Samuel Popkin, formalism compares peasants and capitalist enterprises, concluding that as 'economic bodies' peasants are the same as any capitalist entrepreneur, and that as political actors peasants are more suitably regarded as investors in the political market. Represented by Chayanov, substantivism criticises the analysis that regards peasants as capitalist entrepreneurs, emphasising that peasant engagement in production is mainly for family livelihoods. Marxism believes that peasants are taxpayers, exploited farm cultivators, and that the surplus products of

their production are used to sustain the governing class and state machinery. Western studies of Chinese rural communities are dominated by formalism, whereas Japanese studies on China are mainly dominated by substantivism. This difference stems from the difference in the communities selected for research. Western scholars have mainly selected and studied relatively advanced areas in China, where a commodity economy was comparatively developed, and where social stratification was relatively evident, and the clan/descent organisation was rather strong. Therefore, such studies tended to highlight the integration of rural communities into the market system, as well as the family and kin networks of upper-class society. These rural communities were controlled by state power that penetrated grassroots society, as well as by the gentry (Huang Zongzhi 1986: 27). In comparison, Japanese studies were influenced by the field survey conducted in the plain area of north China during the war period. In this research area, agriculture was dominated by dry farming, and there was no canal transportation. Thus, commoditisation of the rural economy in such an area was very low compared to that in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River and the Sichuan Basin area. Peasant production for the market was very limited, and peasants spent relatively less time on going to market for trading their products. The underdevelopment of the commodity economy, plus the limited surplus of agricultural production had resulted in a kind of rural society characterised by land-holding peasant farming, and limited production relations with the outside. Most of the villagers were peasants holding land, which implied that the state regime was important in villagers' lives. This was due to the fact that the state had collected taxes and levies by land holding since the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. In other words, the state regime had penetrated rural villages, which had impelled the establishment of village political organisation for managing the collection of state taxes and levies. In the villages of those areas, inhabitants were not highly stratified by class. There were few powerful and influential figures, thus, the organisational structure of the family group was weaker than that found in the lower reaches of the Yangtze and Pearl River areas. The family group in the rural area of north China had little family property, sometimes only a small area of ancestral graves, thus, the family group would normally not cross the boundary of villages. This had strengthened the introversion of rural villages (Huang Zongzhi 1986: 27). Therefore, in Huang Zongzhi's view, the concept of the village continuum advocated by Japanese scholars is an important notion and we should include the rural community as an important subject of research especially for exploring village governance as the key interface between village internal organisations and outside administrative regime/intervention.

#### *State administration and rural society*

Du Zanqi (1994) has examined the impact of state expansion on the power structure of rural society. His study included how state power and policy is exercised and implemented in rural communities, their relations with local authorities and local officials, and how the expansion of state power could contribute to the reform of conventional local management structures and facilitate the application of new policies. Du Zanqi used the concept 'culture network of power' to illustrate the interaction between state regime and rural society. Here the culture network of power includes the market, lineage, religion, and organisations such as water control, and informal relations between kin. Because these institutions are connected to social networks depending on

various symbolic values, culture networks are to some extent legitimated and empowered. Both Local and central government have established their own authority by heavily depending upon these culture networks.

Du Zanzi's research revealed that, at the end of Qing Dynasty, the state administered rural villages through the support of local non-bureaucratic officials. This system was well accepted by the local *elite*, because the late Qing Government integrated its authority and power into their culture network. Following the establishment of the Republic of China (1912-1949), the state promoted the modernisation of local government, and tried to cut relations with the traditional, and what was regarded as a 'backward' culture network. During that period, the expansion of the state was carried out through involution, meaning the enlargement of state administrative power was not done by improving the efficiency of the original or newly added organisations, but by duplicating or enlarging the relations between the original state and society. The expansion of state power led to competition between descent groups, and the political function of culture networks declined.

Religion was another channel through which the state penetrated local society. The state held the supreme sacrificial rites on behalf of the entire population, by which the state had hegemonically placed its own culture above common popular symbols. On the other hand, local squires also showed their leading positions by holding memorial ceremonies, which integrated the local *elite* and state regime into one political system. After the establishment of new China in 1949, the Communist Party established its organisations at various levels from the grassroots in line with the State regime, which marked as it were the completion of the involution of the state regime. After the 1980s, some scholars regarded village cadres as 'contractors', 'middlemen', or 'brokers' between the state and villagers.

In summary, previous studies indicate that Chinese rural villages did and do not exist in isolation. The state has penetrated rural village through both administrative and cultural channels, which has greatly reshaped the clan and religious systems of rural communities, and greatly impacted on societal structure. Hence, when we conduct research on or in rural communities, we have to pay close attention to the impacts of the state, as well as to changes in the interrelations between the state and the local.

## **Rural Community Development**

The theme of this research falls within the domain of rural development. Thus, a review on the subject of development, and rural community development in particular is provided below.

### *The notion of development*

Rural development, as a subject, has only been formalised within higher education and research in China since 1998, although this has been the case in western countries for some twenty to thirty years. The notion of development has been understood differently by scholars in various spheres. The conventional understanding of development has been dominated by economists and politicians who tend to equate development with



economic growth. After World War II, many formally colonised or semi-colonised States in Asia, Africa and Latin America became politically independent, becoming part of what have been called third world developing countries. Although very different in terms of land, population, and resource endowment, they were roughly similar in terms of belonging to the category 'poor countries'. In order to reduce poverty, most of the developing countries chose the traditional development model of seeking economic growth and industrialisation of their agriculture-dominant States. By doing this, they expected to enhance their industrialised State capacity and thus their per capita GNP, so as to catch up with developed countries in this aspect. This strategy of imitating the practice of developed countries, although it brought some economic prosperity it has been confronted with many challenges. Firstly, the pure pursuit of growth of GNP and GDP has led to the neglect of other development objectives such as poverty reduction, more equal distribution of wealth, satisfaction of basic needs, protection of natural resources and environment, and human capacity building etc. Secondly, although the economic growth rate of some developing countries is higher than that of developed countries, problems of economic dislocation and societal disorder have emerged, such as heavy state debt pressures, sharp income disparity, political unrest and so on. Thirdly, global competition for economic growth has led to a rapid industrialisation process dependent on high technology, which has resulted in massive waste of non-renewable energy and resources, the rapid growth of world population, and the heavy destruction of the ecological environment. Such failures related to seeking purely economic growth in some developing countries have urged us to rethink the connotation of development and explore new understandings. People have started to realise that pure economic growth does not mean development. If we want to make good development, we should not only aim at economic growth but also pay great attention to population growth, employment, health care, education, social value, political institutions, distribution mechanisms, and so on.

In development studies, development means change, both positive and negative. Such change not only covers the change from simple to complex, from backward to advanced, from so-called 'bad' to so-called 'good', but also the change from modern to indigenous, from stable to reform, from complex to simple. In reality, people indeed tend to pursue positive change. The contemporary understanding of development refers to the comprehensive (positive) change in economic, social and political aspects, as well as in the areas of institution and legislation, human capacity and gender, knowledge and technology, resource and environment, and so on. Development requires a kind of co-ordinated progress amongst different spheres. It includes not only positive economic growth and economic development, but also societal stability, democratic participation, social equity, cultural development, empowerment, decentralisation, capacity building, innovation, indigenous knowledge, the improvement of ecological environment and so on. Development is a systematic undertaking, which requires co-ordinated development of different systems. Only by doing this can we ensure the sustainability and stability of development. Above all, development is an interlocking holistic issue. Hence we should take a holistic view to understand development and pursue the holistic development of society (Ye Jingzhong 2000: 39-44).

*Rethinking rural development practices in China*

As an important component of societal development, rural community development has attracted attention from the Chinese government as well as the international development agencies. For a long time China has allocated large investments of human, financial and physical resources to rural development. In addition, a great amount of international aid has also been absorbed in the development of rural areas. Project intervention has been the major measure for rural development, thus national investment and international aid has been channelled through various national and international rural development projects. However, there is much evidence that shows the unsatisfactory results of these projects. One major international development agency once admitted that 70% of its development projects had failed. The broad experiences obtained and lessons learnt from rural development practice have urged us make an in depth re-examination on previous rural development practice. Such a re-examination mainly includes the following aspects, i.e. understanding farmers and their experiences, the role of science and technology, the role of non-technical factors, communication with farmers and extension, the heterogeneity of communities, learning, endogenous development versus exogenous development, the difference of life-worlds of different actors (Ye Jingzhong 2001: 41-47).

The proper understanding of rural community development requires proper understanding of the notion of 'rural' and 'development'. Understanding 'rural' will certainly require the understanding of the three aspects - 'agriculture', 'farmers' and 'rural community' (*san nong* in Chinese, *san* meaning three, *nong* meaning agro. All three words in Chinese begin with *nong* – agro). The key 'agents' or carriers of rural community development are obviously not the officials, nor the government technicians, but community members – farmers, including wives, women farmers and children. Thus, the proper understanding and recognition of farmers has always been the key entry point of rural community development. Since the key agents of rural community development are the farmers, development choices in terms of the identification of development projects and their implementation should be based on the analysis of problems confronting farmers, and satisfy the expectations and demands of farmers based on locally available potentials. However, in many conventional rural development practices, governmental officials and technicians have decided projects for farmers based on their own imagination of what kinds of problems farmers might be facing. That is to say, farmers have been passive in the decision-making of development options. The result of this is that the projects decided upon are often not the ones that farmers would have chosen or expected. Such a situation reflects the lack of a proper understanding and recognition of farmers.

One famous Chinese rural sociologist, Yan Yangchu, once concluded that peasants/farmers were foolish, poor, weak and selfish (Yang Yabin 2001: 243). Such a view of peasants/farmers is misleading in contemporary rural development practice. So, how do we properly understand and view farmers? There is no doubt of their importance in society. The Chinese government has always prioritised issues related to agriculture, farmers and rural communities on its agenda. Farmers are engaged in an important sector – agriculture, broadly including farming, animal husbandry, forestry, processing enterprises and so on. The stable production of agriculture is the basis for the stable development of other sectors. All such aspects are well recognised. In addition, we should understand farmers from other angles. Farmers view the problems

confronting them from their own perspectives, which are not usually those of officials and technicians. Yet many reports from the county or township government analyse the problems that farmers face from the officials' and technicians' point of view.

Farmers have their own particular understanding of their environment, and their analysis of their problems is usually very different from that of outsiders. Therefore, as development practitioners, it is important to understand problems from the farmers' eyes. In addition, farmers have their own interests and expectations, which cannot be 'imagined' by outsiders. Farmers have a great potential for developing their communities and therefore must not be treated simply as passive development targets. Farmers also have their own knowledge and understanding of issues, having often lived for generations in their complex, and sometimes very harsh environments, and usually have rich skills and strategies for coping with their livelihoods and development. Such indigenous knowledge should be thoroughly recognised in community development, but the reality is that outsiders very often neglect it. In many cases, farmers' indigenous knowledge is more effective and more sustainable than that of so-called advanced technology from outside.

We also need to study farmers' ideas and behaviour precisely because their ideas and behaviour are closely related to their community environment and their own circumstances. Farmers' choices on community development and technical options often do not follow the scientific rationality of outside experts. However, farmers are confronted with complex socio-economic, cultural and physical environments and have their own reasons for their choices. We should therefore not shy away from studying and analysing their reasoning for their choices simply because their choices do not follow so-called 'scientific' rationality. In fact only by studying and analysing the reasoning behind their choices can we understand more of the real worlds of farmers.

It must also be recognised that farmers and farming households are not isolated from each other in rural communities, they have complex ways and mechanisms of self-organisation in their production, livelihood, economic and social areas. Study and analysis of this self-help organisation could provide advice for promoting the further development of such organisation in rural communities, as well as for community governance. The development performance of rural areas in China shows that farmers are primarily the driving forces/initiators of rural community development, that is to say, most initiatives originate from within the community, from the key stake holders of the community – the farmers, and any support from outside can only play a helping or facilitating role. Finally, of course we cannot talk about farmers without mentioning the question of poverty, since farmers in China to a great extent are associated with poverty, particularly in the resource poor and remote mountain areas, which in many cases are inhabited by minority ethnic populations.

The role of science and technology in societal development is inestimable. Many high and new technologies such as genetic breeding, genetic modification and information technologies can greatly contribute to economic development and a comprehensive increase of national capacity. However, a rural community is very different from a laboratory or research station. It is instead an independent, natural, social, economic and cultural unit whose holders are the community population – the farmers. Its major

production is agriculture on a scale that is different from an industrial and commercial scale of operations. In such a rural community, can one expect science and technology to be applied by farmers as designed by professional experts, so as to develop the community? The facts speak for themselves in China, that is, the ratio of transfer of agricultural technologies (including forestry and animal husbandry etc.) is only 30-40%, far below the 70-80% in some developed countries. This is to say that many new agricultural technologies have not been relevant to or accepted by farmers, or have been refused. In addition we have to recognise that there are three major actors involved in rural agricultural technological extension - researchers in research institutes and universities, extensionists from extension agencies at each level, and the end users of technologies, the farmers. Two gaps have been observed between these three actors. The first is the gap between researchers and extensionists, implying that many research achievements do not reach the extensionists. The second is the gap between extensionists and farmers, implying that technologies possessed by extensionists do not or cannot reach the farmers. This situation has probably led to the complaints heard amongst the three actors. For instance, researchers tend to believe that the extension system is not well functioning, and extensionists are not qualified. In the meantime, both researchers and extensionists tend to think that it is the farmers' own problem if they do not accept new technologies, because they are 'foolish', 'poor', 'weak' and 'selfish' (Yang Yabin 2001: 243). And farmers think that both researchers and extensionists do not know them at all, and neither do they understand the complex rural, social, economic and cultural environment. In order to further explore the issues embedded in rural agricultural extension, we should go beyond the surface of this situation, i.e. beyond the complaints amongst three actors. Instead, if extensionists are unable to reach farmers with the technologies they possess, we should all re-examine those technologies *per se* and extension methods. If research achievements do not reach extensionists, we should re-examine those achievements and methods *per se*.

Let us first examine the origin of technologies, that is, of research achievements. Every year the research institutes and universities of in China apply themselves to many projects and areas of research. However, the identification of research topics has not been determined on the basis of the practical needs of farmers. On the contrary, the research projects are selected by the researchers themselves based on their own professional interests, or many have been formulated on the basis of the ideas or interests of the fund-providing agencies or of some key decision makers. But what farmers need are those agricultural technologies that can solve the practical problems they face in their production and livelihood efforts. Therefore the way of identifying research projects every year brings the inevitable gaps described above.

We should also examine the research methodologies. More generally in the scientific world traditional agricultural research was always conducted in laboratories, and it is not difficult to imagine how such laboratory research was far removed from production and livelihood realities. Later, research moved to research stations where research was conducted in experimental stations established by research institutes and universities. The contemporary trend of agricultural research is on-farm research, that is, to conduct the research in farmers' fields with agricultural research and technology development characterised by farmer participation. This kind of research is closer to the farmers' life reality and therefore can better reflect the farmers' practical needs. In China, however,

current agricultural research is mostly oriented to the first two concepts and practices, i.e. laboratory research and on-station research. Of course, we do not wish to create the impression that we deny the importance of laboratory and on-station research, on the contrary, many elementary researches have to be conducted in laboratories and stations. What we are discussing here, however, refers to applied agricultural research, the results of which are expected to be relevant to and used by farmers.

In the process of decision making on development and technology options, farmers often play, if any, only a passive role. For instance, many development and extension programs carried out each year in China are determined by government agencies and technical departments. They are in fact not aiming at farmers' real needs, and even if that were, they would be the farmers' needs as perceived by the government planning and technical departments. Many surveys in rural areas have highlighted the fact that farmer needs can be very different from the components of government-determined development and extension projects. Many failures have stemmed from the practice of not involving farmers in the identification process of development and extension projects. On the other hand, the single discipline approach has also created difficulties in rural development and extension. This is because professional experts and technicians, who have knowledge of a single discipline, are not able to cope with the complex environment of the rural community, and normally tend to recommend development options and technological alternatives from their own disciplinary point of view. The development options and technological alternatives thus recommended will neither fit with the farmers' production and living environment, nor contribute to integrated rural community development. Many practical experiences have revealed that the recommendations of experts and technicians might be indeed technically justified from a single discipline point of view, but the complex reality does not allow farmers to follow recommendations based on one single discipline. In practice, farming is the integration and interaction of many disciplines. Therefore, in rural community development, the single disciplinary approach should be transformed towards a multi-disciplinary, cross-disciplinary even super-disciplinary approach.

Currently there are still many professionals and technicians advocating a technocratic approach. They believe technology can solve all development problems, and therefore they do not try to understand the complexity of the rural community, and neither do they try to understand farmers. Some officials are keen on inviting outside experts and professors to give lectures in rural villages, and the tendency is 'the more famous, the better'. However, their basic lack of understanding of the particular community, leads them, after the lectures, again to conclude that 'farmers here are disqualified, they are conservative and stubborn, because they do not want to apply the technology of the lecture'. Factors such as wanting to earn cash by going to urban centres, having too little land to apply the recommended technology, or not having the financial means to buy seeds or fertiliser, or believing the agricultural taxes levied are too high to apply the recommended technology, may be important factors that are not taken into account. Thus without being made relevant to the particular community and its farmers, lectures and training may not be of practical use or effect. Farmers can only again conclude 'they do not know us at all'. Such a technocratic approach should therefore be re-examined, along with the tendency to believe that experts and technologies are a universal panacea for rural development.

Conventional development practice has normally focused only on technical factors to the neglect of non-technical factors, or has considered them as isolated from each other. In fact common sense and experience shows that these two factors interlock, and sometimes the non-technical factors play the more important role. It is a powerful reason for analysing the local socio-economic and cultural aspects of the community development process, in addition to technical factors. It is to be noted that traditionally development projects have normally only required a technical feasibility study, whereas today they require an assessment of both the technical feasibility and the socio-economic aspects in order to comprehensively analyse the interrelation and interaction of technical with non-technical factors. Another aspect, is that of gender sensitivity. This is still lacking in conventional development practice and agricultural extension. However, many experiences gained and lessons learnt have shown the importance of carrying out community gender analysis and gender planning when we undertake rural development practice, so as to achieve also gender sensitive community development.

Extension in China has been understood as spreading technology to farmers for wide application. This is the typical technology transfer approach; i.e. extensionists must first master all applied technologies and then pass them on to farmers. In fact it is not realistic for extensionists to know all updated applied technologies. Extension in western education has now shifted to communication and innovation studies. Here communication refers to concepts and methods of communicating with farmers, and innovation refers to the process by which farmers get to know technology options, select technologies, and apply the selected technologies with adjustments and adaptations. Comparing the traditional with the modern understanding of the term extension we see difference between 'active' and 'passive', and between 'extension' and 'service'. According to the modern connotation of extension (communication and innovation), farmers are active in the technology adoption process, meaning they actively search themselves for new applied technologies according to their production and livelihood requirements. In such circumstance, extension is a kind of service, a kind of farmer demand-oriented advisory service. Such customer/farmer-oriented services include not only technology, but marketing, business management, farm design, financial management, and so on. In contrast, the extension system in China is still dominated by officials and technicians. Farmers are passive recipients in the technology transfer process, and the content of extension covers only technology. The extension methods applied in China are therefore only top down, i.e. the selection and choice of technology is a process of tasks assigned from national to lower levels, and certainly lacks any grassroots-level participation or feedback of technology application. In some western countries, farmers are considered the holders of extension; thus a kind of bottom up methodology is applied. In such circumstance, the selection and choice of technologies is made with the greater participation of farmers and is thus farmer/customer-oriented two-way communication.

Finally, let us look at extension organisation. In China, extension is operated by government with technology extension agencies established at each level. Thus, it is a formal governmental organisation, and its core consists of government officials and technicians. Farmers do not participate in the organisation. However, in some western

countries, farmers' organisations play an important role in the extension set-up. For instance, the National Farmers' Organisation (NFO) in the Netherlands and the National Farmers' Union (NFU) have both played an important role in the country's extension services. Let me say in summary, that conventional conceptions of development and extension should be transformed on the basis of recognising that farmers are the key stakeholders of such development and extension. And in particular, we should all replace the concept of 'working for farmers' by the concept of 'working with farmers'.

As argued, a rural community is an independent natural, social, economic and cultural unit, and is thus essentially different to a laboratory or research station. Importantly, communities are heterogeneous and thus differ from each other. Such differences are revealed not only in physical aspects, but also in socio-economic and cultural aspects, and between community members in terms of their ideology, knowledge, customs and traditions, and so on. Therefore, development options for rural communities should also be differentiated to suit the particular community, that is, options should be community specific. However, many decision-makers and technicians still strongly advocate the concept and practice of so called 'unified planning, unified design and unified implementation', which contradicts the concept of community heterogeneity. Such unified approaches have resulted in many failures in development practice.

People normally think that farmers have much to learn from outsiders, especially outside technicians. However, outsiders also have much to learn from farmers. This continuous and mutual learning mechanism should become established in rural community development. As a foreign poem says 'everyone is ignorant, only on different subjects'. However, reality is always far from theory. When outsiders (officials and technicians) visit a rural community, they are often highly profiled and accompanied by a group with lots of cars, cameras and recorders, sometimes even with a police car to lead the way. Such profiling will not create a favourable atmosphere for outsiders to learn from farmers. And farmers have a wealth of indigenous knowledge that can and should be widely utilised in rural development.

All outside support in terms of information, technology and funds can play a facilitating role in community development. However to sustain community development outside interventions must be transformed by the farmers themselves, in other words by some internal dynamics. That is to say farmers must accept the choice of outside intervention and appropriate it as their own development commitment. Only by doing this, can farmers' increase their 'ownership' of such development. Analysing village development in China demonstrates that in effect villages develop by driving forces of an internal nature, meaning that development initiatives arise largely from within, from the stakeholders of the community – among them the farmers, and development can thus be called endogenous. In contrast, farmers regard development interventions of an exogenous kind as the business of national and international donor agencies, and the business of officials and technicians. Such development cannot be sustainable in the long run.

Finally, let me re-examine conventional rural development practice from a basic development sociology perspective. In community development there are different actors and stakeholders, with differentiated life-worlds. For instance, there are farmers,

community teachers and financial accountants in a community whose life-worlds differ yet overlap. The life-worlds of teachers circle around students, classrooms, and teaching methods and quality, the life-worlds of the financial accountant are made up of figures, taxes, levies, budgets, and the life-worlds of farmers are replete with fields, crops, children's education, taxes and so on. Obviously their life-worlds, though different, have areas that overlap. This also applies to the three actors - researchers, extensionists and farmers. Were outsiders to fully appreciate this concept of different actors having differentiated life-worlds they would recognise that farmers' life worlds are likely to be very distant from their own and that they are therefore not in a position to adequately summarise community problems on their behalf, nor decide development options for them but need actively to consult with farmers and make joint decisions on community development and technological options. In this way, outsiders and farmers could indeed be colleagues.

Summarising this critique of conventional rural community development practice, we can conclude that experts and technicians are not a universal panacea, that farmers are not ignorant but themselves mostly know what is best for them, and that communities are inherently heterogeneous and made up of different actors and life-worlds. Furthermore community development should be more gender sensitive, and development should be regarded as a continuous learning process by all those involved.

On the basis of these remarks let me now turn to consider the participatory community development approach, which aims to address these issues more directly.

#### *Participatory rural community development*

Participatory development was established on the basis of the re-examination of conventional development practice and the experiences of international aid development practice in developing countries after World War II. It has been roughly estimated that from the 1920s to the 1990s, international multilateral and bilateral aid to developing countries amounted to 300 billion US dollars. However, despite this, by the early 1990s, the gap between North and South was still increasing and people began to ask 'why'? Technology and finance *per se* were certainly not the problem, and thus a serious evaluation began of the philosophy of project intervention design, the operational mechanism of projects, and the executive agencies and cooperation partners involved. Already in the 1980s academics and enlightened practitioners were pointing out that poor populations were able to analyse their own situations and that development intervention should aim to facilitate villagers to take a share, innovate and apply their own knowledge and situations in the planning and implementation process.

Development intervention, then, was to become more open and transparent, and development options and decision-making rights needed to be empowering to the target groups. National and regional development interventions should encourage and advocate mass population participation. 'Stakeholders' needed to be self-organised and share various responsibilities so in order to aim at 'common' development objectives. The donors, planners, executive bodies and beneficiaries should establish a kind of effective, equal and mutually beneficial partnership. All these practical experiences have enriched the concept of participatory development.



Participatory development believes that outside support is important, but accepts that local inhabitants are able to analyse and solve their own problems. Thus it views development *per se* as a process of enhancing local people's self-development and self-organising capacities so that they can share responsibilities and commitment to common objectives. People's active participation in their own development is seen as a kind of basic right – the right to development. Reducing poverty is regarded as an important national goal whose success relies on whether the process can be started from the grassroots, and whether local people can be organised to actively participate in its reduction. The basic principles of participatory development include establishing partnerships, community specific development options, respect for indigenous knowledge and for farmers' skills and knowledge, and seeing them as masters of their own development. Emphasis is on the process and not only the results. The core of participatory development is to underline people's own development. Local people are viewed not as passive development objects, but the holders and guardians of any development process. Only when local people's development is enhanced in the rural development process, can such development be sustainable.

### *The notion of participation*

The term participation is a fashion that has been widely used by practitioners in the field of international development, but it is often no more than a discourse to guarantee the success of development project proposals. In many cases the word participation is often abused and used simply as a synonym of 'presence'. Thus many officials tend to give examples of participation by cataloguing how they have organised farmers and women to join meetings and have joined in with the physical work on development projects to show the great extent of their own and local people's participation in rural development. Such attendance at meetings and physical work in fact is no more than a symbol of being present, rather than being the primary condition for achieving empowerment, democracy, good governance, innovation, cooperation, decentralisation and capacity building.

Furthermore, professionals define the term participation differently. Here are some selected examples. Public participation refers to the direct involvement of the public in decision-making through a series of formal and informal mechanisms (Sewell and Coppock 1977). Participation is 'before-the-act' involvement in the choices and efforts producing benefits' (Uphoff and Esman in de Valk and Wekwete 1990). Citizen participation is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic process, to be deliberately included in the future (Cahn and Passett 1971). Participation will be defined as voluntary and democratic involvement of people in decision-making with regard to setting goals, formulating policies, planning, implementing and evaluating economic and social development programmes, contributing to development efforts, and sharing the benefits therefrom (M. Poppe in Jenssen. 1992). Participation leads to the following benefits: a greater commitment and ability to implement decisions and strategies, more innovation, a larger portfolio of ideas, encouragement of initiative and responsibility (Spencer 1989). People's participation may be defined as the process by which the rural poor are able to organise themselves and their own organisations are able to identify their own

needs and share in the design, implementation and evaluation of the participatory action. Such action is self-generated, based on their access to production resources and services other than their labour and the continued security of that access. It is also based on initial assistance and support to stimulate and sustain the development action programmes (Oakley et al. 1991). Oakley and Marsden (1984) reviewed a whole range of interpretations of participation in development projects and presented them as a continuum to illustrate the direct relationship between interpretation and development analysis. In a more limited way, the following four statements summarise this range of interpretations. (i) Participation is considered a voluntary contribution by the people in one or another of the public programmes supposed to contribute to national development, but the people are not expected to take part in shaping the programme or criticising its contents (Economic Commission for Latin America 1973). (ii) With regard to rural development, participation includes people's involvement in the decision-making process, in implementing programs, their sharing in the benefits of development programs and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programs (Cohen and Uphoff 1977). (iii) Participation is concerned with organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and moments of those hitherto excluded from such control (Pearse and Stiefel 1979). (iv) Community participation is an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish (Paul 1987).

From these selected definitions given by different professionals, and from experience of rural development practice itself, we can conclude that participation is certainly not simply a symbolic presence in meetings and physical work. Participation refers more to involvement in decision making, contributions and efforts, initiatives and responsibilities, indigenous knowledge and innovation, access to and control over resources, capacity building, benefits sharing, self-organisation and self-reliance. Involvement in decision-making and choices is a reversal of the traditional conformist approach. All development efforts aim to benefit target groups but only when farmers completely participate in the entire development cycle including identification, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation can their needs and requirements be satisfied and met. This calls for another reversal of the traditional approach of 'we work for them (farmers)' to 'we work with them (farmers)'. People's participation in development also implies that beneficiaries should contribute to many aspects of development efforts, in terms of labour, skills, knowledge, and commitment and responsibility for its success.

One important aspect of the participatory development approach is to expect that local people will fully use their own knowledge and skills in development actions within their own familiar circumstances. Farmers are more aware of and more familiar with their own constraints, potentials and development opportunities than any outsider, and have developed particular knowledge and skills to deal with their own problems through long practice. Development efforts can therefore only play a facilitating role in a community, facilitating the development of know-how, the application of indigenous knowledge for understanding issues, introducing relevant outside factors and helping people to use their own innovations to develop their community. Furthermore, access to and control

over resources is a precondition for active participation in development actions, and in turn participation is also a process whereby local people seek to gain some influence over access to and control over resources that can help them sustain and improve their livelihood.

Participation can be seen as the key to the inclusion of human resources in development efforts. Previously, planners overlooked the contributions that people could make and the skills that they could bring to development interventions. But as Oakley comments (1991), if one can incorporate the human element into interventions and persuade people to participate in them, then there is a stronger chance of such interventions being successful. Therefore, one of the main objectives of participatory development is to help rural people to educate and train themselves more broadly in order to assess critically their situation, to organise themselves to become more powerful and to creatively work for change. Participation definitely does not mean that local people should participate in all the input aspects of larger development actions such as afforestation and construction work etc. without also participating in a share of the benefits. Where a share of the benefits is not part of the overall intervention policy set-up, one cannot and should not expect poor farmers to participate in such efforts. Here benefits refer to either direct or indirect ones. Participatory intervention is also about promoting adequate forms of self-help and organisation for subsistence farmers to be able better to satisfy their own specific social and economic needs. Some participatory interventions show the highest standards of promoting people's own self-reliance. In such cases, external intervention is of a catalytic nature, stimulating and sensitively assisting people's collective action, taking care not to create a dependence of the people on external support, raising people's awareness and capacities, and eventually withdrawing, leaving behind self-reliant, forward-moving people's processes (ILO 1987:1).

Finally redistribution of power and democratisation is a higher level of participatory development. It partly aims at political and constitutional development, in order to enable and ensure the immediate participation of local people in community development processes.

#### *Participatory community development planning*

Participatory community development planning is an important practical measure for achieving participatory development. Internationally, there has been a broad consensus that development planning should be shifted from the national, towards the regional, the county, and the community level, and that planning should emphasise endogenous development based on local resources and potentials. It should involve all those actors and institutions that can stimulate agriculture and other economic activities to develop a series of forward and backward linkages leading to increased sources of employment and income. It should aim to satisfy basic needs, encourage the use of appropriate technologies and indigenous knowledge, provide basic social and technical infrastructure, and develop settlement patterns that accord a role for small, rural centres. Here planning is not simply creating a general plan or design, but is a development measure - a process cycle, with steps that involve local actors in analysing their own situation and problems, utilising their own resources, formulating objectives and strategies, implementing, monitoring and evaluating actions, and re-planning. It

emphasises the participation of local actors, is problem solving and action oriented and continuous in nature.

The idea of community should be a basic concept of local development planning, even though national and provincial governments may play an important role in framing and implementing policy. Although participatory community development planning emphasises an endogenous development process, this does not exclude possible support from outside in terms of information, technology, capital or human resources. In fact mechanisms of articulation with outside markets and information are often crucial. What it does mean, however, is that planning should satisfy the needs and expectations of the community population, not those of outsiders, and should thus be in terms of real 'farmers' projects, rather than 'official', 'model' or 'symbolic' projects. The unequal distribution of economic, social and political power is to the disadvantage of the active participation of local actors in the development process, which is essential for motivation, self-reliance and productive involvement. This can only be achieved when participation in the decision making process over income, access to commodities, services and social security, is granted. In order to make sure that all interested groups are integrated and activated and – much more important – in order to harness the innovative potential of community actors for development, a communication process has to be initiated between all community interest groups. Such a process would be a learning process for all those involved - politicians, administrators, private investors, and last but not least the farmers. This communication process should aim for a kind of community consensus on development and should be realised in both what might be called 'indigenous' arenas as well as in the more formally organised community arenas or platforms initiated by intervening bodies. Problem orientation in development planning requires the identification and structuring of core and related problems, identifying their causes and effects, assessing their implications for the groups and interests affected in order to reach a pragmatic consensus over what is important before deciding upon and taking action. This can only be achieved by an understanding from all points of view and sides. This kind of comprehensive development approach is, however, by no means easy to operationalise. Sectoral planning is too far removed from the complexities of reality to offer a satisfactory alternative. Even taking into account the investment of time and finance involved, community action planning favours an interactive planning process that starts with a community-wide communication process and selects priority entry actions for development according to the outcome of community dialogue (Jenssen 1992: 16-18).

## CHAPTER 3

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### ENTERING THE COMMUNITY AND BUILDING TRUST

This chapter records the process of selecting and entering the research community. This started the long process of getting to know the community and building the community profile. The readers are presented with a process that highlights the specific context of rural China, its recent history, traditions, ideology, culture, and institutions.

#### **Selecting the Research Community**

Having the research proposal in mind, I needed to identify a suitable rural community for conducting the field research. I had been engaged professionally in the field of rural development practice, extension, training and research since the early 1990s. Development practice refers here to the fact that I provided technical assistance to various international and national projects in all parts of rural China. Such assistance included socio-economic assessments, feasibility studies, implementation, monitoring and evaluation for rural development projects. This experience, especially a number of socio-economic studies conducted in rural areas, enabled me to acquire a comprehensive picture and understanding of China, particularly rural society. China has a total area of 9.6 million square kilometres or 25 percent of Asia and 6.5 percent of the world continental area. It is the third largest country in the world. At present, China has 23 Provinces, 5 Autonomous Regions, and 4 Municipalities directly under the control of Central Government, and it has two Special Administrative Regions. It has 20,312 Townships and some 80,000 Administrative Villages. The administrative hierarchy has six levels, i.e. State, Province or Autonomous Region and Municipality, Prefecture/Municipality, County, Township and Village.

Of the 32 Provinces (this figure includes the Municipalities and Autonomous Regions), I have first hand field experience of twenty-three, among which is Hebei Province, the province finally chosen for the research. This experience included participation in one or more rural development projects in one or more rural areas in each of these provinces. This also implies that a kind of mixed formal/professional and personal network with some individuals and organisations and institutes in those provinces was established through whom I could make arrangements for selecting a rural community for this research. Moreover, through working with these individuals and organizations, a degree of trust was established which made my plans for conducting research in a rural community in their area seem natural and thus not a cause for concern or suspicion. Such trust further facilitated the entire process of carrying out the research in the field afterwards. Without such trust, I would have had to start from scratch and would have met many uncertainties and suspicion about the purpose and nature of my research. This would have built into the research plan a lot of unknown variables that may have adversely affected the conduct of the research.

Map 1 Map of China

Map 2 Sketch map of Pocang Township and the research community



With such considerations in mind, my immediate intention was to select a province in which I already had networks. I had the following considerations for this selection.

First, the rural community in the province should be representative. While accepting that 'it is wrong to regard one community as the sole representative sample of all Chinese rural communities, to view one rural community to be completely different from others in all aspects and to be absolute unique, is not correct either' (Fei Xiaotong 1996: 64), I nevertheless wanted a rural situation in a province that was not too extreme (e.g. highly urbanised). Second, the community had to be reasonably accessible. I would need to come to the community frequently and thus preferred a community that could be reached within the same day of travelling from my institute. Third, my links with individuals and organisations in each of the provinces were evaluated. I certainly wanted to use the stronger links and better personal networks to organise the research. Based on these criteria, I selected Hebei Province where a rural community could later be selected to conduct the research.

From 1988 to 1992, I devoted half of every year to working in the rural areas of Hebei Province. During that period, the Government launched a policy to develop grain production in the Huang-Huai-Hai region, that is, in the middle and lower reaches of the Huang (Yellow), Huai and Hai Rivers. Hebei Province is one of the key provinces in this Huang-Huai-Hai region. In order to ensure technical support for the implementation of the grain production policy, the National and Provincial Governments promoted the participation of universities, particularly agricultural universities to render technical advice and carry out new technological extension in rural areas. As a representative of China Agricultural University (still called Beijing Agricultural University at that time but later merged with Beijing Agricultural Engineering University to become China Agricultural University in 1997), I worked firstly in Dongguang County for two years and later in Wu'an County for three years. In these two counties I worked mainly with the County Agricultural Bureau and local Townships. Major activities included a socio-economic survey of rural communities, demonstration experiments of new technologies in farmers' fields, training and extension, and so on. Most of the time was spent in rural villages with rural actors (farmers, officials, technicians, and so on). Thus, I acquired a lot of information on the southern and eastern parts of Hebei Province.

In 1994, as one of a four-member team, I carried out a six-week socio-economic feasibility study for the Hebei Sino-German Afforestation Project (KfW). From 1992, KfW, the German Development Bank, representing the German government and the Chinese Ministry of Finance and State Forestry Administration, jointly launched 19 Sino-German Afforestation Projects, covering 15 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions, mainly distributed in the 'Three North' areas (north-middle, north-east and north-west of China) and the Yangtze River regions. All had a strong socio-economic focus. Most are still ongoing. Each of these projects is relatively large, with a target of over 30,000 hectares of afforestation and mountain closure, together with related project activities on environmental rehabilitation and poverty alleviation. To a great extent, the projects have achieved their expected targets, and those implemented at the early stage have had good demonstration effects - having achieved an improvement in the ecological environment and having helped farmers to alleviate poverty and encouraged them to participate in the reform and development of forestry.

During the six-week feasibility study, a number of workshops and interviews with the provincial and county officials and technicians from related governmental and technical

institutions were held. In addition, a socio-economic survey was carried out and an analysis made of 20 selected villages in all four project counties, namely Laishui County, Yixian County, Laiyuan County and Tangxian County. This survey and analysis itself gave experience of the process and ways of interacting with village actors, particularly the male and female farmers, village officials and local technicians and many lessons were learned. Key methods and tools applied by the team in the 20 villages included meetings and discussion with key informants, village resource mapping, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews (male and female), ranking of problems, ranking of preferences and ranking of wealth, trend analysis, and included case studies. The socio-economic study aimed to come to conclusions about the appropriateness of the project's goals and purposes; to indicate the interests and concerns of the various subgroups of the population affected by project activities; and to recommend how their interests, concerns, preferences and willingness to participate and accept project measures could be integrated into the overall project design. The study also aimed to analyse the major social risks that would likely affect project implementation under the existing design of the proposed project.

This socio-economic study enabled me to establish strong professional and personal networks with individuals and organisations at the Hebei provincial and four counties level. The study provided a great deal of basic socio-economic information on the areas that lies to the north-east of the Taihang Mountain range, in particularly in the 20 selected survey villages. The research community I finally selected includes one of these survey villages – Nandugang Village in Yixian County. The strong network established benefited from the successful completion of the study and the harmonious and cooperative working atmosphere amongst the study team and the local partners. This was useful as it won the local partners confidence in the team's professional capacities. They had observed the respect and good relationships between the team and the international study experts and our ability to communicate with them in the English language. In many cases the study also gave me experience of playing a bridging role and resolving subject-matter conflicts between local partners and the international study experts. Such interventions also helped to build trust in our relationships and in this respect the representative of the local partners group, Mr. Tian Suozhang, made a great personal contribution.

In 1994, Mr. Tian Suozhang was about 45 years old. He had graduated from Beijing Forestry University in 1981. Since 1994, he has been Director of the Hebei Provincial Sino-German Afforestation Project Office in Hebei Provincial Forestry Department. The entire project feasibility study in 1994 was organised and co-ordinated by him on the local side. Mr. Tian also co-ordinated the technical and socio-economic feasibility study teams and spent much time with our socio-economic team. He enjoyed talking about people more than he did about soils, seedlings, trees and pest control. He also offered us, as is custom, the opportunity to relax with him over drinks. During the study period, the Chinese moon cake festival took place, which is on August 15 in the Chinese lunar calendar. During that day family members get together to eat moon cake and enjoy the full moon. However, because the study team and Mr. Tian and his colleagues were unable to return to their families, we celebrated the festival together with the international experts like a big family. This event greatly enhanced personal relationships and the event was often recalled by Mr. Tian and other Chinese



colleagues. There were tears in many eyes when we departed from the project area.

During this experience I gained substantial knowledge of Hebei province. The Province is located in North China with Bohai Sea to the east, Taihang Mountains to the west, the Yellow River to the south and Mongolian plateau to the north. Its total area is 18,7,693 km<sup>2</sup> with Municipalities of Beijing and Tianjin embraced in its territory. The Province has a population of 66 million and consists of 11 provincially administered municipalities under which are 176 counties (city or district counties). The capital city of Hebei Province, Shijiazhuang is about 300 km from Beijing.

In early 1999, I started the process of identifying a rural community in Hebei Province to carry out the research. Because of the existing link with Mr. Tian and his office in the Provincial Forestry Department, I initiated the process by contacting him and his institution first. The Hebei Afforestation Project was still in progress and since 1996, I had been responsible for organising the national technical inputs, thus my contact with Mr. Tian and his office had continued. A colleague was also working for the project as project management specialist. In February 1999, this colleague was travelling to the provincial capital to render a few days service to the project and I accompanied him to meet with Mr. Tian. In this way everything would seem more official and project related. Before travelling I had contacted Mr. Tian by telephone with the pretext of seeing how his project was running and how we might in the future improve the national technical service. I then mentioned in passing that I wanted to discuss with him the possibility of planning a small-scale development related research project in a rural area in his province.

As expected, Mr. Tian welcomed the visit to his place and his project. It is strategic to talk about official business and introduce it first on the phone, and only then mention in passing something additional. Mr. Tian could have no worries if it was considered official business. Under such a precondition, many things that follow can be arranged more naturally and will not be seen as personal. For example, Mr. Tian could legitimately accompany me to the field. Under the umbrella of the official Sino-German afforestation project, the additional thing – and of course the main reason for my visit – was much easier to introduce, first, because the afforestation project is an important subject for the province, and second, my institute had already successfully co-operated with Mr. Tian's organisation over the project. Without this official pretext and the networks of trust built up, my request to Mr. Tian to do research in his area for my Ph.D. would have seemed more like a request for personal help. The visit gave Mr. Tian the opportunity to discuss my project and raise any questions and concerns he might have relating to the research, which were probably more easily done face to face rather than by phone. I had not mentioned on the phone my intention to discuss with him identifying a rural community for carrying out my Ph.D. research, but only that we were hoping to plan a small scale development related project in a rural area in the province.

Approaching things in this way is partly due to the fact that sociological research requires not a one week or one month field survey, but several years' of continuous work, during which I would need to visit and quite frequently stay for periods in the selected rural community. Without any other kind of linking activity, it might be

difficult to get the community's long term support. However, if I could at the same time help the selected rural community to apply for and to implement a small-scale development project, then the community would welcome this and in the meantime I could confidently carry out my research. In this way, the research again becomes an official activity. Many facts afterwards proved the justification of implementing my research in this way. In 1999 my institute had just completed a small-scale community development project in Yanqing County of Beijing Municipality. The project was for farmer household livelihood development by providing free of charge young goats or cattle to poor families under a participatory arrangement, and it had been very successful. The project was supported by the German NGO called EZE (Evangelische Zentralstelle Fuer Entwicklungshilfe E.V.), and EZE had promised my institute that they would continue to support another small-scale rural community development project. Therefore, I already had an almost 100% chance of success, and this project could serve as the carrier of my research.

As planned, after spending time discussing Sino-German Afforestation Project issues with Mr. Tian and his colleagues, I was able to explain to Mr. Tian:

“... we want to identify a rural community to plan a small-scale development project. We have the following objectives: (i) We are a Rural Development College of the Agricultural University, we want to develop a practical approach to community development in China, for instance how to organise farmers, how to mobilise local resources, and so on. This will be beneficial to overall rural development in China at macro level. (ii) By implementing such a rural development project in a rural community, we wish to establish a practical base for the students from our college. (iii) In the wake of the project implementation, we will organise some surveys and research to be conducted in the selected community...”

Here I again put the research purpose last for identifying the rural community. The first two objectives would certainly be welcomed by any local official, because the small-scale project would physically contribute to the development of the community, and association with a central university in China and in particular becoming the practical base of the university students would bring many direct and indirect benefits to the local community. Having the first two objectives accepted, the third objective of doing research would be viewed as natural, because it would be assumed as normal for a university to conduct research. As expected, Mr. Tian's response was positive, and he welcomed having the project in Hebei Province. He directly suggested that such a community development project could be planned in one of the four afforestation project counties, i.e. Laishui, Yixian, Laiyuan and Tangxian. From his experience over the past several years of the Sino-German Project, he advised of the four counties not to select Tangxian County, 'because the staff there [referring mainly to the staff of the County Forestry Bureau] are not very good'.

'The staff there are not good' implied that Mr. Tian himself had little trust in them, or did not have a good network with them. His judgement of the other three Counties also rested on his trust of and network with the staff built during the six-week socio-economic study in the four project counties. Of the four counties, Laishui is adjacent to

Fangshan District of Beijing Municipality, where tourism is relatively developed, Laiyuan is a rather remote and mountainous area and less convenient for access. Under such considerations, I agreed with Mr. Tian's preference for Yixian County for selecting a community for the research.

With the above consensus, Mr. Tian and I came to Yixian County. He had explained the purpose of the visit before our arrival. The immediate contacts in Yixian County were with the County Forestry Bureau - Mr. Zhao Changzhen, its director, Mr. Zhang Wencheng, deputy director, and Mr. Feng Yongxiang, deputy director of the Yixian County Sino-German afforestation project office. I repeatedly explained the objectives of the visit and Mr. Tian indicated that it was on his recommendation that I had come to that county and he requested the local people to support any future possible activities. As expected, the local officials gave our visit a warm welcome. I already knew them from the project's socio-economic study. They also showed great interest in the idea of carrying out a small-scale development project in one of rural communities. In order first to identify a township for further selecting the research community, I asked the local officials for basic information on the County. Yixian County is located in the north of Hebei Province, and administered by Baoding Municipality. It has 28 townships and 469 administrative villages. The total population is about 540,000, of whom 520,000 are a rural agricultural population. It is a typical agriculture-dominated county. Its total land area is about 3.8 million mu (1 ha = 15 mu), of which 2.4 million mu are for forestry use. The average per capita income is around 1,200 Yuan (1US\$ = 8.3 Yuan in 1999). The major crops are wheat, maize, sweet potato, millet and soybean. The main economic industries are agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, some small-scale mine development and tourism, etc. The county capital is about 100km from Beijing and 210 km from the provincial capital, Shijiazhuang.

In addition, an agro-ecological and socio-economic zoning exercise was conducted with local officials. This exercise was to cluster different geographical zones with similar patterns in terms of natural conditions, agricultural, forestry and animal husbandry productions, and socio-economic aspects such as population, labour force, migration and per capita income etc. From this exercise, Yixian County can be simply divided into three agro-ecological and socio-economic zones, i.e. the plain area to the east, the mountainous area to the west, and the middle area of plain and mountain. The eastern part is dominated by agriculture with higher crop production and higher per capita income. Forestry and animal husbandry have only a small share. The western part has relatively less land for cropping, but a higher proportion of forestry and animal husbandry production. Farmer's per capita income is relatively low. The middle part lies between these two. Because experience reveals that the plain areas have less cultural dynamics, that area was not considered for choosing a community. Thus, I asked local officials to recommend one township in the middle area and one in the west, for a field reconnaissance. Two townships were then proposed, i.e. Liujiing Township in the middle area and Pocang Township in the west. For both townships Mr. Tian, the county forestry officials and I held discussions with township officials after which one village in each township was visited. Later, I discovered that one of the forestry officials, Mr. Zhang Wencheng had been the director of the Pocang Township government before he moved to the County Forestry Bureau.

Liujing Township is about 10 km away from the Yixian County Capital, bordering with Laishui County. The township administers 14 villages. One of the villages visited was Liujing, a village with 335 households and 1,114 rural inhabitants. The arable land in this village is 2,767 mu, of which 1,000 mu can be irrigated. Farmer's per capita income in the village reached to 1,800 Yuan (app. 217US\$) in 1999. The village has about 5,000 mu of mountain forestry area. I was not at all impressed by this township, because the head and his colleagues were not dynamic, the same applied to the several village leaders met in Liujing. They seemed very interested in any material or financial support for the township but showed little interest in discussing any conceptual approaches in relation to rural development. The township has a lot of plain fields, the road connecting the county capital and the township was very dusty, and passing cars left clouds of dust hanging in the air for a long time. The township is quite close to the county capital and thus it is relatively urban related, and largely affected by tourism to the nearby Qing Dynasty Tombs.

Carrying such an unsatisfactory mood, I continued by car to Pocang Township, again with Mr. Tian and the county forestry officials. About five minutes after leaving the county capital, before us appeared a very clean and well-paved mountain road, although narrow. On the way, I saw village settlements, one after the other, with chicken, pigs and ducks around. Goats and sheep and their herders were to be seen on the mountainsides. Sometime the herders were teenage schoolgirls. After one and half-hours driving, I arrived at the Pocang Township with great interest. The administration is situated in the usual locale, a courtyard with several rows or blocks of one-story buildings that serve as offices, a pattern found everywhere in China. In such a place one finds representatives of all governmental administrative and political bodies in line with higher administrative and political government at county, municipal, provincial and national level. For instance, there is the People's Government of Pocang Township, which is in line with the State Council, and the Communist Party Committee of Pocang Township, which is in line with the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee. The People's Congress of Pocang Township is in line with the National People's Congress, and the Political Consultative Committee of Pocang Township is in line with the National Political Consultative Committee. Amongst these administrative and political bodies, the People's Government and the Communist Party Committee are the ones that play the key roles in rural areas. The People's Government of Pocang Township is in charge of the operation and administration of the township, with one director and three deputies. The Communist Party Committee is in charge of issues that relate to the communist party in the township, with one party secretary and three deputies. In practice, the party secretary is the first decision-maker in the township, taking overall responsibility for the administration and operation of the township, while the director is the second decision-maker, mainly for assisting the party secretary. The party secretary and several of his deputies or colleagues were already waiting for us. Certainly a contact had been made already by the county forestry officials. According to the normal practical order in China, because I am from Beijing, viewed as 'central', or top of the administrative hierarchy by local people in China, I explained first the purpose of the visit:

“... in fact we are very familiar with your township, because my colleagues and I came here before for the purpose of the Sino-German Afforestation

Project. As we have discussed with director Tian, director Zhao, and director Zhang, we are a Rural Development College of the Agricultural University and we are looking for a suitable rural community in order to plan and implement a small-scale rural development project. By implementing such a project, we intend to develop a practical approach on community development in China, for instance how to organise farmers, how to mobilise local resources, and so on. We also wish to see whether such a rural community can be a practical base for the students from our college. In addition, during the time of the project planning and implementation, we will organise some surveys and researches to be conducted in the community. We have just come, after our discussion we would also like to see a village. If we select a rural community here in your township, we will come very frequently in the future, we will take a lot of your time, but I think this is also a good opportunity for your township to be linked with the outside. If we come in the future, we will not ask director Tian, director Zhao, director Zhang to come, because they are very busy, instead, we will always come directly to you. As we say in China: ‘for the first time when we meet we are new to each other, but next time we will be more familiar’, I hope we will be good friends from the third time on.”

I obviously wanted to develop a direct link with them for possible future contacts and co-operation. After my introduction, Mr. Tian gave some information on the latest development in relation to the Sino-German project, since Pocang Township also belongs to the project area, and then repeated the purpose of our visit. Director Zhao concluded:

“... the purpose is very clear to us. If a rural community can be identified in Pocang Township, I think it is not only a good thing for Pocang, but also good for the County. I hope you (the local township personnel) will try your best to fulfil the needs (of the researcher). They are from Beijing, it is not so easy for people living in big city to come to our poor mountainous area, we should try to make comfortable arrangements for teachers and students when they come in the future.”

Although short, Mr. Zhao’s words were very important, because he had verbally concluded the tune of the purpose by saying ‘it is a good thing’. Since Mr. Zhao represents the highest authority at County level, the township people would certainly follow him. Finally the party secretary expressed a warm welcome to the visitors and said:

“... we will follow what director Tian and director Zhao have said. We hope you can finally choose a community from our township and we, at township level, we will try our best to support any activity in the future. We indeed hope many teachers and students from Beijing will come to our township ...”

After that, the party secretary gave very detailed information about the township. Later I discovered that the party secretary and several of his colleagues graduated from Hebei Provincial Agricultural University. This brings me and the party secretary and his

colleagues much closer, because they and I are all from agricultural universities in China. This can be viewed as 'having common words'. In addition, most of the township officials met were in their thirties and very enthusiastic about their work, and again their similar ages brings them and me closer. The geographical patterns, the environment and also the village visited were all very impressive to me. The village briefly visited later became one of the research villages. Therefore, Pocang Township was eventually selected for the small-scale development project and the associated research.

Pocang Township is located in the western mountainous areas of Yixian County of Hebei Province. It covers a total area of 72.6 square km. Winter temperatures drop below freezing and the summers are hot and dry. Annual average precipitation is around 500 mm. Administratively, the township comprises 9 villages and 54 farmers' groups. The nine administrative villages are Yuangang, Nandugang, Sanggang, Gaotai, Pocang, Baoshi, Modoudian, Shangweichang, and Xiaweichang. There are in total 1,561 households in the township, with a total population of 5,857, amongst which 2,861 are labourers (the active work population in terms of work). The average per capita income is 1,000 Yuan (120 US\$), mainly from agricultural cropping and labour migration. 70% of the land area in the township is mountainous, and only 10% of the land area is arable. The remaining 20% is for water area, road and settlement. The total arable land is 5,615 mu. Agriculture is dominated by wheat (30%), maize (50%), sweet potato, peanuts and millet (20%). The average yield is 250 kg/mu for wheat, 400 kg/mu for maize. The total mountainous area amounts to 83,695 mu. There is a seasonal river crossing the township, mainly for irrigation. The main livestock animals are pigs, sheep and rabbits. There is no collective enterprise, but a few private ones. The township has a junior middle school, a clinic and two markets that open on specific days. Each village has a primary school.

I did not visit all villages in the township for a final determination of villages. However, I did indicate that I preferred one or two adjacent villages with homogenous characteristics that they considered a real rural community, and that the village(s) should represent the average level in terms of village economy and farmer's per capita income. It was agreed that the township would discuss the matter again and let me know their proposal, and that I would organise a team to come back to the township after the Chinese Spring Festival which was some ten days after this visit. This festival is the most important in China, especially in rural areas, and is regarded in the same way as Christmas in western countries. Government employees in the cities will normally have five to ten days' holiday, all students have about one month's winter vacation, while farmers in rural areas will spend one month or even more time for the festival, depending on the labour requirements of agricultural production. During this festival period, farmers invite guests to their homes for drinks and a meal, many of them also get together to chat, watch television together, or play cards, or *Mah-Jongg* and so on. There will also be some indigenous performances, such as local opera, local dances and games and a local fair etc.

About two weeks after the Spring Festival, the township party secretary, Mr. Zhao from the County Forestry Bureau, and four village party secretaries representing four selected villages came to visit my institute. We showed them around the university campus and

our college, and gave them a detailed introduction on the operation and the professional fields in which the college was active. This visit was firstly a return visit by the local people to show that they were very interested in our proposal. Secondly it was a confirmation visit to further test whether the proposal of planning and implementing a rural development project in the township was feasible. As one of them, Mr. Liu Zhenkun, the party secretary of Nandugang Village, indicated some months later, they were not sure in the beginning whether my proposal could be realised. In their mind, the university would not have much funding for doing a project in a rural area, even if it was for pure research and one which would not bring any direct material benefit to them. Thirdly, it was a justifiable reason for the local people to come to Beijing, which is normally regarded as a kind of incentive, because they rarely have an opportunity to leave the area. In this way, the expenses related to their visit could easily be reimbursed from the official budget. They were very impressed by the visit to the university and the college. We invited all of them for lunch in a Mongolian style restaurant named Tiemuzhen, a self-service restaurant offering a spicy hot pot, and a variety of cooked food, sea food, roasted mutton and beef, fruits, dessert, and drinks and so on. They (especially the village people) were extremely impressed by such a variety of foods and also the style of self-service where you could take as much as you wanted. The event was mentioned many times on many occasions by all four village party secretaries and became during the later two years a kind of symbolic event that never failed to make the atmosphere much warmer when meeting with them.

Four villages had been proposed by the township as one joint community for planning and implementing the project and for doing the research. They explained that all nine villages in the township were interested to participate. However, these four villages were in one category in terms of agro-ecological and socio-economic similarities, and they were at the average level in terms of village and household economy. In general these four villages can be viewed as one community in the rural area. Particularly three of them, i.e. Yuangang, Nandugang and Sanggang Village are adjacent to each other with great homogenous characteristics at village level, thus they indeed can be regarded as one rural community with several dispersed settlements. Therefore, the research was mainly conducted in these three villages, a combined rural community with a few cases from the fourth village, Baoshi Village. The rural development project was planned and implemented in all four villages.

Thus, the township and the villages – the rural community - for the project and research were identified. Since the three villages are homogenous at village level, I used Nandugang Village (which represents the common characteristics of the other villages) for an analysis of the different spheres that have configured the rural village as a geographical and administrative, but also dynamic economic, social and cultural unit. However, different physical and demographic realities of the other three villages will also be presented in this thesis, and some cases are drawn from the other three villages to support the focused analysis. Tracing back the long process of selecting the research community, it can be concluded that this process *per se* is also a process of using various kinds of trust and social networks at different levels. But importantly, it was also a process of rebuilding trust and re-establishing social networks. In addition, Chinese societal particulars such as social norms, institutions, structure, social

behaviour, social etiquette are strongly embedded in such a selection process and are also obviously reflected in this recording.

### **Entering into the Community, Getting to Know the Community**

Theoretically, I had entered the community twice, but they amounted to little more than ‘physically’ entering or a ‘visit’, because they were very short and highly profiled, meaning we were accompanied by many officials and several cars, including police cars. In China, many governmental agencies (sometimes even non-governmental agencies) wish to register one or several of their cars with police plates, so as to be more privileged. On the other hand, there is a police branch in forestry agencies at different levels, mainly for preventing the illegal cutting and destroying of forests, and fire. Thus several cars of Yixian County Forestry Bureau have police plates. When we had previously visited the community, the cars from the county forestry bureau were definitely regarded as police cars by the villagers. In China, when high officials go to rural areas, or when there are important guests such as foreign guests visiting an area, the local government always seeks to have police cars leading the way. The purpose is more for showing respect than for security concerns. However, this is often misunderstood by some visitors, particularly foreign visitors. In any case, such a highly profiled visit can only be used to gain an impression or for asking about the basic statistical figures of the community and certainly not for any real understanding.

Nevertheless, the experience at Pocang Township, and the reception the four village party secretaries had been offered in Beijing, was a good foundation for our future activities in the area. My team (several assistants and I) came to Pocang and the selected villages to start the research and to plan for the development project in the four villages in March 1999. The event also marked the beginning of my fieldwork, after which I made a series of visits to the area lasting two weeks to a month. We named the project ‘Community Based Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development with Research Orientation in Yixian County, Hebei Province’. All components of the development activities planned were on the one hand to develop the livelihood of rural villagers, and on the other they served as carriers for conducting the said research. The research was budgeted as one project component. This proposal was submitted to EZE in Germany for financial support and due to our successful implementation of a previous EZE funded project in Yanqing County of Beijing Municipality, it was quickly approved. The implementation of the project was for two years, from 2000 to 2002. The approved project included the following components and budgets (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 EZE project components and budget

No.	Project Components	Budget (DM – German Marks)
1	Programme	152,000
1.1	Project Planning and Follow up	52,000
1.2	Training of Participants, Capacity Building	40,000
1.3	Water Resource Systems	32,000
1.4	Incentives for Development Programmes of Local Farmers	28,000
2	Research (including Co-ordination and Reporting)	24,000



3	Reserve	14,000
Total		190,000

The total budget amounted to Yuan 760,000 (1 DM = 4 Yuan approximately). Component 1.1 refers to all activities in relation to the formulation of the project plan of operation, its implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and short-term technical support to the project. Component 1.2 mainly included the establishment of a library in the four villages with a budget of Yuan 4,000 for each village, and various kinds of training for farmers, technicians and local officials. The training targets were evenly distributed among the four villages. Component 1.3, ‘Water Resource Systems’, included the construction of a water-blocking checkdam in Sanggang Village for Yuan 80,000, the construction of one water tower in Yuangang and Nandugang Villages with a budget of Yuan 40,000 each, and one water tower in Baoshi Village with a budget of Yuan 30,000. The EZE support amounted to Yuan 128,000, with the rest provided from Mr. Tian’s Office. Component 1.4 was designed to provide revolving funds for the economic development of poor households in the four villages. The distribution was Yuan 10,000, 40,000, 42,000, 20,000 for Sanggang, Yuangang, Nandugang and Baoshi villages respectively.

Component 2, that of ‘Research’ is the budget allocated purely to carrying out the proposed research activities. Component 3 was primarily meant to be utilised for coverage of expenditure exceeding the budgeted amount of an item because of price increase and there being no corresponding savings possible on other items. The proposed project activities all address the immediate needs of the four villages. The amount of project funds was extraordinary for both the four villages and the township. Therefore, my team and I were greatly appreciated by the township, villages and the farmers. The entire research mostly went very smoothly and all actors encountered were generally very cooperative.

Since the township party secretary was on business leave when the team first visited, he had designated his deputy, Mr. Wang, to fully cooperate with the team. Mr. Wang Jinsuo later became the key local contact for the following three years. He was about 35 years old in 1999. He graduated from Hebei Agricultural University with a Bachelor degree in Silviculture and had worked in Pocang Township for more than ten years. His first job there was township technician, and later he was promoted to deputy director of the Township Government, and Deputy Township Party Secretary. He is a man of action rather than a politician, otherwise, with his career and experiences he could have been a township party secretary already. His family lives in the capital of Yixian County and he visits them once a week on average, unless township work prevents him. Despite being a man of action he has been working in the local political structures for such a long time that he has been influenced to a great extent by bureaucratic politics. This was revealed in the speech that he made when we first met. When my team came to the township and had the briefing session with him he was reminded:

“... As you have known, Mr. Wang, we are from the College of Rural Development of China Agricultural University. We are very familiar with your township already, because my colleagues and I had come to this

township before for the purpose of the Sino-German Afforestation Project. As we have discussed with the Township Party Secretary, we are coming to plan and implement a small-scale rural development project in the four villages.... By planning and implementing such a project, we will conduct various kinds of research in the four villages. Such researches are very important to us. We also wish to have your township to be a practical base for the students from our college. When planning and implementing the project, and conducting our research, we would like to listen and learn more from farmers, especially the poor farmers. We strongly believe in the participatory approach in rural development. After this discussion with you, we will directly come and stay in the villages. As we indicated before, we will come here very frequently in the future, and will certainly take a lot of your time. If you have any advice for us, please let us know at any time.”

As many other local officials in China, Mr. Wang was not so fond of hearing that my team would apply the participatory approach in the project and the research. He said:

“... the party secretary told me that you were coming. We indeed welcome you from the university to do a project and research in our township. However, you may not be very familiar with the situation at grassroots level. In local areas, I think everything has to rely on the Party and the Government, it will not work if you only work with farmers without the support of the local authority. ...”

I explained to him that we were not going to shy away from local government, but only to address the farmers’ real needs and study the real situation of farmers and that we had common objectives with the Township Government to help develop the livelihoods of rural households. In this first encounter, Mr. Wang thus behaved precisely as one might expect of a local official. After the discussion in the township, Mr. Wang came to the village, taking the same car as me, and we were then able to have more personal communication with him. I later discovered that Mr. Wang still retained many of the characteristics of a technician, rather than a politician. When I explained to the villagers why a participatory approach was important, Mr. Wang understood very quickly. Later he always used his own words to explain to farmers the purpose of my team being there in the village, and also explained how the project would be planned and implemented and how the research would be conducted. After a few days, he told me that he liked the things we were doing there. He even indicated that he did not like very much the work he was doing, because many things were not on the ground. He knew that my team and I would be organising activities in the four villages for a long period and asked me to persuade the Township party secretary to let him fully join our activities for the period. This was how Mr. Wang became the key local contact for the research for the following three years.

#### *Position of the researcher in the community*

Traditionally, researchers have claimed to place themselves in a neutral position, so as to view issues and things objectively and to obtain truthful information, and have accordingly developed so-called objective research methods. Among these, the

positivist methodology has been over explored and excessively applied. This can most probably be realised in most of the research in natural science. However, in sociological research, particularly in rural development sociological research, to understand the community, its members and their dynamics, the researcher needs to interact with all community actors, from community organisers, administrators (village cadres) and technicians, the better-off and poorer farmers - male and female - and the children. During such interaction, it is not possible to isolate oneself and look at the actors as from outside the circle. Nor will it be possible for all actors to cooperate with the researcher by orienting their actions according to the researcher and research process needs. The latter also have different interests and imagined worlds, and thus conflicts naturally exist between them. During interactions between researcher and other actors, the contents of the interaction will certainly touch upon areas of conflict. The researcher can always try not to touch upon sensitive issues, however, the price of doing so is to put distance between researcher and researched and trust will suffer and inter-personal communications and thus the data collected will be far more limited. In sociological research, inter-personal communications are very important for understanding the multifarious local dynamics in many aspects.

Therefore, in my research I certainly did not intend to behave like a neutral and isolated objective outsider, but to play a role as far as possible of community member during the entire process. When interacting with community actors on certain subjects, I gave my own opinion and judgement, which might later have been spread to others in the community. On the other hand, my understanding or judgement on certain issues was changed or adjusted after direct face to face interaction. For instance, once I had the impression that Yuangang Village was not doing very well with the project revolving funds, others complained that Mr. Zhao Guo'an, the village party secretary only distributed the revolving funds to his farmer supporters or relatives. This information was provided by farmers from Yuangang and other villages. Afterwards, I went to discuss with Mr. Zhao with a lot of suspicions. However, as the discussion proceeded, I began to understand the rationality of his way of distributing the revolving fund. He had very clear views and reasoning on how to secure the repayment of the revolving funds one year after. His reasons led me to completely change my judgement on Mr. Zhao himself and on project implementation in Yuangang Village. The same applies to a case in Baoshi Village. One day the village cadres in Baoshi took me to the village primary school, where many students were crowded in small and narrow classrooms, I was deeply moved by conditions in the school. During lunch that day, the discussion was almost all related to the school, and I was willing to see to the possibility of helping to improve the school's facilities. Had there been no such visit and interaction, I would not have come up with this intention at all. Therefore, during this entire research process, I never intended to play the role of a objective observer, but always to behave naturally as a human being with emotions and feelings and my own way of judging things.

In China, there is an idiom 'you may be not be big in the capital city, but you will not be small when you are outside the capital (*zai jing bu da, chu jing bu xiao*)'. In other words, you might be a government employee with very low position in Beijing, but when you visit other areas outside of the capital, your position will be much higher compared to that of local officials. There is always a marked tendency for local people to treat people from the capital with high profile. This similarly applied to my team.

Once Mr. Liu Zhenkun, the party secretary of Nandugang village asked me a question: “When you go back to your province, I am sure the officials of the provincial party committee will make a reception for you?” I am from Jiangsu province, and certainly go back home on occasions. But the guess he made was completely impossible in the reality of Chinese political structure. However, it does reflect how he and others have the concept that as I was from Beijing, then I must naturally be in a very high position. And this belief certainly enlarged the distance between the local people and me. Again in Nandugang village, the EZE project built the tap water system and on the wall of the well house is written: Supported by China Rural Development College. I had in fact many times emphasised that the team was from the College of Rural Development of China Agricultural University. However, in the local people’s world, everything from the capital should be prefixed with ‘China’, or ‘Central’. Such concepts and ideology with which people saw me and my institute in fact created many challenges for really integrating into the community and being treated as neighbours and peers during the research process.

During the planning and implementing of the EZE-financed project my aim was to make the community actors feel that they were not passive, researched objects, but the active ‘holders’ of the research. Community actors felt the research was for their benefit, thus, the research was also a process through which they could build their ownership of the research. Having ownership made them more accountable for the information and the data they provided me, thus I believe it was more realistic and reliable. The relationship between local actors and myself was that of cooperative partners rather than opposite parties. Based on this approach, I freely lived in the community and was able to behave as a neighbour, partner, as friend. I joined in all activities in the community, chatting with farmers, children, women and the old, helping farmers to carry water for cooking, to feed animals and collect fruits in the orchard, by eating and watching television together, playing with children, participating in community meetings, discussions, and games and cultural and ritual events. During the process I did not behave as an objective observer, but as an active and personal participant and thus developed trust.

#### *Households for accommodation and meal*

Before coming to the village, I had indicated that we would stay in the community with village members. Without knowing the situation, I could only ask the village authority to organise this for me, showing no preference. They were informed that we would pay to a household 35 Yuan per day per person for both accommodation and food during our stay. I was normally accommodated in the household of the village party secretary or village director or deputy director. It did not matter to me too much in which household I would stay, However, a matter viewed as such a ‘small thing’ by me, can symbolise important social and political implications in the community. The research and the project are regarded as an important official event by the community members, thus, the organisation in particular of where to stay and where to eat etc. has to be arranged officially by the village authority. Where costs are incurred these are met from the village public budget, although this public budget is very limited. For instance, reception expenses every year in each of the four villages were around Yuan 2,000 to 4,000. The household that arranges such so-called official things normally benefits in

many ways. For instance, the household will provide guests with a good meal, which guests will usually invite the hosts to eat with them. Certainly this also creates additional burden in terms of cooking for the housewife, but it is also viewed as a great honour to have people from higher levels to stay in the household. Therefore, such a thing is usually arranged in the home of the village's first decision-maker – the village party secretary or other village cadre's home. The village cadres took this opportunity of having me stay in their homes to confirm their authority in the local community, as well as to extend their social network. This clearly proved the case in Nandugang village.

In Nandugang I stayed at party secretary Mr. Liu Zhenkun's home. Because of this, the township party secretary, the director of the township government and other township officials occasionally came to Mr. Liu's home to see the team and me. Thus, with our stay and the visits of officials from higher authorities, Mr. Liu and his family felt greatly honoured. One day the township officials invited me to lunch. Mr. Liu was also asked to join and after the lunch Mr. Liu insisted on paying the bill. He was very happy to do so, because again he felt honoured. These events are seen by community members as a symbol of support to his administration in the community, which will enhance his authority. When I went to the township, Mr. Liu sometimes also joined me to go to the township market. Sitting in my car, Mr. Liu was indeed happy and always opened the window in order to greet the local people that we met on the way, but also to be seen by them. This showed the community public that I respected him, which strengthening his reputation and social position. One day as I chatted with Mr. Liu and asked: "We also had some students from our collage staying at your home before, they must have brought a lot of burden to your family, correct?" His reply surprised me since I thought he would just politely say 'not at all'. Instead he replied:

"Not like this, those students are from China Agricultural University, one of the central universities in China. After graduation, they can work in any organisation. When they have enough capacity and power in the future, for instance when they become managers of firms, or high governmental officials, they will remember me, and our village."

It was an explicit expression that my stay in a village cadre's household not only brought his family income, but importantly, also provided an opportunity for the village cadre to extend his/her social network, which is considered of great importance for their future.

Although it had been stated that food and accommodation would be paid for, many local village cadres did not believe it. Nobody, in his or her experience, from higher governmental agencies had paid villagers for overnight stays in the village or for food taken there. In particular, villagers do not have the concept that one should pay for just sleeping a night in a household. This is the case in most local areas in China. In Sanggang Village, when I and the team came there the first time, we all stayed in Mr. Xu Changquan's house, but the food was provided in turn by each of the village cadres and we changed from household to household for each breakfast, lunch and dinner. This mechanism of providing food to outsiders is widely adopted in many local villages, called *paifan* in Chinese, meaning arranged meals assigned to different households. Originally different farmer households would be assigned the task of providing meals

for visiting officials staying temporarily in a village, later they were usually assigned to village cadre households at the expense of the village public budget. This was difficult to understand and also very inconvenient to us in the beginning. Later, I discovered that Mr. Xu Changquan, Sanggang village party secretary, did not fully believe that payment for the team's stay would be forthcoming. Thus, in order to reduce the cooking burden for his wife, he had arranged that the village cadres would share the task. When the promised payment finally materialised at the end of the first stay, he seemed highly surprised and apologised that we had had to change place for each meal. When my team came to the village for the second time, he told the team from the very beginning that we would take meals in his home only. Changing around for meals was never repeated in the following series of stays in the four villages. This payment of thirty-five Yuan per day per person is in fact an extraordinary amount to a rural household. It was arranged in order to help villagers by generating some income for their households. During the research, many farmers asked how much we had paid to the household for our stay, and when knowing the amount, they often said that it was too much and invited us to stay with them for less or even free of charge. Such kind of jealousy is inevitable.

In Baoshi Village, the team lodged with Mr. Chen Gengshen's household. He was only a deputy director of the village committee. Both the party secretary, Mr. Zhao Shengli, and the director of the village committee, Mr. Liang Shutian had higher positions. Later I discovered that this arrangement was done purposely. As Mr. Wang Jinsuo explained:

“They (the village party secretary and the director of the village committee) have been in conflict for some time. To arrange for you to stay in either of the two households would incur misunderstanding. If staying in Mr. Zhao Shengli's home, the director of the village committee (Mr. Liang Shutian) would complain and think that his importance was being ignored.”

Mr. Zhao Shengli later also confirmed this when he said:

“In fact it would be very convenient for you to stay at my home because my house was just constructed last year with relatively better facilities. But concerning the overall situation, it is more appropriate to arrange your stay in Mr. Chen Gengshen's home, in order to avoid any misunderstanding and gossip by Mr. Liang Shutian and those farmer households who side with him.”

### *Communication*

Their concern was justified by many later facts. Many farmers in Baoshi Village were particularly interested to know where we stayed and with whom we had meals, and who cooked. They were even more interested to know how much we would pay per day. A former village cadre, Mr. Xu Yinping continually asked me: “Why don't you take the arranged meals, ... the village will pay the costs, right? When you come next time, please come to my home, and you do not need to pay, the village will cover it.” When we affirmed that the accommodation and meals would definitely be covered by ourselves, he shook his head. When I asked him why we should take the arranged meals, he said: “By doing so, you can hear the true voice of farmers. You should listen

to more farmers and interview not only the better off farmer households, but also poor farmer households.” In the view of Xu Jinping, if my team stayed in a household then we must surely trust the household. Therefore, when I discussed issues related to the water tower project in the village with him, he was inclined to have a lot of reservations, indicating that perhaps he thought I sided with Mr. Zhao Shengli and Mr. Chen Gengshen. The same applied to Mr. Liang Shutian. In the beginning, I could hardly explore any information, ideas or opinions with him. I asked if he had known we were coming and his reaction was very strong, indicating the depth of his feelings about the event. He said:

“I do not know much about the project, because I was in hospital when the water tower was in construction. But I heard that you were coming. You are staying in Mr. Chen Gengshen’s home, right? .....Mr. Zhao Shengli never discussed this issue with me!.....With regard to your activities, Mr. Zhao Shengli only mentioned it once to me. He phoned and said ‘The team from China Agricultural University is coming for a survey and research, I have arranged that they will stay in Mr. Chen Gengshen’s home, Please be informed’. He never discussed it with me.”

The matter of which household to stay in again was shown to symbolise important social and political significance in the community. Mr. Liang Shutian repeatedly stated that Mr. Zhao Shengli never discussed the matter with him. From this instance one can see that no matter how big or small a matter is, the communication or information flow among the actors concerned implies a kind of (re-)structuring of relations of power and status. In fact I did not intend always to stay in village cadres’ homes, I was simply following the community’s ways of arranging things. Naturally one might think that it would be useful for the researcher to stay in an ordinary farmer household. However, insistence would violate the community’s way of organising matters, which in turn could have had adverse effects on the research.

My stay in a village was viewed by local people as a symbol of favouring that village or of trusting that village. Thus there existed a kind of competition among the four villages to have me and the research team stay there. When my team first arrived and stayed in Sanggang village, Mr. Liu Zhenkun from Nandugang predicted ‘more project funds will be allocated to Sanggang’. He affirmed this at a later stage when he told me that if I had stayed in his village first, then he was sure they would have received more project money. Indeed what he said is true to some extent. As I explained earlier, the researcher is not an objective body, but an individual, with emotions, feelings, judgements, likes and dislikes and so on. When I first came to Sanggang village and certainly had more interactions with village personnel, it would have been easy to favour that village more than the others. Likewise, if we stayed in a village for a length of time, other villages would normally be suspicious of why we stayed so long

After staying for the first period at Mr. Xu’s home in Sanggang, I next stayed in Mr. Liu Zhenkun’s home in Nandugang village. This move was much appreciated by Mr. Liu and made him very proud. One day when Mr. Liu and I met Mr. Xu in the township market, I warmly greeted him, informing him that we were undertaking a survey in

Nandugang village and would come to his village a few days later. Mr. Xu responded in front of Mr. Liu as though he was the loser of a match:

“... Oh, I thought you would come and stay at my home again, in fact we had prepared the beds and quilts for you already. Please come at any time. But I am sure Mr. Liu will take a good care of all of you. What are you doing here, Mr. Liu?”

Mr. Liu responded with a broad smile saying “Hi, my old fellow, I am here to buy some daily necessities for the team.” With a somewhat accusing tone Mr. Xu said “Didn’t you prepare in advance?”

A kind of competition is evidently implied in this conversation. They are both party secretaries of their respective villages, and are thus colleagues of the same level in terms of position and authority. They compete with each other not only personally, but also as representatives of their villages. I later asked Mr. Liu what else he had discussed with Mr. Xu during that encounter. Mr. Liu said that Mr. Xu asked that now we had arrived what was he going to prepare for us. He told Mr. Xu: “Nothing special, but two kegs of peanut oil for them”. Mr. Xu wondered: “So little?” Mr. Liu responded: “They are from the capital city, they do not lack anything, and what we prepare is indeed not a gift, but local family-produced indigenous products.” Mr. Xu agreed and said: “We want to prepare some two sacks of chestnuts and walnuts.” Later I realised that the village cadres from the other two villages had also communicated with Mr. Liu and Mr. Xu on what they should prepare for my team. This revealed on the one hand that information travels smoothly and quickly amongst the local villages through local networks, and on the other that competition in many aspects exists among local villages. The reason for competing over the team’s stay in a village can be understood as competing for our trust and inter-personal links with the local community, which are of great value as part of the building of social capital. I had declared from the very beginning that we would not like to accept any gift from the local community, but would pay for anything they prepared for us. However, local villagers always tried to prepare some local farm products for us, because they appreciated that we had helped them to successfully obtain the EZE financial support for the community. The project generated a great many immediate and direct benefits and they commented on this.

In addition, as we had always made sure that we paid for our stay in the villages, a sum which was large by their standards, the households wanted to give us produce as a kind of appreciation. It would have insulted the farmers’ kindness to refuse to accept such products, though sometimes we used the excuse of having difficulty in carrying things back to Beijing with us.

#### *Integrating the researcher into the community*

I always began interactions with the household heads with whom I stayed by asking advice on how to become well integrated into the community and have trusting communication and interaction with the villagers. For example in Nandugang I asked Mr. Liu, who responded in a very straightforward way that:



“In China if you want to do research in a rural village, you have to come to the village level by level, meaning from the province to the county, to the township and lastly to the village. Otherwise from the 80,000 Chinese villages, you would not find an entry, i.e. a village to suit your research. If you were to contact a village directly, the township and the county authority would not be happy, similarly if you directly contact rural households, the village authority would not be happy.”

His logic clearly indicates the rationale for identifying a research community. That is to say, you need to develop your social connections through the existing administrative hierarchy, arriving at the lower units through introductions from units above them. By doing this, trust is to some extent secured. On how to behave so as to be accepted and trusted by community members and be treated as their peers, Mr. Liu remarked

“Normally if an outsider comes into contact with farmers directly, they will not trust you, because there are many uncertain things in the society. This uncertainty is revealed in two ways. On the one hand there are many cases where farmers have suffered from uncertified seeds, pesticides and other farm inputs provided by the markets or governmental agencies, as well as from unfavourable policies or the misapplication of government policies by local officials. There are also some floating persons mixed in the rural society. They might be jobless or even prisoners, so farmers normally treat outsiders with cautious eyes. Without an introduction from government authorities, you can only come to farmer households through relatives or friends. That way, farmers have certainty about the possible follow up activities. There is also the possibility for outsiders to directly contact farmers, but you have to bring real benefits, otherwise they will not be interested. For instance, your teams from the agricultural university, since you will bring material benefits to farmers, local people warmly welcome you to do the project or research here. If you should want to do further work here, without the introduction of the township government, all the villages in the township would welcome you, because they all know what you have done here.”

Since Mr. Liu is the village party secretary, it is obvious that he would emphasise the importance of doing things through the administrative hierarchy. He also underlined the importance of trust based on kinship relations. In addition, he believes that bringing real benefits are the basis for doing research with local villagers, though research organised by the political and administrative authorities might be the exception. With regard to interaction with farmer households, he said:

“Normally farmers like to start by talking about the problems they are faced with, perhaps directly related to their household livelihoods, but they could also be about community affairs. Thus, you cannot start first with the research topics that you are interested in. In fact they do not like to express too much from the beginning, they prefer to see whether you can help them solve problems, if not, they might think that it is of no use to discuss with you. Anyway, this is the traditional concept that people believe that only

officials with power can solve problems for them. For instance, if you directly contact a household, that household later may also directly ask you to provide them with the project's revolving funds, and if you do not satisfy them, then they may not spend time talking to you any more."

In addition to the local power structure, I felt that there was also a strong local benefit-sharing structure. The involvement of our team and project intervention in some ways reshaped the existing power and benefit-sharing structure. Of course we could not respond to all the problems or requests relating to household livelihoods or to the way the community operated. Therefore, there were farmers who were much more willing to co-operate with me than others in interviews or in joint discussion groups. Similarly there were farmers who kept their distance. This is the reality of research experience. Nevertheless, I made considerable effort to move closer to community members, perhaps by always bringing cigarettes for the men, towels or soap to the women and sweets or pencils for the children. Outsiders do not always do this, and it helped to smooth the way. Farmers appreciated that I followed local custom by distributing cigarettes and bringing small gifts. When friends meet, they always offer cigarettes to show respect, even though they may not themselves smoke. When farmers visit kinsfolk, they bring sweets for the children and they seldom leave with empty hands. Farmers commented on the fact that I did the same.

Integrating needed not only appropriate strategies and methodologies, but required a general attitude of respect for community members. Time and patience are needed to understand the dynamics of a local population and to recognise that there is a clear stratification in rural communities. There were clusters of specific groups such as village cadres, better off households, poor households, male and female farmers, children, community teachers, health workers, and so on. These groupings have very different life experiences, interests, behaviour and understanding about issues. One cannot simply guess the worlds of the actors according to one's own assumptions. For example, at the beginning of the research, there was a young married lady who always followed the team and me, and she participated actively in the various kinds of interactions and discussions. We were extremely happy about her participation and even considered her a community activist. One week later I discovered that she in fact expected us to provide her with some project revolving funds which she planned to use as an initial investment for starting a community shop along the road. Her family was not of the wealthy group so I did not see any problem in helping her and even attempted to do so. However, two weeks later, when I came to interview another household, I was strongly ashamed of not knowing the full picture of the community. This household had four members, husband, wife, and two schoolboys. The head of the household, the husband, had been injured in a car accident two years previously, and was unable to do any farming or field activities, so he had opened a very basic shop operated from his house. In fact no outsider would have known about the shop from external appearances. He only sold basic daily necessities, such as detergent, salt, beer, liquor, sweets, soy sauce and so on. When we came to his home, he first asked whether we had agreed to support the lady in her plan to open a shop. I was very surprised he knew of this. Information obviously spread quickly in the community. He said that if we supported her from the project revolving funds, his shop would have to close, because he would not be able to compete with her, and if so, he would face many income problems with

his family. This made me immediately conscious of how such a simple decision to help one person, could have ramifications for another in the community. If we had only come to the community for a short time as many official project missions do, how wrong we could have been in the decisions we made. In the end the decision of whether to fund the woman's plans or not were left to the community members to decide.

When an outsider comes to the community he will usually hear first the voice of the village cadres, and then the wealthy households, because they are used to speaking for the community. Through incentives the more middle group can be encouraged to speak. They usually do so by arguing points with the village cadres and wealthy households on what they have said. With strong encouragement and by applying appropriate participative methods, it is eventually possible to get poor households to start to speak. They seldom express their views in public. This is not only due to the fact that their voice is weak, but also because opportunities are always first taken by the better placed actors, and because the community takes it for granted that these poor households won't raise a voice in public. Observations reveal that the worlds expressed by these various actors are indeed different. For example, when discussing the potential activities for that the project support, the village cadres and wealthy households normally ask for community improvement activities such as drinking water supplies, school improvements etc. because they know such projects will benefit all community members. The poor households will most likely ask for support for household economic activities such as raising livestock, planting fruit trees etc., because these are their immediate livelihood needs. This must be borne in mind during research so that all the different voices can be included in the construction of the community reality. By doing this, the analysis will be more *actors* oriented, and conclusions drawn and recommendations proposed more realistic and action oriented.

#### *Building upon local arenas and the application of participatory methods*

Instead of just arriving in a community and observing, I designed a package of participatory methods and tools aimed at listening, or more appropriately 'hearing', what local people had to say. Such methods require getting local actors together and having joint discussions in social and spatial locations where actors confront each other, mobilise social relations and deploy discursive and cultural means for attaining their specific ends, including perhaps simply remaining in the exercise. Thus it is also a process of building local arenas, in which social encounters or a series of situations in which contests over issues, resources, values, and representation take place. In this process actors may draw upon particular domains to support their interests, aims and dispositions. This concept of arena is especially important for identifying the actors and mapping out the issues, resources and discourses entailed in particular situations of disagreement or dispute. While the idea of 'arena' has an affinity to that of 'forum' or 'platform' in development practice, the latter carries with it the implication that the rules for debate are, in a sense, already agreed upon, whereas contestation in an arena denotes discontinuities of values, norms and practices (Haan and Long 1997: 6). In this research, local actors are invited in mainly two ways to the community arenas to interact with each other. By experiencing the encounters amongst the actors, and between the actors and me when different modes and domains of interaction take place, one can add to the community profile built..

When first coming to a village, the cadres will usually all be waiting, having been informed in advance that the research is combined with a project, which makes the thing very formal and official. The cadres normally include the party secretary and his/her deputies, the director of the village committee and his/her deputies, the village bookkeeper and the director of the village women's union. When basically settled in the village, it is possible to start a kind of key informants group discussion so as to collect basic information on the overall picture of the village. This is done by a pre-prepared question list and will be seen as taking them and their community seriously. In order to draw further the picture of the village, group discussions or individual interview and other methods are employed. These methods include village resource mapping, village historical profile, agro-ecological and socio-economic zoning, village transect walk, village settlement and social infrastructure mapping, wealth ranking, village institutional diagram, household Venn diagram, seasonal calendar, household daily routine, village development problem analysis, and so on. By applying such tools, one builds a picture of the village from different angles. Importantly, these tools also serve as carriers for further integration, because during the process of conducting discussions and interviews, one is able to observe the interactions amongst village members themselves. In many cases, such observed interactions are more meaningful than the results of the exercises, since the interactions reflect more of village culture and dynamics. The results of the participatory methods and observations were fully recorded and provided the profiles built for each of the villages.

For conducting the participatory surveys, farmers had to be organised to join the exercises. In some cases in the beginning this was done by the village cadres, sometimes male and female farmer groups assembled separately in a village locale such as the school, the party secretary's office, or at a farmer's home. Before organising, the cadres were told to try to select representative farmers, including the wealthy and better off farmers, but also poor farmers. For the farmer groups organised in such a way, discussions and exercises were related only to the village physical settings, such as resource mapping, agro-ecological and socio-economic zoning, community transect walk, community settlement and social infrastructure mapping, and so on. These exercises do not touch upon many sensitive issues, although the discussions were always very active and thus the results did not depend on whether the organised farmers were supporters or opponents of the village cadres. Organising farmers through village cadres in the beginning stage was for two reasons. Firstly I did not want to give the village cadres the impression that I would do everything on my own without the co-ordination or involvement of the village administration. Doing it that way created more trust between village cadres and the team and was a way of showing them respect. In their understanding, the village is regarded as their territory, and they expect any outside intervention to be co-ordinated with them. A second and more practical reason was that I was not familiar enough with community members in the beginning, neither did many of them know the purpose of my team's stay among them. This was explained in the early discussions and exercises so that the farmers present would spread the information to other community members. The discussions are also a familiarising process and through the interactions clues are gathered as to which local actors in the community it would be useful to interview later in the research.

After a few of these sessions and also through participation in the community's life in many ways, I became known to most members and at this stage I was able to freely organise farmers to participate in the semi-structured discussions and interviews without raising suspicions. I was likewise able now to use the rest of the participatory tools mentioned. These discussions and interviews about the livelihood of the community as a whole and of local households depend on the understandings of many different actors. As a consequence the interactions between them can amount to mild disagreement to a level of arguing, quarrelling, and even fighting with each other. The community dynamics become evident through these exercises. Therefore, the way of persuading farmers to come together to participate is essential to success. Where possible I gave people a choice when organising such discussions and interviews, rather than having them pressured by the village cadres to attend.

In the community, there is usually a public street, square or corner where farmers meet when they are free. I just joined them and participated in their chat. When they were familiar with me I began to ask them to join me in group discussions, listing for them the subjects I was interested in – for example village history, the wealth situation of different households, community and household social networks, and the development problems they faced and so forth. In addition to the public space, I sometimes just visited a household and asked the household members to invite a few others to join us. I behaved in line with local customs and always distributed small gifts when taking a farmer's time. People were usually very cooperative and found the topics interesting. Sometimes, one can also walk into a tense or difficult situation, for instance, when one or several farmers are highly depressed after a heavy fight. In such a case, one cannot comfort the depressed ones too much, otherwise the other farmers think that you are siding with them. One can only repeatedly reaffirm that the purpose of our discussion is to get a full picture of the community, without intending to judge what might be considered correct or incorrect.

The successful application of participatory methods and tools depends to a great extent on the practical experience and interpersonal skills of the facilitator in communicating, moderating, motivating, co-ordinating, and negotiating. Smooth communication is essential to the conduct of any research activity, no matter the degree of participation. Thankfully the local inhabitants did not have a very strong local dialect so I was easily able to understand them. To create a flexible environment for communication I would first chat on non-subject issues, for example about agricultural production in general, about recent news and so on, and offer cigarettes and sweets around. In the first meetings I would introduce the team and the purpose of the stay and of doing particular exercises and then invite all those present to introduce themselves. Farmers have their own ways of introducing themselves and this will often create a lot of laughter and fun and jokes and banter with each other, often with innuendo towards the female farmers. After such a warming up, more serious discussion can start. Time needs to be given to careful listening and to giving farmers sufficient opportunity to express their views and opinions. The tools are not sufficient in themselves. Rather it is the interaction process in the discussions that is always more important than the results of applying methods *per se*. To effectively conduct group sessions, moderation is the key to success. Such moderation means being prepared and using appropriate tools and materials. For instance, in most cases, I would bring cards, pens and a board for visualising the main

points and outcomes of their discussions, thus stressing my role as facilitator not decision-maker. During all such discussions, one always find some farmers are more active and speak more than the others, and one needs skills to motivate every participating farmer to express his ideas. Sometimes it is necessary to interact directly with inactive participants in order to encourage them to speak and show that everybody's ideas count. Discussions can be very heterogeneous, and sometimes views of their life worlds conflict and skills are needed to harmonise the conflicts and promote the concept of learning from each other. Strong negotiation skills are needed to convince actors who strongly insist on their own views and undermine those of others. In summary, in applying participative tools, the researcher has to play many roles, not least of which is to be oneself an active participant.

### *Households for case studies*

In Nandugang village, I stayed in party secretary Mr. Liu Zhenkun's home. We spent many hours in discussion and he gave me his own opinion on the selection of households for the proposed case studies. In addition, he always showed me how to locate families or made appointments for me which helped the research process and saved time. However, it also created some difficulties. Firstly, households proposed by Mr. Liu were generally those who supported him and his work, and were thus a biased sample. The fact that I was staying with him and was introduced to households by him was not liked by some of the villagers. I later discovered that this was the reason for the relative indifference towards the research activities shown by some farmers. This led me to change my strategy for selecting case study households.

Although it takes more time one should first have a fuller picture of community relationships and the power structure to obtain comprehensive and unbiased community information. Working through Mr. Liu or some other leader within the power structure leads villagers to assume one is part of the authority structure and they suspect that one's activities are simple part of a political show. Therefore, I needed to independently select the households for interview free from the influence of Mr. Liu. This to some extent made Mr. Liu unhappy, and sometimes angry. But I had to include the opposite households for further studies, so that I could grasp the conflicts in the community. By randomly entering a household for discussion, I was able to identify, through a snowballing method, further relevant households for study. After winning such independence, Mr. Liu was interested to know of my whereabouts. Information flows very quickly within the community and he quickly received news of my survey and research and if not he would inquire about my day's work in our regular evening discussions. In fact, Mr. Liu is a brilliant talker, with a lot of ideas and sensitivity. In the beginning of the research, since I only had interactions with him and the farmers who supported him, I had the impression that this village was exemplary in many aspects, and Mr. Liu won my respect and admiration. However, as the research proceeded, some farmers in the village expressed critical reservations about him, for instance, some said that Mr. Liu was relatively dictatorial, and fawned on higher authorities and suppressed farmers. I began to realise after staying with Mr. Liu for some time that I was not evaluating him as an individual community member or seeing him as part of the community power struggles and cultural environment as first decision-maker of the village.

### *Our socialisation into the community*

Before the rural land reform and the collapse of collective farming in 1978, there were occasions during the year when community members assembled together. There were once or twice general community meetings in which all community adult members had to participate. The community also organised film shows once or twice a month and local opera performances during certain festivals. But since 1978, only on rare occasion have community members assembled together. In many villages there has been no general community meeting for many years. In the four villages studied, except for perhaps a local opera performance during the Spring Festival, there has been no other opportunity for farmers to get together as a community. I realised this fact and in order to create an event where farmers could get together, as well as to introduce myself, the team and the project to a wider range of community members, I had the idea to organise a film show in each of the four villages. Since the community is rather large and consists of several villages and their hamlets or 'natural villages' (*zi ran cun*), it was difficult for community members to get to know me, the team and the project only through informal information networks or direct contact. Moreover, information is always shaped and reshaped every time it is carried from one actor to another. Thus, we preferred to give people first hand and clear information on our being in the community. An example of how information can get distorted is provided by the following. In Sanggang village, some local people and those from outside began to conclude that 'Sanggang is having trouble now, you see, the car from Beijing has come, they must have come for investigations of the village cadres.' To clear up these and other misunderstandings and to introduce the team to everyone, we organized a social event that included a film show in each of the four villages.

When we contacted the County Film Company, they were very surprised to hear that the film show was for the village, since they had not had a film show in a village for many years. Their business now was mainly for individual households, for special ceremonies, and of course mostly for the wealthy ones. We made a simple survey about what kind of film farmers would like to see and the result was as expected in many of rural areas in China, that farmers like to see '*kungfu*' films. Before the film show, posters were prepared by the village authority in order to disseminate the information to the public. In Baoshi Village, the poster read:

#### Notice

Comrades from China Agricultural University are doing survey and research in our village. For enhancing the friendship with our villagers, they present a film show for us. The film is planned to start at 8:00 p.m., audience are welcome to come. Finally we thank them for presenting this film show.

Baoshi Village Committee, 23 of July

Several '*kungfu*' films plus some short films on practical agricultural technologies were shown in the open air in the public locale of the four villages. Villagers were indeed happy. It was like a festival because they had not experienced such an event for many years. The excited children especially made the event come to life. In between the film show, we made ten minutes of introduction to the audience on the purpose of our stay as well as the concepts and components of the projects similar to the speeches reported earlier. We emphasised that the project would take two years and would involve the visits of many students and teachers and would take up a lot of their time. I told them I was also born in a rural village and that my colleagues and our students had all had experience of rural life. I mentioned the Chinese idiom that 'for the first time when we meet we are new to each other, but next time we will be more familiar'. "And now we have met, I hope we will be friends. We will frequently come to your village in the future, and I sincerely hope you will treat us as members of your village. Please do not view us as outsiders."

This event was extremely successful. Before this film show, when we had walked in the street, there were always some farmers who looked at us with uncertain eyes. However, the day after the film show, when we met farmers, they greeted us with "Oh, you are from China Agricultural University, the film show for us was organized and paid for by you." I strongly felt that the show had brought us much closer to the villagers and many farmers actively invited us to visit their home afterwards.

In rural areas in China, farmers have a lot of leisure time during some parts of the agricultural calendar. When the weather permits, such as in the later afternoon and evening in the summer and spring season, farmers like to be out of their houses to get together for free chat, or to play games. In northern China, this is called 'sitting in street' (*zuo jie*). In fact it is not necessarily the street, but could be any public space in the community, such as a corner or the square. During such occasions, villagers freely come into groups by gender, age, and by friendship or kin relationships. Certainly different groups will be chatting about different subjects. This is an indigenous arena where farmers encounter each other in a relaxed manner, and where interactions are constructed spontaneously and one can view social norms and ongoing social network relationships, family life, and learn about special events, cultural dynamics, production and economic activities, as well as policies and institutions. It is also a kind of indigenous community platform where actors communicate with and learn from each other's experiences in those domains. One case study in the following chapters indicates how one farmer began his development initiative by the enlightenment of his interaction with a fellow friend while 'sitting in street'.

This 'siting in street' is a spontaneous activity and very important for the villagers. Firstly they enjoy conversation and gossiping with their fellows and secondly they all want to be well socialized in the community. Isolation is the heaviest punishment that a person has to endure. I certainly wished to be integrated into this indigenous arena. However, the participation of the team was discovered sometimes to disrupt the harmonious nature of the event. Although we tried to behave in a socially and culturally adapted manner, villagers never completely moved away from viewing us as 'outsiders'. When we joined groups, even though we invited them to continue their chat, they always took some time to return to normal and it often altered the direction of their



discussion The male farmers group sometimes complained of the difficulty of farming and the unfavourable policy for farmers, obviously they thought that as an outsider I could probably get them justice. However, their complaints in fact helped me to understand to what extent a well-designed intervention or well-formulated policy could be reshaped locally, and why farmers were so reluctant to trust some of the government policies and interventions.

Another important way to socialise is to tell and to record anecdotes. In Nandugang, Mr. Liu Zhenkun was always pleased to oblige when asked to tell some local hearsay and anecdotes. People enjoy telling stories and through them they keep certain events and stories alive. Mr. Liu Zhenkun told me three local anecdotes. The first related to a local saying, namely 'it is not tasty when Yushuan drinks the persimmon' (*yu shuan he shi zi bu shi wei*). Everybody in Nandugang village, including children, know this story, and when people want to say that something has a strange smell or does not taste good, they always use this phrase to express the meaning. The story happened in the 1960s. A group of men from Nandugang Village worked on a government river construction site and a man called Yushuan brought a persimmon from his home to the construction site. Another man called Yusan stole Yushuan's persimmon and drank all the juice inside the fruit through a very small hole, after which he refilled the persimmon with water from the river. Later when Yushuan drank from the persimmon, he wondered why it was not as tasty as usual. When people learned of what had happened they coined the phrase, which has now become part of local language. The second and third were about a ghost, and about male and female affairs in the community. These latter two topics are always hot issues that are gossiped about in many Chinese rural villages. Being able to tell such stories made me feel more like a neighbour than an intruder from Beijing.

### *Conclusion*

These everyday encounters in organised arenas (i.e. those using participatory methods) and in more indigenous arenas (such as 'sitting in street') described in this chapter, form the basis for an understanding of the domains of community organisation and household livelihoods. They also, together with the account of interactions with village officials and leaders, draw attention to the significance of differentiated life worlds. They helped us to become socially and culturally socialised into the community.

These experiences provide the foundation for the analysis of the village social organisation and the dynamics of rural initiatives that are explored in Chapter 4 on village profiles and in Chapter 5 on farmer development initiatives.

## CHAPTER 4

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### BUILDING THE COMMUNITY PROFILE

This chapter falls into two parts. Part one begins with a general picture of village administrative organisation and is followed by a general profile of each of the four researched villages. Most of this data was collected through discussion and interviews with key administrative cadres and from information obtained from records kept by the bookkeepers of the party offices and augmented by the research team's general observations. Part II explores the village profiles further through the use of a number of participatory methods and interactions with villagers in their everyday lives. The villages of Nandugang and Sanggang that share boundaries and are in close proximity to each other are profiled in greater depth and cover aspects common to all four villages. Yuangang and Baoshi are dealt with more briefly and are described in terms that bring out their specificities.

The profiles furnish the reader with a full picture and penetrative analysis of a Chinese rural community and they thus provide the necessary background and contexts for exploring the nature and implications of farmer development initiatives, which is the focus of the next chapter.

#### **PART I: Village Administration and Profiles**

As previously indicated, instead of giving readers a well structured static outline of the social and spatial organisation of these villages, I present the community through my encounters and interactions with its members in various formal and informal arenas and domains. Insights and data are also gained from the outcomes of using a range of participatory research methods. Through encounters in the formal and less formal 'indigenous' arenas of the community and through the methods mentioned I was able to explore aspects such as local social norms, cultural dynamics, power and benefit relations, network structures, collective behavior, economic undertakings, and so forth.

The lowest administrative unit in Chinese rural society is the village. It comes under the direct leadership of the next administrative unit up - the township. When we talk about the village in relation to official matters, then we are mostly talking of the village as an administrative unit (*xing zhen cun*). As a unit the administrative village may include several natural villages (*zi ran cun*) or hamlets. Each natural village or hamlet is an area with a concentration of continuous settlement. In the plains area there are normally no 'natural villages' within the administrative village but in the mountainous areas the terrain dictates a more dispersed pattern of settlements. The village administration is shared by a village committee made up of officials elected by villagers and a party branch committee of officials elected by party members and approved by the township

party committee<sup>2</sup> (see also the later section in this chapter for a fuller description of the different types of committees and functions at village level in Nandugang village). The administrators of village affairs, although in theory government officials, are very different from those officials working at township level and above. The latter are kind of ‘civil servants’ that receive salaries from county and provincial government budgets, and have residential permits to live in urban centres, or in other words they are what in China are referred to as ‘citizens’ (*shi min*). Village administrators are still farmers with a rural residential permit and known thus as ‘rural inhabitants’. They receive a small stipend paid out of the levies collected from the villagers. All village administrators whether of the party or not are referred to as village ‘cadres’ (*cun gan bu*). Normally a ‘village’ in China is regarded as a community, that is, an independent ‘natural’, social, economic and cultural unit, but several adjacent villages may also be referred to as a community when they are geographically close and exhibit a degree of coherence in terms of everyday interaction. The four selected villages chosen for the research can be so regarded. With the exception of obvious differences in terrain and geographical space and in certain social and economic particulars, the four villages share similarities with respect to their social domains, history, organization, household composition and the size and distribution of landholdings and livelihood stratification, seasonal activities, temporary migration and so on. These and other dimensions are set out in the profiles that follow.

### *Encounter with Village Cadres*

When an outsider comes to a village, his or her first encounter will be with one or more of the village cadres. The success of this first encounter will become a foundation for the smooth conduct of any follow up activity. It is taken for granted that when any (formal and official) outsider comes to a village, the village cadres will give a basic introduction to the village, illustrated with mainly quantitative information. The village cadres are also supposed to be informed of the purpose of the outsider’s stay in the village. This is not only for them to show each other respect, but also it allows outsiders to build up good coordination with village cadres for any further activities in the village.

This can be illustrated by our introductions to Nandugang Village. We were received by most of the village cadres on our immediate arrival at the village party secretary’s home. After the customary conversation, we told them that we would like to have a group discussion with them on the basics of the village. This was no surprise to them and they were prepared for it. At a later stage we assembled in a room, the office of the village party branch. Mr. Liu Zhenkun - village party secretary, Mr. Liu Zhenshan - director of the village committee, Mr. Zhao Shunjun – village bookkeeper (*cun kuai ji*), and Ms. Song Yulan – head of the village women’s union, were all there with us. It was

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<sup>2</sup> Presently village administration and local government is undergoing restructuring in order to institute a more democratic representation by local inhabitants. The changes afoot are promoting the selection of village and party leaders through free elections. In the four villages chosen for study and in many parts of China at the moment it is still the practice for only party members – usually a small minority of village members – to choose their party secretary who is the senior decision maker in local administration. In several cases it is not unusual for the village party secretaries to be appointed by the intervention of township party officials.

a modest office room with desks and chairs, covered with a layer of dust. This is all normal for most Chinese rural villages. However, we were immediately attracted to the papers on the wall. White sheets of paper with black, mostly printed, characters. In order to warm up the atmosphere, we intentionally did not start the subject discussion first, but chatted about these printed papers on the wall. Mr. Liu Zhenkun told us that in each village there were always such papers in the party branch office room. The paper was centrally printed by the Hebei Provincial Party Committee and distributed to each rural village, as an important component of the standardization of the setup of the village party branch. The papers connect and form a sheet about 1 metre in height and 8 metres in length. The printed contents of the papers include the principles of being a party member, the regulations pertaining to the setup of a standardized village party branch in Hebei province, and some other party related policies. It also leaves blank parts for each village to fill in, including the basic introduction of the village, the major achievements of the village party secretaries during all the recorded periods, and the 'partner' household of each party member and the photos of all party members in the village. Therefore, we collected the basic introductory information for the village and the party secretaries for all previously recorded years from these papers on the Nandugang village office wall, as we did for all the other three villages. The partner household of each party member means that every party member in the village is responsible for contacting one household, normally a poor household, for assisting with their household livelihood development. This is an established mechanism and one based on good will. However, it is rarely put into practice. A village sketch map is also usually to be found on the wall, which we were able to copy.

After such an initial free chat session, we were all relaxed, and we started to ask the village cadres to provide us with basic information of the village to get an overall picture of the village. We had prepared a semi-structured list of questions based on our many years of working in rural areas, and felt free to adjust questions while the discussion was going on. Although we asked the cadres to jointly give us information from their knowledge, it is normally the case that the party secretary will speak the most if he or she is present. This was the case in Nandugang village. Although Mr. Liu Zhenkun invited the others to speak first, nobody did so, and instead all returned the ball to Mr. Liu by saying "You can represent us, it is all right for you to speak". During the process, when Mr. Liu indeed had problems with certain figures, the village bookkeeper would help out by saying, "I will check for you later". Certain information such as the status on taxes and levies, village structure etc. was provided by the village bookkeeper in written format afterwards and sometimes in consultation with Mr. Liu Zhenkun. All the written information prepared by the bookkeeper was finally checked by Mr. Liu Zhenkun before being passed on to us. Ms. Song Yulan, the director of the village women's union never spoke, which we know to be normal in many other villages. This is the typical way of regarding 'presence' as 'participation'. However, after the completion of our discussion, we found her to be heatedly arguing with Mr. Liu Zhenshan, the director of the village committee, over a land issue. Thus, she did not speak a single word during our discussion, probably because she was not interested in the subjects or did not have all the information in her mind, or thought the first man of the village should speak on their behalf. It was certainly not because she was too shy to speak in front of men. During the discussion others came in on three occasions looking for Mr. Liu Zhenkun. On each occasion, he left the room for this but we could hear their

conversation, mostly about seeking Mr. Liu's agreement on some matter or other. Such interruptions indicated that in such a rural community, the village decision-maker is indeed important for community actions and is very busy. Half way through the discussion, Mr. Zhang, the Township Party Secretary, Mr. Wang, the Township Director, and Mr. Wang Jinsuo, the Deputy Township Party Secretary came to see us and we interrupted our discussion to greet the officials with a kind of 'diplomatic' conversation. They knew that we were only half way through and thus after a few minutes, they said that they would like to have a look at the village, so that we could continue our discussion. The visit of township officials to a village such as Nandugang was seen as an honour to Mr. Liu Zhenkun and his colleagues because normally there would rarely be an occasion for key township officials to come to a village all at the same time. This was also seen by the village as a sign of support for our research activities at the higher level. Thus Mr. Liu Zhenkun and his colleagues were highly motivated and indeed happy after the short visit of the township officials, which was reflected in their conversation when they left. After completion of the discussions, we were invited by the township officials to eat with them at a 'five-star' restaurant (in fact a very modest local restaurant, but the best in the township). Mr. Liu Zhenkun was invited too.

As mentioned, the discussions in all four villages were conducted by following a prepared semi-structured question list. The outcome of these meetings – mainly taken here from the answers given by the village cadres in Nandugang village - is presented below. This output can be regarded as a kind of 'plain' profile of the community which will come to life later when it is integrated into the context of all the dynamic interactions that took place in the introductory and following meetings with village personnel.

### **Nandugang Administrative Village**

Nandugang is sketched out more fully than the other villages since I use this first village profile to give a fuller picture of the institutional and farming arrangements that are common to all four villages.

#### **General:** *geographical location, administrative organisation and population*

The following details are taken from the wall of the party office.

Nandugang Village is 4 km to the southeast of the locale of Pocang Township Government. It consists of 4 natural villages. Currently there are 184 households and 728 inhabitants in the village. The total arable land is 828 mu. There are 70 communist party members. It is said that the village was established in Qing Dynasty. Since most of the household heads had the surname of <i>du</i> , and the village is located in the south ( <i>nan</i> in Chinese) of the Wulin mountain, the village is called 'Nandugang'.
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The Administrative Village of Nandugang can be physically characterized as a small basin surrounded by mountains in four directions. The mountains to the north and south

are more distant than those of the east and west. The four natural villages (which I will henceforward call hamlets in order for the reader not to confuse administrative with natural village) that make up Nandugang, are called Beigou, Nangou, Nanzhuang and Zhucun. In the Commune period between 1958 and 1978 these hamlets formed six Production Teams/groups or Sub-Brigades. Beigou and Nangou were production teams No. 1 and No. 6 respectively, production teams No. 2 and No. 3 corresponded to Zhucun, and No. 4 and No. 5 to Nanzhuang. These production teams/groups have remained unchanged since 1978.

In 2001 there were a total of 726 villagers, of whom 361 were males and 365 were females, 219 were below the age of 18, and 136 were older than 50. The total labour force amounted to 371. The total number of villagers (726) was 2 less than indicated on the wall (728), because the information in the wall was prepared one and half year before.

**Physical aspects:** *land, settlement pattern, water and other resources and services*

The total land area of Nandugang is about 7,000 mu, of which 820 mu is arable land (i.e. approximately 1.14 mu per capita), the rest is mountain (about 5,200 mu), riverbank (about 400 mu), settlements (about 500 mu) and idle land (70 – 80 mu). Of the arable 820 mu, only around 300 mu can be irrigated. Irrigation is seasonal, when water is available in the river. The tree cover in the mountain includes locust, pine, poplar, willow, shrubs, and various fruit trees, such as chestnut, walnut, persimmon, apricots, plums, Chinese dates, pears, apples, hawthorn, Chinese prickly ash and so on. The soil is sandy. The river transecting the village is the upper part of the Caohe River. However, currently it flows only in the rainy season, i.e. July and August. Before the 1970s, the river had water flowing all year around. The underground water table is about 20 meters. The mineral resources include calcite, ironstone and vermiculite. Currently Mr. Yang Changyou from Mudoudian village and Mr. Xu Zaoquan from Sanggang are contracting two sites for mining in the village (basically small-scale surface exploitation of small mineral deposits that can be exploited on a contractual basis from the community). Average rainfall is about 450 mm per year, however, in 2001 only about 200 mm precipitated.

Of the 184 households, 84 live in Zhucun, the main hamlet, 45 are settled in Nanzhuang, 22 live in Nangou and 33 in Beigou. All these four natural villages or hamlets are connected by a village road, which can be used for agricultural transportation. The village is connected with Pocang Township by an unpaved township-village road that is in poor condition. It is muddy in the rainy season and very dusty for the rest of the year. The distance to Beijing, Baoding (near the Great Wall) and Yixian County capital is 170 km, 90 km and 70 km respectively. A public bus passes through the village to Baoding and Yixian County capital every morning at 6 o'clock. Since 1986, the village has had an electricity supply for family use and also for irrigation. The four hamlets used to have a tapped supply of drinking water by collecting water from the top part of the mountain into a water storage tank built midway down the mountain that was connected to each household by pipeline. However, the facility had not functioned for several years due to the decrease in rainfall and water resources on the mountain. Instead villagers had to fetch drinking water from

collective village wells. The tap drinking water supply in Zhucun and Beigou was restored in May 2001 by the EZE project-built water tower and pipelines to the two villages. Irrigation is done mainly by pumping water from wells. The pumps are mobile and can be moved from one well to another. There are in total 14 wells in Nandugang three of which are in Nangou, six are in Nanzhuang, two are in Zhucun and three in Beigou.

Rural communication has been rapidly developed during the past several years. For instance, several years ago one could hardly image that telecommunication would reach rural villages, but now in Nandugang village, Zhucun hamlet has nine telephones, there are six in Beigou, one in Nanzhuang. Nangou has yet to get one.

There is one primary school in Nandugang village teaching grades 1 to 4. The students number about 50 and are taught by three teachers (one male and two females). There were previously three doctors living in the village. However, the health system has now almost collapsed. One of the doctors has very poor skills, one (a lady) has married and moved out of the village and the other has been sick for a long time though he still sells a few basic medicines for curing colds, and he gives injections. The most frequent illnesses that villagers face are flu, strokes (hemiplegia) and heart disease. The township immunization station is responsible for basic immunization of children from birth to eight.

There is no market in Nandugang. Farmers normally buy daily necessities and sell their products in the two nearby markets - in Yuangang village (open every 5 days, on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of the Chinese lunar calendar), and in Pocang (open every 5 days, on the first and 6<sup>th</sup>).<sup>2</sup> Farmers can rarely obtain credit from the government credit services. Informal credit (money lending) is active although it has never been encouraged by the government. 80% of the households use firewood for energy consumption, and 20% use coal or gas.

**Social aspects:** *land tenure system, social and cultural characteristics, labour migration and demographic features*

In general land is owned by the State or the Collective (but here the term 'collective' is vague since no-one can any longer explicitly explain who or what the collective is). Except for ownership, farmers have most of the rights over land tenure, such as usufruct, management, production rights and so on. Thus in practice, except for the sale of land, farmers are in control of land use and choose what they grow and are free to manage it in their own way. The land in Nandugang village was first distributed to farmers in 1981 for contracting under the 'household responsibility system' that followed the national land reform of 1978, since which several adjustments have been

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<sup>2</sup> The Chinese lunar calendar is formulated according to changes in the shape of the moon. It also has 12 months and around 30 days in each month. Normally the month in the solar calendar is roughly about two months in advance of the same month in the lunar calendar. Rural populations of China are more familiar with the lunar calendar, and the printed calendars mostly have the combined dates of both solar and lunar calendars.

made. The most recent land adjustment was in 1997 and 1998 when minor redistribution was carried out for long-term land contracts of 30 or 50 years. This is part of national policy of stabilizing land usufruct over the longer term. Land distribution is conducted first by categorizing village arable land into several classes according to land fertility and productivity, then the land of the different categories is evenly distributed to households according to the number of family members. Of the middle quality land, the village reserves 5%, i.e. about 40 mu, to make minor adjustments to household allocation in accordance with the increase or decrease in the number of family members or to give to new village members etc. Such minor adjustments take place within a five-year period using the 40 mu to meet these new needs. At the end of the five-year period, land will again be evenly distributed among households in order again to free up a 40 mu reserve for the following five-year adjustment period. In reality, village arable land is normally dispersed in several big plots in different locations. Each of these plots will have different physical conditions such as soil fertility. Although sometime the difference is not significant, each household will want to get a share of the better plots. Thus, rural land distribution in many cases is executed in such a way as to evenly distribute all the village arable areas among all village households. Such a practice results in the fragmentation of land, which is characteristic of most rural areas in China. This acts as a constraint on the development of large and medium scale commercial farms. In the research community, landholding per household is very small (i.e. 4.3 mu), and the average number of land plots held is 7.2, giving an average plot size of about 0.6 mu. Many such household plots are dispersed in different locations and often at some distance from each other.

In 1982 the mountain land was evenly distributed to the households by the production team or sub-brigade that controlled that particular piece of mountain. This was done along the same lines as for arable land. However, one result of this distribution was a decline in the tree stocks, because some households were not interested in or not able to engage in reforestation activities. Thus, in 1996 and 1997, the village collective took back all the previously distributed mountainous land, and put it up for auction by dividing it into different lots that villagers and others could bid for. Contracts for the lots were then given out, some lots with a fee of between 30-50 yuan per mu per year, others for even less than one yuan per mu per year. The contractors could be villagers of Nandugang, but they could also be outsiders. In normal practice, outsiders would only be able to participate in the auction if nobody in the village was interested in contracting a particular lot. 70% of households in the village have obtained a plot of mountain land through such auctions. This distribution of mountain land by auction also became a requirement of the implementation of the Sino-German Afforestation Project. Contract fees for lots are collected by the production team that had had original responsibility for those lots. The fees are used for the team's internal welfare or production related activities.

Originally all the villagers in Nandugang were of Mandarin, or Han nationality. However, several women from the Zhuang minority have migrated to Nandugang village during recent years. There are two options for such migration. One is through marriage when a villager meets and falls in love with a girl while temporarily working in the city and then brings her home to the village after marriage. The second is a marriage arranged through paying a small fee to a middleman. In this case, the villager



is usually from a poor household and has difficulty in marrying locally and the outsider will usually be a woman from a minority group and from a remote and poor rural area of China. Such a practice is officially illegal in China, although some of the minority women enjoy a better life after such a marriage. However, many social problems have also emerged in relation to this practice.

The village has 70 to 80 villagers who migrate to urban areas for temporary work. Most of them do road and building construction in cities such as Beijing, Shijiazhuang (the capital of Hebei Province) and Baoding (the capital of Baoding Municipality). The average wage level is about 15 to 30 yuan a day all-inclusive (8.3 yuan to one US dollar). However, in some cases, after one year of work, the villagers cannot get their salary from the companies or contractors in time to return home as planned, which can create a great many social and psychological burdens for villagers. Most migrants go to look for work after marrying and almost all of such migrants are males. Fifteen to sixteen of them migrate on a yearly basis. The others migrate seasonally because the burden of their absence places all the family and farming work onto the women. They therefore come back for the busy farming seasons. There are three possibilities for a villager to find work outside the village. Some factories or companies come to recruit workers locally in the village, introduced by relatives or friends, some go directly to the cities looking for work opportunities. While there are also 30 to 40 village farmers working temporarily in local mines and enterprises. The wage level for this is about 10 to 20 yuan on average per day.

The population growth rate of Nandugang Village is about 3%, meaning there are only 2 to 3 new births in the village every year. The average household size is about four members, usually husband, wife and two children. The household pattern is predominately the nuclear family. There are very few extended families living in one household. There are also many cases of households consisting of one old couple or even just one old person when the partner passes away.

During leisure time, farmers take part in various cultural events in terms of performances or other kinds of activities, such as temple fairs during the Spring Festival period, local opera for celebrating the autumn harvest in Pocang village, 'walking on stilts' (*gao qiao*) performances, 'wheelbarrow' performances (*xiao che hui*), and 'Bawang' whip (*ba wang bian*) performances. All such are local indigenous cultural activities.

**Economic aspects:** *agriculture and other economic activities, income levels and household expenditure, taxes and levies*

The crops in Nandugang village include wheat, maize, sweet potato, soybean, groundnut, sesame, pea, millet and castor etc. There are about 300 mu of arable land for staple crops - winter wheat, 350 mu for maize, 450 mu for sweet potato, the rest for other crops. The average yield for wheat is about 250 kg/mu, that of maize and sweet potato about 300 kg/mu and 1,700 kg/mu respectively, and that of soybeans is about 100 kg/mu. In general grain production just meets village consumption needs. However, farming in general does not bring much cash income. In 1997, 70% of households in the village obtained contracts on mountain lots when these were put up for auction. Farmers have mainly planted timber and fruit trees on this land such as chestnut, walnut,

persimmon and so on, but the harvest will not be available for several years. The livestock in the village ranges from rabbit raising, to goats, pigs, chicken, donkeys, ducks and geese etc. There are some 3,000 rabbits raised in some 20 households in the village, with one raising more than 200 rabbits at any one time. Some households raise rabbits on contracts signed the previous November at an agreed fixed price with companies in the County. Some began rabbit raising in imitation of others and sell to middlemen who come to the village. The market price for rabbits has always fluctuated, and the losers are always the farmers. Five to six households have raised about 300 goats by allowing them out to graze. Although grazing is not officially prohibited, neither is it promoted for environmental reasons. Farmers mainly sell their goats in November, when middlemen come to the village. Almost every household raises two or three pigs a year, and consumes one of them by curing or souping the meat after slaughtering. The rest are sold to middlemen. Each household raises some six to seven chicken. Eggs are mainly for family consumption, while 40% are sold to middlemen who visit the village. In Beigou hamlet there is one household that has raised about 120 chicken and the eggs are sold to visiting traders. Eggs produced by locally raised chickens have a better market price than those produced on industrialized chicken farms. For instance, eggs collected from the village can be sold in urban markets for 12 yuan/kg, whereas eggs produced industrially fetch only half that price. The biggest problem for chicken production is the threat of chicken cholera. There are also some 20 to 30 donkeys raised by households in the village, mainly for sale as young donkeys to middlemen. Family products then are mostly sold to middlemen who come to the village, rather than farmers having to go out to look for markets. Hence market awareness is still very weak among villagers and the marketing system has still to be developed.

Many farmer households in the village make 'glass' noodles. After harvesting the sweet potato, they make a starch out of the raw potato and from this they make the noodles. In addition, there are various other types of small-scale family enterprise in the village. Three households are engaged in noodle processing, one is engaged in processing coal bricks from mining residues, six households are engaged in bean curd (*toufu*) making, one is engaged in pea sprout making, one in *youtiao* making (a kind of typical food processing in China by frying pieces of fermented wheat flour), and several are engaged in transporting people and goods. The village has one small retail shop (five previously) and four other types of household-based processing enterprises. In addition, there are also two small mining operations currently operated by two contractors from outside.

The actual per capita income in the village is about 800 to 1,000 yuan per year. The sources of income mainly include wage income from jobs outside the village and locally, household enterprises, livestock raising, and forestry (walnut and persimmon trees). When we asked for the per capita income, they always asked us whether we were asking for the figures that the village reported to the higher level or whether we wanted the actual per capita income figures. Some years ago, the National Government declared that rural villages should reach a set target of 'well-being' (*xiaokang*) by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This target required reaching a per capita income US\$ 300 per year (1 US\$ = 8.3 yuan approximately). Thus, in order to meet this political target, many rural villages had reported to higher level authorities an annual per capita income growth rate that

would simply meet the required target. Therefore, rural villages in the research area had all in theory reached a per capita income level of at least 2,400 yuan per year.

Household expenditure is mainly on schooling, agricultural inputs, water and electricity costs, agricultural taxes and levies, and other daily consumption needs. The local tax and levy system in the research area is abbreviatedly called ‘three funds, five fees and two taxes’ (*san ti wu tong liang shui*). Since the taxes and levies were too complicated to explain during our initial discussion with the village cadres, we asked the village bookkeeper to prepare them afterwards. The results are shown in the Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Taxes and levies in Nandugang Village

Category	Name	Purpose	Destination	Amount	Way of collection
Three funds	Public welfare fund ( <i>gong yi jin</i> )	Village road construction	To village committee	30.6 yuan/capita/year	Collecting cash from each household by village committee
	Public accumulation fund ( <i>gong ji jin</i> )	Construction of water system and electricity			
	Management fund	Subscription for newspapers and magazines			
Five fees	Education fee	School construction	All to township government	30.6 yuan/capita-year	Collecting cash from each household by village committee
	Family planning fee	Magazine, illustrations, and medicines			
	Militia drilling fee	Militia drilling			
	Military supporting fee ( <i>you fu fei</i> )	Caring for households which have members in military at the moment			
	Township road construction fee	Village to village roads within the township			
Two taxes	Agricultural tax	Contribution to state budget, and for agricultural development	All to township and county financial bureau	20.8 yuan/capita-year	Collecting cash from each household by village committee
	Tax on special agricultural and forestry products	Contribution to state budget, and for the development of special agricultural and forestry products			

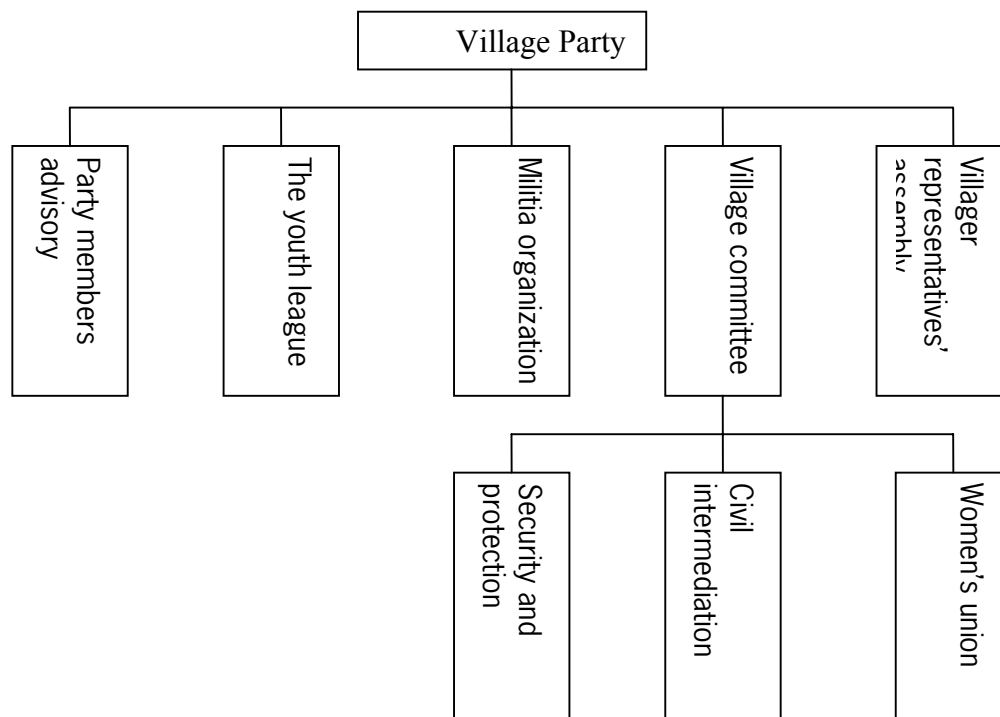
The major durable items in the village include colour television sets in 70% of the households, refrigerators in 10% of households, 30 three-wheel motorcycles, and a few vehicles for transportation. The village collective income is mainly from the levies and

is largely spent on the stipends of village cadres, the construction of village public infrastructure such as road construction, canal construction, well digging etc., subscribing to newspapers and magazines, telephone communication costs and the costs of receptions etc. The development potential of the village lies in the large mountainous area for plantation and fruit trees, also horticulture and nurseries can be potentially developed. However, the main constraints include the lack of technical knowledge, skills and information, the lack of water resources, poor transportation, a closed ideology, and extensive crop farming.

**Organizational and institutional aspects: *organization and village administration***

In order to understand the structure of village organization, we asked the village cadres to draw a diagram. The bookkeeper was again assigned this task by Mr. Liu Zhenkun. The organizational diagram as well as the composition and functions of each institution in Nandugang village are displayed in Figure 4.1 and Table 4.2.

Figure 4.1 Organizational diagram of Nandugang Village



The diagram and table shows that the village has a complex organizational setup. The village party branch is the core and leading institution in the village overall institutional setup and operation. Therefore, in practice in all rural villages in China, the head of the party branch (the party secretary) is always the first man/woman in the village, and the primary decision-maker on all issues and affairs in the village. In the case of Nandugang village, the first decision-maker is Mr. Liu Zhenkun. The party secretary is elected by all party members in the village, and then officially appointed by the township party committee. When the elected one is not to the township party committee's liking, they

will overrule the village. Here the party refers to the Communist Party. Since the communist party is the most popular and powerful party and plays the absolute leading role amongst all parties in China, the ‘party’ stands for the communist party in this study. Under the leadership of the village party branch, the village committee is the second powerful institution in the village since it is responsible for the implementation of policies and works assigned from a high level, as well as the operation of all inter village works. Therefore, the director of the village committee is normally the second decision-maker, in the case of Nandugang village, Mr. Liu Zhenshan. The village committee is in fact a simplified term for villagers’ committee, because it is supposed to represent the interests of all villagers. Therefore, the director and its members are normally elected by all villagers. This is particularly the case during recent years.

Table 4.2 Functions and composition of village institutions in Nandugang village

Name of village institution	Functions	Composition
Village party branch	Overall responsibility for all kinds of work in the village	3 members: party secretary Liu Zhenkun; deputy party secretary Zhao Yunshan; member Zhao Guohai
Party members advisory committee	Provides advice to the village party branch	7 members: chairman Liu Guoxiang; members Sang Dengshan, Zhao Huanbang, Zhao Shungang, Zhao Qingyou, Zhang Zimin, Liu Zhenshan
The youth league	Politically it is a reserve for the party	3 members: secretary Liu Guohai; members Zhao Shunjun, Song Yulan (female)
Militia organization	Politically it is for national defense, it is regarded as a reserve for the formal military	3 members: head, Zhao Guohai, deputies, Zhao Shunjun, Zhao Yunshan
Village committee	Implements policies and assignments from higher level, organizes and executes all kinds of village works	4 members: director Liu Zhenshan, deputy Zhao Yunshan, bookkeeper: Zhao Shunjun, head of the women’s union: Song Yulan (female)
Villager representatives’ assembly ( <i>cun min dai biao hui</i> )	Facilitates the village committee’s work, gives advice, monitors the works implemented by the village committee, including village income and expenditure	35 members: chairman Zhao Qingxiang, vice chairman: Sang Dengshan, Zhao Huanbang, and 32 other members
Security and protection committee ( <i>zhi bao hui</i> )	Helps the official security agencies to maintain social security and order in the village	3 members, head, Zhao Shunjun, and two members
Civil intermediation committee ( <i>min tiao hui</i> )	Intermediates and solves civil conflicts amongst villagers	3 members: head, Zhao Yunshan, and two members
Women’s union	Promotes party policies, and	3 members: head, Song Yulan

	engages in village family planning work	(f), and two female members
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Within the village committee, the bookkeeper (*kuai ji*) has an important role, because he or she manages village income and expenditure, and is also responsible for reporting all kinds of data to high levels. Thus, the village bookkeeper is normally appointed according to the preference of the village party secretary. In the case of Nandugang, the bookkeeper is Mr. Zhao Shunjun. The village women's union is in fact a branch of the All China Women's Federation (ACWF) at grassroots level. Officially it is a non-governmental organization, but in practice, it acts more like a political, official and governmental body. Particularly in rural villages, family planning is always a priority task for the village authority, and the village women's union is the only organization that can be closely linked to all women in the village, and it therefore plays an important role within the village institutions. In the case of Nandugang, the head of the women's union is Ms. Song Yulan.

Hence, the village party secretary, the director of the village committee, the bookkeeper, and the head of the women's union are the four key positions/cadres for the administration, management and operation of the village. This was exactly reflected in the information given us in our first official encounter with the village cadres in Nandugang village. As stated earlier, the village cadres receive stipends, which could in fact be called work subsidies from the levies collected from villagers. The subsidies are at very low level. In the case of Nandugang, the party secretary, the director of the village committee and the bookkeeper all receive a monthly subsidy of 120 yuan, while other village cadres receive less. From the compositions of the different institutions of Nandugang, women are extremely underrepresented in the different village organizations, which is the general case for most of China.

The operation of a village is normally based on 'village rules and regulations' (*cun/xiang gui min yue*) agreed upon by all villagers. These serve as the general constitution and include two parts, the official and the indigenous component. The latter normally differs by village and relates more to community social and cultural undertakings. The former is normally standardized for all villages in a township and relates more to the official and formal operation of the villages, thus, they differ by township. In Nandugang village, the standardized rules and regulations are the same as that for other villages in Pocang Township. They include the general principles, responsibilities and regulations of villagers' organizations, the management of village economic affairs, social orders/affairs, and public welfare as well as other supplementary rules.

Since the party branch is the most important institution in the village, the historical development of the party branch has been well recorded by the village. As in other villages in Pocang Township, we find the record of the achievements of all previous party secretaries displayed on the wall of the branch office. It recalls the following details (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Major achievements of previous party secretaries of Nandugang village

Name	Period in position	Major achievements
Sang Qingmei (f)	1938 – 1948	Set up the village party branch
Zhao Luozhan	1949 – 1952	
Fu Luogui	1953 – 1955	
Zhang Zimin	1956 – 1964	Constructed irrigation canal of 1,500 meters
Zhao Qinglu	1965	Cadre for the ‘four eliminations’ ( <i>si qing</i> ) political movement
Yang Yinhan	1966 – 1967	Cadre for the ‘four eliminations’ political movement
Sang Dengshan	1968 – 1974	Constructed dam of 1,000 meters, and dug 10 wells
Zhang Zimin	1975	Cadre for the Cultural Revolution
Zhao Bingtang	1976	Cadre for the Cultural Revolution, established a forestry farm, and afforested 200 mu
Sang Dengshan	1977	Cadre for the Cultural Revolution
Zhao Shunca	1978 – 1979	Cadre for the Cultural Revolution, watershed management of 100 mu
Sang Dengshan	1980 – 1987	Set up forestry teams, established carpet enterprise, constructed road
Zhao Yunshan	1988 – 1990	Cadre recommended by higher level
Zhao Zengfu	1991	
Zhao Hanwen	1992	Constructed tap water system
Zhang Haiyong	1993 – 1994	Afforestation of 300 mu
Liu Zhenkun	1995 – present	Constructed a village bridge, established party branch office, constructed school, afforested 2,500 mu, planted 30,000 fruit trees, dug 3 wells, renovated 10 wells, constructed 2,500 metres of irrigation canal, improved electricity facilities

I now outline the basic profiles of the other three villages in the research area, giving attention to how they differ from Nandugang.

### Sanggan Village

Sanggan Village is located in the western mountain area of Yixian County, 3.5 km to the southeast of the locale of Pocang Township Government. There are 178 households and 696 inhabitants in the village. The total labour force amounts to 350. The total arable land is 720 mu, of which 350 mu can be irrigated. There are 72 communist party members.

Sanggan is a single village unit settlement with no hamlets. It neighbours Nandugang. The village has about 7,000 mu, of which, as the wall chart states, 720 mu are arable (i.e. approximately 1.04 mu per capita) with sandy soils, and more than 5,000 mu of mountain land. The rest includes riverbank, settlements and idle land. Its physical features are similar to those of Nandugang. The Caohe River crosses the village but again flows only in the rainy season. The mineral resources include ironstone and

vermiculite. The same muddy or dusty unpaved road links the village to Pocang Township and the same early morning bus takes passengers to Baoding and Yixian County capital. The village has had electricity since 1986 and has tapped drinking water during the rainy season and water is drawn for irrigation and household use from the collective wells for the rest of the year. The village has 10 wells.

There are 10 telephones in the village and one primary school for grades 1-4. The students number about 70. There are 3 teachers (1 male and 2 females). Currently Sanggang village is constructing a central primary school with full grades (1 to 6). Students from the nearby two villages are expected to come to this school for completing their primary education. There are three private health care dispensaries in the village with three local doctors. The most frequent minor illnesses reported are flu and headaches etc. The township immunization station is responsible for basic immunization of children from the birth to eight.

There is no market in Sanggang village, and farmers therefore sell their produce and buy daily necessities in the nearby markets of Yuangang and Pocang. Households mainly use firewood (80%), coal and gas for energy consumption. Although there is a credit station in the village, farmers can rarely obtain credit from it, and the village authority does not have any influence on credit provision. Informal credit is active.

Land was first distributed to farmers in Sanggang in 1982 when the household responsibility system was introduced. The most recent land adjustment was in 1998 when 30-year contracts for usufruct rights were introduced. Five percent of middle quality arable land is here set aside for responding to changes in the number of household members. The mountain land was similarly parceled out in 1982, which also led to a reduction in tree stocks. Thus, in 1998, the same process of auction and contracts took place here as elsewhere. Some 80% of village households obtained mountain lots in this way.

Villagers are almost all of Mandarin or Han nationality with three women of Zhuang minority who are married in. 60 to 70 villagers travel to urban centres as far afield as Beijing for either seasonal or longer-term work. Most go for the first time after marriage, and again almost all are males. In addition, there are also more than 20 farmers from the village doing temporary work in local mines and enterprises. Households are basically nuclear family units of around four members. Very few extended families are to be found. Farmers and their families enjoy the usual leisure activities provided by the indigenous social, cultural and seasonal calendar.

The same crops are planted as in the other villages and the same varieties of trees can be seen on the nearby mountain land. The average yield of wheat is a little lower than in Nandugang, at 220 kg/mu, that of maize and sweet potato is about 300 kg/mu and 1,300kg/mu respectively, and that of groundnut and millet is about 100 kg/mu and 50kg/mu respectively. In general there is no surplus above household consumption needs. Currently there are 2,000 persimmon, 40 apple and 150 walnut trees mature enough to bear fruit. Livestock consists of 10 cattle, 400 goats, 300 rabbits, 60 donkeys, 300 pigs, 500 chicken and 100 ducks raised by village households and sold to middlemen.



Family based small-scale enterprises in the village range from a grain mill, glass noodle processing, coal-brick making, fodder pulverization, local cake making, bean curds and transportation. The village has two small retail shops. Per capita income in the village is on average about 1000 yuan per year. Sources of income include outside and local waged labour, money from the sale of livestock and forestry products (walnuts and persimmons) and a small amount of farm produce. Expenditure is mainly on education, agricultural inputs, health care, taxes and levies, and daily consumption needs. The local tax and levy system is the same for all villages.

Seventy-five per cent of households have a TV, less than 5% own a refrigerator whereas all households own a bicycle. There are 15 three-wheel motorcycles, and a few vehicles for transportation. The village collective income is mainly from the levies and the payments for labour from the Sino-German Afforestation Project. Its expenditure covers stipends (about 12,000 yuan per year), subscribing to newspapers and magazines (about 3,000yuan per year), telephone communication and reception costs (about 3,000 yuan per year) etc. Development potential lies in the large mountainous area for plantation and the surplus labour available. The main constraints include lack of water resources, poor livestock development, inconvenient transportation, lack of new suitable technologies, poor education and the low quality of agricultural and forestry products.

The village organizational setup is the same as for all villages and will therefore not be repeated here. The party branch party secretary is Xu Changquan, his deputy is Xu Xinquan. The village committee is composed of the director, Zhao Qinggou, his deputy, Zhao Laisheng, the bookkeeper, Xu Runzao, and one member, Hao Hefeng, a female who is head of the village women's union. Xu Xingquan is the head of both the village security and protection committee and the village civil intermediation committee.

### **Yuangang Village**

Yuangang Village is located in the western mountainous area of Yixian County, 6.5 km to the southeast of the locale of Pocang Township Government. There are 307 households and 1230 inhabitants in the village. The total labour force amounts to 450. The total arable land is 1,200 mu, amongst which 700 mu can be irrigated. There are 85 communist party members.

Yuangang village is located to the most easterly part of Pocang Township and neighbours Guantou Town to the east and Nandugang to the west. It is surrounded by high mountains to the south and the north. It is divided into a total of ten production teams. It was composed originally of three hamlets but since 1993 all villagers have congregated into one settlement.

The land distribution and physical aspects of the village are similar to the other villages of the study. There is one central primary school teaching all grades (1 to 6). Students from Liugang and Sijiaozhuang villages come to this school to complete their primary education. The school has about 160 pupils with 7 teachers (2 males and 5 females). There are four private health care dispensaries in the village with four local doctors.

Yuangang has slightly more fertile soil than other villages but its crops, land distribution and livestock situation is much the same as elsewhere in Pocang Township. It has a large mountainous area contracted out as in the other villages. The major fruit tree production includes about 2,000 persimmon trees producing 150,000 kg of persimmons each year as well as about 200 mu of plum trees, 100 mu of pear trees and other trees already producing fruit. In three to five year's time, Yuangang is expected to become a village specializing in fruit tree production.

What is really different about Yuangang village is that it has its own market where local farmers and those from the other villages come to buy their daily necessities and sell their products. This village market opens every 5 days, on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of the Chinese lunar calendar and its founding and operating makes an interesting story.

### **The Yuangang market**

Before we came to the village we had not been happy about how this village operated the revolving funds of the EZE project and, in particular, had heard that Mr. Zhao Guo'an, the party secretary, tended to give the revolving funds only to his relatives and friends. But after our visit we understood better this man's philosophy.

We were particularly impressed with how the market in the village had been established through his efforts. Several generations of villagers had hoped for a market in the village, but the dream had been a reality for only one year. Preparing a place for a market is not very difficult in rural communities, however, the critical thing is to attract buyers and sellers to come to the market, and to have farmers trust that they will be able to sell their produce and buy agricultural inputs and daily necessities there. In order to attract local people to the market in the beginning, Mr. Zhao Guo'an invited a locally well-known opera troupe from Baoding city to give opera performances in the market place for one week, and many posters were distributed among nearby villages. In addition, Mr. Zhao Guo'an announced on behalf of the village committee that the village would not collect any fee from traders for the three years. In the beginning, the village even gave subsidies to those venders who did not earn enough profit, so as to let them feel that coming was worthwhile. In order to protect the growth up of the market, Mr. Zhao Guo'an has prevented official bodies such as the market management and tax collection agencies from coming to collect fees from the market traders, sometimes by force. This has probably been achieved because he has good relationships and many friends in official government agencies, including those involved in market management and tax collection. They often play *Mah-Jongg* together and thus his personal relationships with them have helped prevent the market traders from being taxed and levied.

As I pointed out above, the market currently functions every 5 days, on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> days of the lunar calendar. Farmers from nearby Liugang, Nandugang, Sanggang, Luojiapu and Yuangang villages have accepted this market and come for their own purposes. Venders are mainly from Lianggang township and Yuangang village. The main trading items include agricultural products (such as meat, eggs, vegetables, grain, fruits, etc.), agricultural inputs (such as tools, pesticides, fertilizers, seeds, etc.), daily

necessities (such as clothes, shoes, salt, sweets, soap, etc.), animals (such as cattle, pigs, chicken, goats, etc.) and so forth. People in the market can also buy delicious local food cooked by the villagers. On average, 600 to 700 people come on each of the market days.

People have seen the Yuangang market grow over the few years since its founding. Mr. Zhao Guo'an and his colleague realized, after three years, that the market would not bring any monetary benefits to the village collective until they started to collect management fees (for occupying stall space). On the other hand, they also eventually expect to establish a local specialized trading center for fruit products, since Yuangang will have a substantial number of fruit trees in production in a few years. When we asked Mr. Zhao Guo'an what would happen if Nandugang or Sanggang village all planned to open their own markets, he immediately replied full of pride, "Other villagers are not able to open markets, because our consumption is much higher than theirs."

### **Baoshi Village**

Baoshi village is located in a mountainous area, 1.5 km to the northwest of the location of Pocang Township Government. There are 196 households and 687 inhabitants in the village. The total labour force amounts to 390. The total arable land is 502 mu, amongst which 260 mu can be irrigated. The village party branch was established in 1939. There are 53 communist party members.

Baoshi village covers an area of 18 km from east to west. It is a mountainous area characterized by a sparse population scattered among 15 small hamlets. It has six production teams, and relatively more enterprises than other villages.

The total land area of Baoshi is about 26,000 mu, of which 502 mu is arable land (i.e. approximately 0.73 mu per capita) with sandy soils and more than 20,000 mu is mountain land with mixed forest and fruit trees. The upper reaches of the Caohe River seasonally flow across the area. It has deposits of calcite and vermiculite. A side branch of Provincial Road 112 crosses the village and connects the village with Pocang Township. All the hamlets are connected by local village roads that can be used for three-wheeled agricultural motorized carts. Electricity was brought to the village in 1985. Only Zhucun, the main hamlet has a tap drinking water supply for a population of 420 inhabitants. Other hamlets have collective wells. Thirteen of the fifteen hamlets have a total of about 60 telephones. The other two have no connection yet. There is one central primary school in Baoshi with full grades (1 to 6). Students of the village and from the nearby Pocang and Mudoudian villages complete their primary education in this central primary school. There are about 240 pupils and nine teachers (6 males and 3 females) working in the school. There are two health care dispensaries in the village. The most frequent illnesses villagers have include flu and whooping cough. Villagers use the Pocang market (open every 5 days, on the first and 6<sup>th</sup> of Chinese lunar calendar).

Again land arrangements for both mountain and arable land follow the general pattern of the Township villages. The village collective still keeps two sites of the mountainous area and a reserve of about 25 mu, for minor adjustments. The ethnic mix is likewise similar to that of the other villages researched. Thirty or forty of the young married males migrate for work and more than twenty-five farmers work temporarily in local mines and enterprises. The average household size is about 3.5 members per household. Public entertainment is concentrated around the seasonal festivals and events.

The people of Baoshi raise small livestock for consumption and sale and grow wheat, maize, sweet potatoes, soybeans, groundnuts, peas, millet and sorghum etc. There are about 250 mu of arable land for winter wheat, 300 mu for maize, 400 mu for sweet potatoes, and the rest are planted on small plots. Average yields are similar to those of the other villages.

There are various types of small-scale enterprise in the village. Two ironstone and two calcite-processing enterprises operate in the village with investments from outside. There is also a petrol station and two repair shops have opened in the village. In addition, there are the usual food and coal processing and transport businesses. The village has two small retail shops. The actual per capita income in the village is about 1,000 yuan per year, gained from the usual sources and expenditure is on the same items as for all the other villages.

The major durable items in the village include television sets in 90% of the households, refrigerators in less than 10%, VCD and video players in 20%, bicycles in all households, 4-5 three-wheeler motorcycles, and a few vehicles for transportation. The village collective income is mainly from levies and land contract fees and fees paid by outside investors, as well as from development projects funded by outside agencies. Village collective expenditure mainly includes the salary of village cadres (about 9,000 yuan/year), subscriptions to newspapers and magazines (about 3,000 yuan/year), telephone and reception costs (about 3,000 yuan/year) and small-scale construction of village public infrastructure (about 1,000 yuan/year) etc. The newspapers subscribed to in the villages usually include *The People's Daily*, *Heibei Daily*, *Baoding Report*, *Yishui Report*, *Hebei Farmers*, *Hebei Science and Technology*, *Yanzhao Cities*, *TV Program Guide*, *Family Planning* and so on. The magazines subscribed include *World of Marriage and Reproduction*, *Chinese Women*, *Career*, *New Farmers*, *Marriage and Family*, *Rural Youth*, *Abstracts for Farmers*, *Communist Party Members*, *Party Ethos and Party Disciplines*, *Party History* and so on. The development limitations faced by Baoshi village include poor resources and soil fertility, a 'closed' ideology, and a general lack of information and capital.

In addition to the organizational setup common to all villages, in Baoshi, under the village committee, there is another institution called the village technology committee, which is parallel to the security and protection committee, civil intermediation committee and women's union. This village technology committee is responsible for promoting the application of new suitable technologies in village and household production. The party branch secretary of Baoshi village is Zhao Shengli. He has two deputies - Liang Shutian and Liang Shulai - and two members - Zhao Mingshan and Chen Gengshen. The village committee director is Liang Shutian and his deputy is Chen

Gengshen; the bookkeeper is Zhao Mingshan, and the remaining two members - Chen Lanting and Du Xiufang - are women.

### *Compiling Village Documentary Data*

During our first encounters with village cadres, some quantitative data collected were only rough estimates due to the need for the bookkeepers to look up figures or due to their absence. This was exactly the case in Sanggang village. But when needing to cross check data during the absence of the bookkeeper, the village party secretary was indeed straightforward, and asked us to confirm whether we wanted to know the reality or the data reported to the higher level. We thus were later given by the bookkeeper the exact figures on data such as village population by gender, arable land, per capita income, the average crop yield etc. The bookkeeper was in the beginning very cautious and afraid that providing the data could negatively affect the community. He always denied that he kept the official statistical records of the village. At that stage he was also not sure of what the village party secretary might think of his supplying us with the 'real' data.

We gave him space to consider our requests by not insisting, affirming that there would be no political implications over the data if we could get them and that all we wanted was to know what records the village held. Later, after he had attended the village meeting to explain the purpose of our stay and the way we worked, he was greatly released, and although he still denied he had the official records when we told him that the secretary had been unable to recall certain figures, he said "Let me go back and try to check".

At the end of the village meeting, he gave us a piece of paper on which he had written the figures we wanted. Obviously this was a clue to the fact that he kept copies of such records. In the evening, it was turn to take dinner at his home (the arranged meal system), and we asked him how he had got the data we had asked for, he said the information came from checking the household registration books. Thus, we knew he had all the household registration books with him. When we asked what other information he had, he was again very hesitant but, after further explanation, he eventually took out a key and opened a big wooden box. It became evident that the community in fact had kept various rich records in relation to its operation and management. For instance, we saw the community socio-economic statistics for 2000 and previous years, the sheet of village affairs for opening to the public, household registration books, record of taxes and levies collected, records on the land distribution and auctions of mountain land, and various other contracts and so forth. Like this, by strategic interaction with the village bookkeeper we removed his worry and hesitation and instead won his trust and cooperation.

## **PART II**

### **A View of Village Social Life through the Use of Participatory Research Methods**

I now aim to fill out this account of village organisation through a series of meetings and interactions with farmers and officials and their families, focussing on particular dimensions. Here I have selected the most illustrative examples from the neighbouring villages of Nandugang and Sanggang. The various participatory methods used in the meetings produced fairly uniform results, indicating a common history and experience for all four villages.

#### **Recalling Community History**

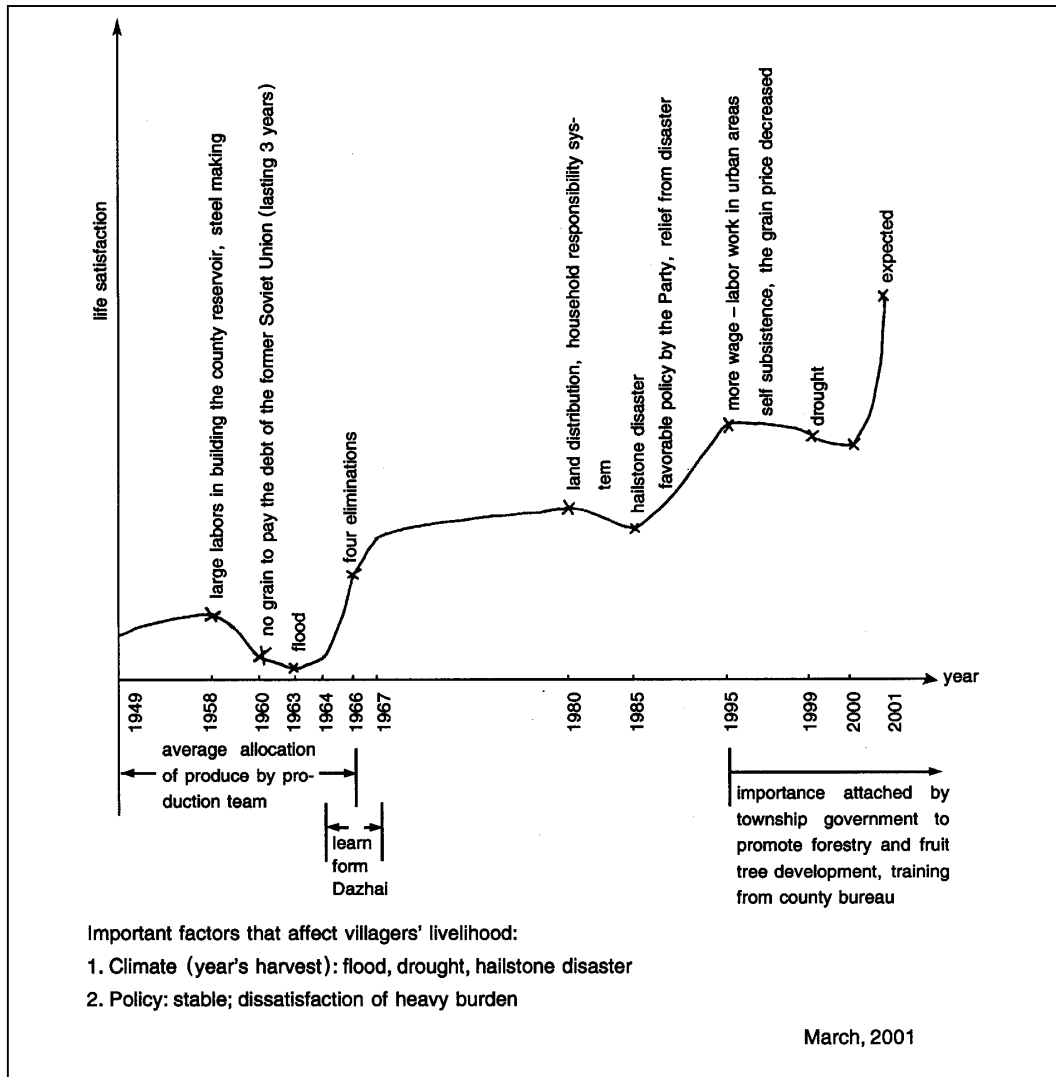
To understand the historical development of the community, we asked the village party secretary to ask elderly key informants in Nandugang village to come to talk with us at an arranged time. After a while, Mr. Xu Chungui came. We gave him a cigarette and waited for other farmers to arrive. Finally Mr. Xue Jinhai and Ms. Long Fengmei turned up. They were all in their sixties. After some customary chat, we told them our purpose and explained to them that the historical trend of the community could be illustrated on paper. We placed a large sheet of paper and pens on the ground. After explaining to them how to draw the historical trend on the paper, we invited them to select one of them to do so. We knew that they could all read and write. They all declined by shaking their heads, and more encouragement had little effect. It was not unexpected. We know that participation in such exercises requires getting used to. Thus, while speaking to them we drew a line on the paper to indicate historical time. “Uncles and aunt, since the establishment of New China, which years have brought large impacts on your life?” We then continued, “for instance, in which year was there a favorable climate for a bumper harvest, in which year were you confronted with natural disasters such as drought or flood? Certainly also include government policies and try to recall all those aspects that have heavily affected your community.”

They looked at each other, and then Mr. Xu Chungui started. “If we talk about things that have affected our village the most, then it would be the political movement of ‘four eliminations’ (*si qing*) in 1966 and after that the land distribution and application of the household responsibility system in 1980. They are important, because after that our life has been getting better and better.” We immediately recorded these two points in time, 1966 and 1980. “What else?” The old folks were now able to start recalling other historical events. “After 1995, more and more villagers went to cities for work, they earned more money.” We also joined the recalling process by asking “We heard after 1995 the grain price started to decrease, did this affect you?” “Not really, because the grain production in our community is self subsistence.” “We also heard since 1995 the township government started to promote forestry and fruit tree development, is that correct?” “Yes, the county forestry bureau trained us, and many village technicians also did training with us and we also received a lot of materials.” We were now recording more and more historical moments. We tried to facilitate their recalling process by

always asking “What else?” or “We have heard...” or “What happened in between year A and year B?” and so on. Eventually we came up with 1949, 1958, 1960, 1963, 1964, 1966, 1967, 1980, 1985, 1995, 1999, 2000 and 2001 on the horizontal axis, and then recorded all the events responding to the years on the vertical axis.

Afterwards, we drew the curve that represents the extent of satisfaction of their life. “Uncles and aunt, amongst these years, in which year had you a better life?” The old folks looked at those years and pointed to the year 1985 when crops were heavily damaged by a hailstorm. “Since that year, our life has been getting better and better. However, unfortunately in 1999, there was a severe drought. Mr. Xu Chungui indicated that the life satisfaction in 1995 was the high point and that since 1999 and 2000 it had gone down a little but they expected the situation would be favorable in 2001. Back to the earlier years, the shortage of grain was very serious in 1960 due to a heavy natural disaster and the former Soviet Union’s demands for China to pay back its debts. In addition, in 1958, life was difficult because a lot of labour had to be given to construct the county reservoir, and because people were pushed into working in the steel industry. Such a situation continued until the lowest point in 1963, when people’s lives were even worse than they had been before the liberation, when as mentioned below labour was diverted from agriculture into industrial production and famine ensued. After such an interesting discussion, a comprehensive community time line emerged as presented in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 Historical time line of Nandugang Village



This community historical time line clearly shows the history of the development of these rural villages. From the illustration, we find farmer's lives in the earlier years were at a very low level, similar to that found before the liberation. From 1958 they deteriorated drastically. As mentioned, at that time the mass population of China was encouraged to engage in steel production. Farmers all ate in the commune dining place together. Labour was withdrawn from agriculture resulting in famine. It was a highly politicized time. Huge numbers of trees in the mountains were felled for steel making, with a marked decrease in forest cover creating a low point in China's history of forestry development. And then the natural disaster of heavy floods around 1963 destroyed most of the fertile farmland in the village. Under pressure from both the social and natural environment, the *economy* stagnated. Large numbers of the rural population heavily suffered from starvation, and some had to get food by begging until the Cultural Revolution began in 1966. The immediate political movement was called 'the four eliminations' meaning the elimination of economic problems, political problems, depravity and corruption. The equal distribution mechanism in the commune



brigades had started to collapse giving farmers again the motivation to produce and thus living standards started to rise.

The 'learn from Dazhai' movement of 1964 to 1967 (a model village of the time notable for its high but much exaggerated agricultural production) in fact enhanced the improvement of basic agricultural infrastructure, and hence contributed to the development of agriculture in China. The death of Chairman Mao in 1976 was a momentous event in China. Many rural farmers believed 'China would be over after the death of Chairman Mao'. But after 1980, when the community land was distributed under the household responsibility system, farmers' production initiatives were greatly encouraged. At the beginning of the land reform there were debates and arguments among villagers as to whether the land should remain collective or be distributed to individuals. Many farmers publicly said that they preferred the land to remain collectively managed, because they were afraid to make political mistakes. People still had strong memories of the serious consequences that such mistakes could bring during the Cultural Revolution. In fact there was no clear indication from higher levels in the beginning on how to handle the policy of land distribution. Many rural villages had started the process without central government preventing their actions, and thus more and more villages, including our research villages, began to distribute land themselves. Later government approved their undertakings. After the land distribution, farmers in the villages of the research area, as elsewhere in China, were able to rapidly produce more grain for their consumption, and starvation was largely eliminated. Except for drought years, agricultural production has risen to meet consumption requirements and sometimes produces small surpluses for marketing. By 1995, almost all farmers in the villages were in this situation. At about the same time, it became the fashion for young farmers to contribute to household income by seeking outside work in the urban areas. In addition, the township government had promoted forestry development and the planting of fruit trees. These developments have led to generally better standards of living in the villages of the area.

### **Mapping Community Resources**

After gathering basic community data from encounters with village cadres, and getting a historical perspective, interaction with farmers was then sought for mapping and looking at their views and understandings of village resources. In Nandugang, we randomly invited a group of farmers including two women to discuss resources with us, passing on the time and locale for the discussion via the village cadres. Mr. Liu Zhenkun, village party secretary, recommended the office of the village committee for the meeting. Mr. Wang Jinsuo, deputy township party secretary also joined us and on the way he told us there was a Nandugang television station in the village and that Mr. Liu Zhenkun intended to record the process of our discussion. With great interest and curiosity, we came to the office of the village committee, a very ordinary room of about 20 square metres. Several benches were strewn around without order, and two desks and a bed were also in the room. All the furniture was covered in dust. However, there was an old video camera hung up there with two microphones on a desk. In the wall near the video camera there was a simple backboard on which 'Nandugang Television Station' was written with nice calligraphy and design. Near the video camera, there was a metal cabinet containing several pieces of equipment such as a video player and a lot of wires.

We were told this was the Nandugang cable television network. In fact it is prohibited in China to operate a village television station without official permission. However, Mr. Liu Zhenkun thinks such a system is very interesting for them to use, so he used his personal network with the county broadcasting and television bureau, and got an old video camera that they had considered obsolete. With the help of the bureau, a few bits of equipment were cheaply bought and installed, and many households were connected up to the network. By doing this, the so-called village television station was established. In Mr. Liu Zhenkun's words, "We think it is nice to play, we can use this system to play technical videos, we can use it to disseminate information and notices to farmers, we can explain policies to farmers, and farmers can also watch the process of village cadre meetings." So the entire process of our follow up interactions with the invited farmers on village resources was broadcast to all villagers. However, we strongly felt that Mr. Liu Zhenkun's motive for installing such a system was his eagerness to enrich village cultural dynamics (and perhaps increase his own reputation).

Only four farmers arrived on time, as usual we gave them cigarettes. After a while, three more came. And we then thought we could start our subject discussion and began by introducing the purpose of doing a village resources mapping exercise. Five more farmers turned up at different times so we had to repeat the introduction. From the time of the first arrivals to the final start of the exercise more than forty minutes passed. This is the reality the researcher must face when doing research in a rural area. We put a paper on the desk and asked the farmers to select one among them to draw the map. Without surprise, farmers were not active at the beginning and nobody wanted to take the lead. Each of them said that others could write and draw better. It is not so much a question of farmers not liking to take a lead in such kind of actions but more of a common modest way in Chinese society of letting others come first. Finally all farmers proposed that Mr. Liu Guoxiang should take the lead. He was happy to accept and sat formally near the desk, because the video camera was recording him. Obviously he was very delighted to be recorded as a key actor on television. Other farmers were also joking with him by telling him that his wife would be watching him at home on television. He took the pen and asked others how to start. Farmers at that moment were discussing with each other. They said that they had the full picture of the community in their heads but did not know how to start.

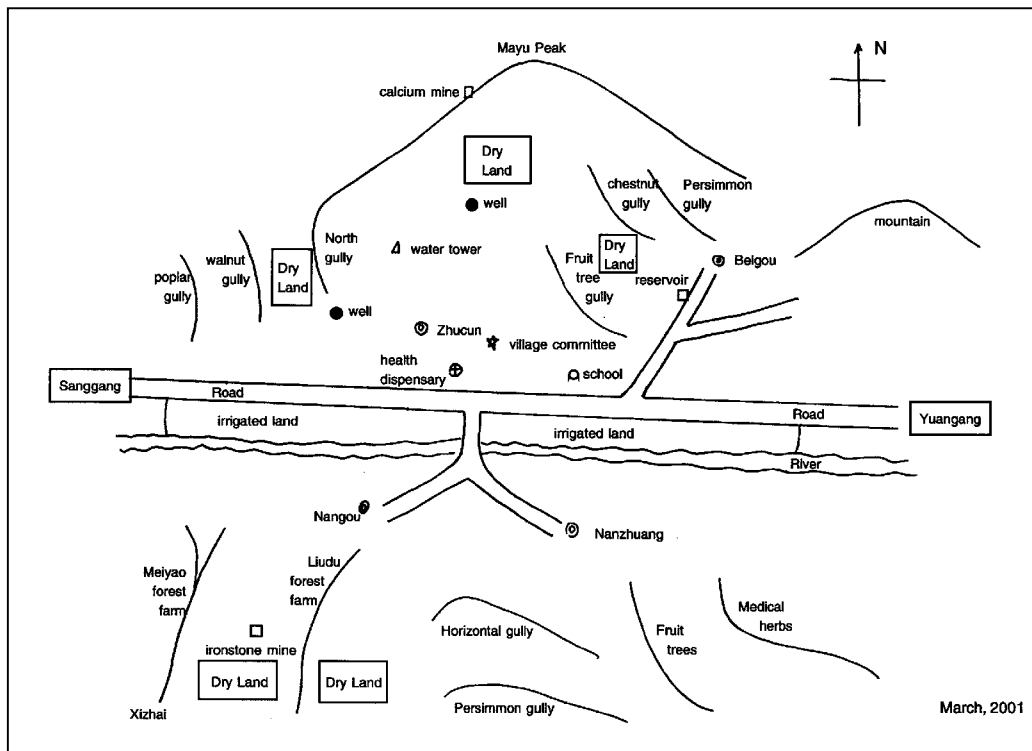
After a while, they started to give their ideas. "First draw Zhucun (the centre and largest of the hamlets of Nandugang), then draw the items to the south of Zhucun." "Draw according to a certain scale". "We should first draw the four directions on the paper, up – north, down – south, left – west, and right – east." "First draw large objects and then small objects." We also joined the discussion by saying: "We are sure you have your own ways to illustrate your community resources, we can also put down the road and the river crossing the community for comparison." Mr. Liu Guoxiang decided to first draw Zhucun hamlet, the road and the river. "The road can be represented by two parallel lines and the river can be shown by two parallel curves," and a farmer added, "The bridge should be three." At that moment, the participants all became more active and excited, and more laughs were forthcoming. The atmosphere was indeed getting warm and smooth. We commented to Mr. Liu: "Your writing is so nice." Then one farmer responded: "Oh, people say he has the same qualification as a university graduate." Obviously this farmer was joking with Mr. Liu Guoxiang. After a while, the

mountains and gullies to the south had been drawn in, then the forestry farm, the walnut tree gully and the persimmon tree gully, the irrigated land area and the dry land areas, and so on. A farmer suggested to write the names of the different mountain peaks, the names of the gullies, and the name of the river. At that moment, another farmer proposed to change the name of the river from 'Caohe' to 'no water river'. This indicated that farmers there were not satisfied over the environmental degradation and decrease in rainfall and other water resources. One farmer then remembered to put the location of the calcite and ironstone mines in the drawing, another farmer agreed but commented: "Mines cannot solve economic problems", indicating thereby that farmers were not happy that only a few privileged farmers had benefited from the mine enterprises.

When the resource objects were mostly indicated on the paper, we asked: "Where is the health care dispensary?" "There is no bloody health dispensary, there is something in Zhucun, but none in the other hamlets." Again this revealed that farmers were extremely unhappy about how the health service system in rural areas in China had deteriorated. Finally the names of the participating farmers and the date were also recorded on the paper.

As displayed in Figure 4.3, the community resources are comprehensively presented in the illustration. By looking at this map, as outsiders, we can easily construct the reality of the community. From here, we see that the economy is dominated by arable farming, forestry and fruit tree development and that lack of water is a serious problem. The only river, to the south of Zhucun hamlet, has very limited water available for irrigation and in summer time the river dries up. The order of their drawing of the different resources indicated the priority and importance they gave to them.

Figure 4.3 Resource map of Nandugang Village



### Transecting Community Landscape

In many cases the physical objects in the village are endowed with rich social and cultural meanings. In order to understand more fully the life worlds of farmers, we invited key informants to make a transect walk with us across the community landscape, during the process of which we interacted and conversed about what we saw. In Sanggang Village, Mr. Xu Shimin, a farmer, and Mr. Zhao Laisheng, the village technician, were invited to join us for the walk. Mr. Xu Shimin had lived in the village all his life and knew well all the vegetation and physical variations of the village landscape. Through many years of agricultural practice he had accumulated a lot of production and livelihood experiences, and thus he was very familiar with land resources as well as development constraints and potential. He has a large area of mountain land under contract and is especially concerned about the future of land use. As a village technician, Mr. Zhao Laisheng has participated in many training sessions and since 1996 has been responsible for the implementation and management of the Sino-German Afforestation Project in the village. He is very familiar with the situation in the community. Whenever he saw a small locust plant growing between rocks, he would emotionally exclaim, "This is the achievement of our project".

As shown in Figure 4.4, we started from the village road (point A), and walked towards the south mountain (points B, C, D, E, F, G, H), and then walked towards the north

mountain (points I, J, K). While walking, we listened to their commentary, we discussed and recorded all the information. The road was full of dust. Mr. Xu Shimin seemed embarrassed and said “This is much better than the mud in the rains. When it rains, I don’t know how we’ll manage to walk this way”. We came to a large area of arable land, and Mr. Xu Shimin explained how in the production season it would be very colorful, with grain crops, vegetables, grapes, and Chinese prickly ash growing there. The fertile plots are used for two grain crops a year, first winter wheat, then maize. After the maize harvest the stalks are piled in the field and used as fodder for animals. On the less fertile plots sweet potatoes and groundnuts are grown. Organic fertilizers (manure) are carried to the field by donkey and irrigation is done by pumping water from the river or from wells. River water is limited and heavily polluted by the waste products from the ironstone processing enterprises in the river’s upper reaches. Irrigation with polluted water can damage crops. This area carries the community high quality soil and normally winter wheat yields 250 kg/mu, maize 350 kg/mu and sweet potato 2,000 kg/mu. Hence it is the main source of the villagers’ subsistence. We asked: “Is sweet potato used for fodder or is it processed?” “It is partly used for fodder, and partly processed for starch, Starch can generate a certain cash income for us”, Mr. Xu Shimin replied.

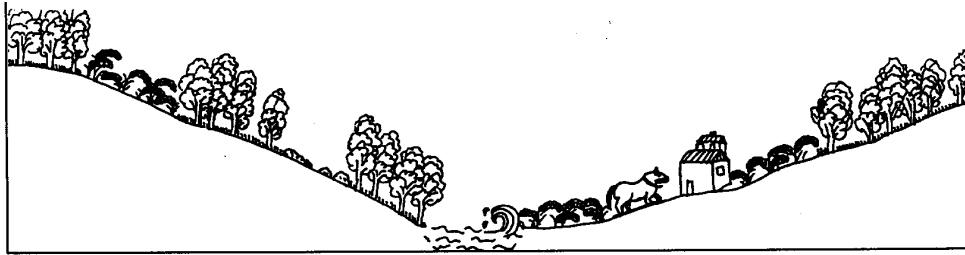
After passing the arable plots, we came to the riverbank. Observing the dry riverbed Mr. Xu Shimin could only express his disappointment: “Every year there is water for only a short time between July and September. For the rest of the year there is very little water. As you can see, some farmers use the riverbank as sweet potato-processing sites or to grow sweet potato seedlings. When there is more water, we use it for irrigation.” After passing the river, we started to climb the side of the mountain. On the way, Mr. Xu Shimin and Mr. Zhao Laisheng discussed various things about what they had seen. Facing the sparcity of trees there, Mr. Zhao Laisheng explained: “This area is the north slope. We also have the south, east and west slopes. On the south slope water run off is higher so the soil moisture is lower and drought often occurs. Trees find it difficult to survive here. On the north slope, run off is lower and trees have more chance to survive. Although where we are standing also belongs to the north slope, the rock is gneiss with a very thin soil layer and so the tree survival rate is very low and the rate growth rate is slow too.” Mr. Xu Shimin seemed not to fully agree with what Mr. Zhao Laisheng. His analysis was different. “I think the critical problem is inappropriate management. Before the contract in 1998, farmers lacked technology and management experience. They also did not care that much about investing in such land, thus seedlings were not properly planted, which is one of the key reasons for their low survival rate. Since the contracts of 1998, things have changed tremendously.” We asked how the area was contracted. Mr. Xu Shimin responded: “There are two ways of contracting the land, one is for one household to contract a large area, the second is for a group of households jointly to contract a large area, a so-called ‘united households’ (*lian hu*) contract. On this lot each household has 6 to 7 mu, and the contract fee is less than 100 yuan a year. However, the contract period is only two years, thus, although many may have been taken, their management is still weak, plus the fact that because of drought survival rates and growth are very low and growth is slow.” Walking further, we saw an area full of bare rocks with almost no vegetation. They both shook their heads and said: “The situation will only get better when there is enough soil layer after long weathering.”

Climbing further, we saw an impressive area of dense locust trees. Mr. Xu Shimin said: “This is contracted by one household.” The other added: “These trees were planted with the support of our project. The project specified that for planting the holes should be dug at ‘174’, meaning 1 meter long, 70 cm wide and 40 cm deep. If the soil depth was not enough, more soil had to be added around the roots of the seedlings. Otherwise, trees find it difficult to survive. Here also belongs to gneiss rock. Gneiss weathers more easily than limestone. The soil layer here is a bit thicker. The work of digging holes is very hard. People say, ‘sweetness will only come after bitterness’. When people see flourishing green trees giving shade and rich fruits, they will enjoy very much the amenity and happiness of the harvest.”

After passing a small hill we saw a broad land area. Mr. Xu Shimin said with great sorrow “Here the mountains are so undulating that people are claiming this area for crop farming. Although the soil is infertile and there is a lack of rainfall and often drought, farmers never give up. Arable land is our life. Here we only have poor mountain and limited water resources, we have no fertile soil, not enough water for irrigation and no convenient access to the outside. People call our area ‘one line sky’ (*yi xian tian*), meaning we are in between two sides of mountains, the sky we see is just like a line. We want to work outside but we have difficulty finding jobs. We want to raise livestock in our community, but we lack information and so we have been striving in this given land for generations.” Looking at the distant large and undulating mountains Mr. Zhao was very touched and said: “Now this mountain cannot be forested because the soil is too thin, we can only temporarily close it.” On the way back, they both repeated several times that, “Afforestation here has tried several times but only when we have good rainfall can the trees survive.” Drought is indeed the most critical factor hindering agricultural and forestry development in the community.

After transecting the south mountain we returned to Zhucun village and continued to walk towards the north mountain, following the direction and order of points I, J, K. The north mountain is relatively low, and the vegetation is simple. When passing the settlement area, Mr. Xu said: “The settlement conditions here are poor, houses are run down and streets are untidy. In the future we should have general planning in order to build a more beautiful community and let people enjoy the amenity.” After passing the settlement area, we saw an area of arable land and Mr. Xu commented: “This area is good quality arable land. Although the soil layer is only about 30 to 40 cm it is still suitable for grain farming, only the yield is a somewhat low.” After the arable land plots we started to climb. We found an economic forest area. There were black Chinese date, peach, and persimmon trees etc. Mr. Zhao told us that if persimmon trees were grafted onto the stems of the black Chinese date, then production would be higher. Climbing further, he pointed to the distant mountain and indicated that those areas could only be managed if the mountain was closed for use to let the thin soil recover.

Figure 4.4 Transect of Sanggang Village



	600m	500m	400m	300m	200m	150m	150m	200m	300m	400m	500m	600m
Item	H	G	F	E	D	C	B	A	I	J	K	L
Land Use	Forest land	Arable land	Forest Land	Bare rocks	Forest land	River	Arable land	Road	Farm house	Arable land	Forest land	Forest land
Soil	Yellow Sandy soil	Brown soil (gneiss)	Gneiss	Limestone	Gneiss		Brown soil (gneiss)			Brown soil (gneiss)	Gneiss	
Soil Layer	Thin	Comparatively thick	Comparatively thin	Very thin	Comparatively thin		Very deep			Comparatively thick	Comparatively thin	Very thin
Main Vegetation	Forest Closure	Maize, wheat, Sweet potato, peanut, potato	Almond, locust, willow	Weeds, shrubs	Locust, arborvitae		Maize, wheat, sweet potato, peanut			Maize, wheat, sweet potato, peanut	Cash crop (black chinese date, peak, etc. )	Forest Closure
Restricting Factors	Drought, thin soil layer	Drought, low fertility	Drought, thin soil layer	Thin soil layer	Drought, thin soil layer		Drought, low fertility, weeds, vegetable pests			Drought, low fertility, weeds	Drought, thin soil layer	Thin soil layer
State of Utilization	Soil and water conservancy	Grain production, glass noodles (dry)	Fruits, soil and water conservancy		Soil and Water conservancy	Dry glass noodle field in dry season, irrigation water in rainy season	Grain production, vegetable, pumping water	Transport	Habitation	Grain production	Cash income	Soil and water conservancy
Existing Problems		Underdevelopment and unlikeliness in variety, grown not up to the scale	Backward in technology, low survival rate of forest trees		Backward in technology, low survival rate of forest trees	Less water 10cm of rainwater except the period from July to September	Giving Priority to foodstuff, less cashcrop	Narrow road, muddy and difficult to walk in rainy days	Scattered and disordered	Underdevelopment and unlikeliness in variety, grown not up to the scale	Low survival rate of forest trees	
Innovation Perspectives		To optimize and unify variety, to grow in large scale	To improve technology, to increase the survival rate of trees		To improve technology, to increase the survival rate of trees	Check dam for underground water and store water	Grow more varieties of vegetables	Road renovation	To program as a whole	To introduce new variety to increase the yield		

March 2001

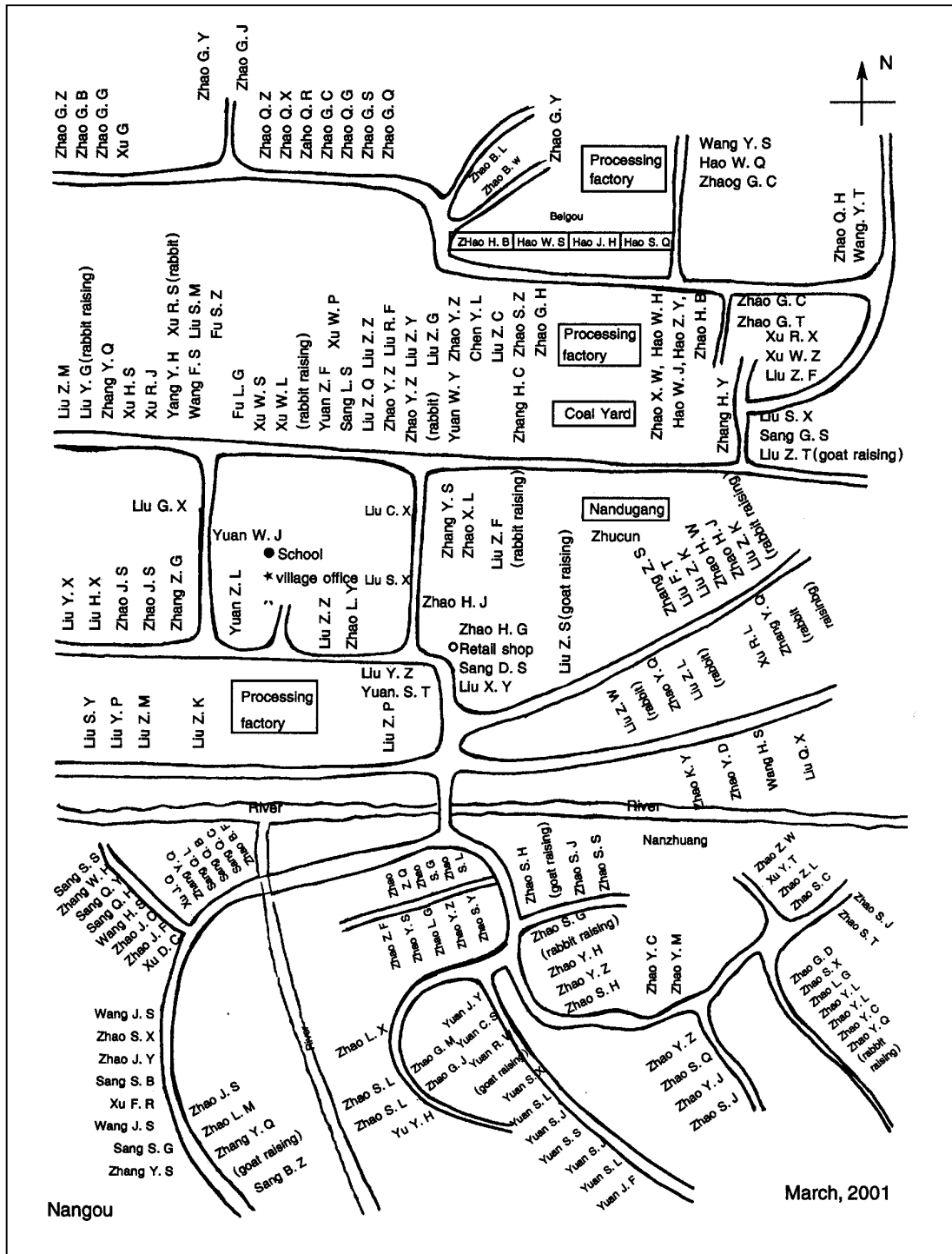
From participating in this community landscape transect process we learned both explicitly and implicitly how rich the farmers' knowledge is of their landscape. But more importantly, we came to understand how farmers viewed their landscape and resources, how they evaluated and analyzed their situations, and how they have and will act for their future. Farmers are confident about their future, even though their resources are limited. With regard to the four researched villages it became clear that farmers had struggled there for generations to make a living. Many of their discourses signified their disgruntlement over their environment, particularly over the declining rainfall and water resources, which has often brought them severe drought.

## **Mapping Community Settlement and Social Infrastructure**

In addition to the physical resources of the community we invited farmers to map the community settlement and social infrastructure so as to become more familiar with the locations of different households as well as the social facilities available. We explained to Mr. Liu Haixiang of Nandugang, and his fellow farmers to illustrate on paper in their own ways the locations of farmer households as well as schools, health dispensary, village offices, enterprises etc. They are indeed familiar with such information, but still had difficulty to start the illustration. We suggested “First draw the roads and streets, then indicate the names of different households along the streets. This will make it easier since all households are located on one or both sides of village streets. When we have the streets drawn then it will be easy to identify the locations of households”. They first drew the roads and streets in Zhucun, the centre hamlet, and by extending the roads they naturally came to the other three hamlets of the village since they are all connected by village roads. It indeed took a long time for them to put all the names of the households on paper. “Where is the school?” Mr. Liu then used a sign to mark the location of the school. Nearby the school are the offices of the village party branch and village committee. “Where is the health dispensary?” One farmer responded: “The health service is really weak in our community, we used to have three doctors, but one lady moved out after marriage, another one is incapable, and the third has himself been sick for a long time. He is here in Zhucun.” After putting all the social facilities and household names on the paper, one farmer suggested marking the households with specialized animal raising undertakings. He thought it was important to do so and that by doing so we could familiarize ourselves with which households in the community had been engaged in goat, rabbit and chicken raising and we could then earmark them to receive certain revolving fund support under the EZE project! We fully supported the idea of mapping them. The final product is presented in Figure 4.5.



Figure 4.5 Settlement and social infrastructure of Nandugang Village



Stratifying Households by Wealth Ranking

The community settlement and social infrastructure map can be used as a basis for ranking community households by wealth, since it includes all household names. The example taken comes from the Sanggang community settlement map. This settlement was chosen to illustrate wealth ranking because the farmers there identified the greatest number of wealth categories and provided full evaluations for their placement. We realized that such a ranking of households by wealth would be a sensitive issue. First the most wealthy would not wish to be shown as the richest in the community since this still carries with it a lot of painful connotations and implications in rural China with its long history of struggle and harshness against landlords and richer farmer families, made worse by the Cultural Revolution. Such experiences are still within living memory. Secondly, farmers like to be ranked poorer, because outside projects as well as government welfare programs do not usually target the better off and richer households. This is particularly the case for our research, because one component of the EZE rural development project aims is to provide revolving fund support to households that fall at least below the community average in terms of income and resources. We were also prepared for the fact that conflict might arise between participating farmers during the process of ranking. Furthermore details of their rankings could be spread to other villagers, indicating who had ranked whom in which category. This would certainly cause social conflicts or tension.

Taking all such concerns into consideration, we randomly asked seven farmers to join us at the home of one of the farmers. When we told them we were going to rank the wealth of community households, they suddenly became unnatural and serious. We repeated that our intention was only to understand the heterogeneity of households in the community, and the results would not be linked to the EZE project we were implementing. We also suggested that "It is a great honour to be rich in rural areas. Our government indeed has promoted that some households should get rich first." After this, we tried to give some time to farmers to think and prepare by distributing cigarettes to males and sweets to females. Slowly farmers became more relaxed and the atmosphere became harmonious. We asked the farmers to write the names of community households on cards by copying them from the community settlement map, one card per family. During the process we asked whether it was not necessary to get the household list from the community bookkeeper to crosscheck so as to avoid the possible exclusion of some households. They confidently replied: "No, it is not necessary, we are very clear about the households in our community." After that we asked them to deliberately brainstorm how many categories of households in the community could be classed. It went thus: "Three. Better off, middle ones, poor ones." "No, that is too general." "I think five, the richest, better off, middle ones, poor ones, poorest ones." A lot of different suggestions were proposed. We asked them to discuss with each other and come to a consensus. In addition we also told them that during the process of grouping community households into different categories we could still add more or reduce the categories. Finally they decided on ten categories, which is the most that I have ever experienced in practice and research in China. Researchers usually themselves limit the categories to about five and sometimes use only three. So farmers are really very serious and discriminating in their judgements when asked to do something. Then farmers wrote the numbers 1-10 on ten separate cards using a different color to that of the cards with household names. They then spread the ten numbered cards in order across the long raised platform normally used for sleeping or resting (made of bricks with under

heating from the household cooking place, very typical of north China). We then asked one of the farmers to take the cards holding the household names and one by one discuss with his fellow farmers under which category card they should be placed. Since many farmers have kinship relations with others in the same village, it was not surprising that the two female farmers intended to rank their own and their related households downwards. However, two male farmers said: "We should rank according to the real situation." This showed that they were monitoring each other and the results are therefore probably reliable.

Half way through the procedure an old farmer turned up. He had been a teacher and is now enjoying his retirement in the village. From the greetings exchanged with him it was obvious that he was highly respected in the community. After hearing what we were doing there, he emphasized that such rankings should indeed be based on the real situation of households in the community and pointed out the relevance of the relationship between the level of wealth of households and the units of family labour they commanded. Another interesting comment was from one of the children. Several had accompanied their parents and when one of the woman said that her household should be ranked in category 6, her daughter, about eight years old, disagreed with her, saying that her family should be ranked into 5 or 4, because the family of one of her classmates was ranked 6, and she thought her family was much better off than her classmate. Children also have a view and are able to make judgements of status distinction in their village through their own experiences and interactions.

After classifying all households of Sanggang village into different wealth categories, we moved on to ask them to rank households within each of the ten categories by simple comparing the households in the same category with each other. Since there were normally only about 10 to 20 households under each category, it was not so complicated to rank them in order. After that, we were about to remind them to check whether some households had been inappropriately ranked, when we found they were already checking the appropriateness of their rankings. Finally we asked them to cross check by comparing the last ranked household in one category with the first ranked household in the succeeded category in order to ensure the overall logic and objectiveness of the ranking. After completion of the ranking we were all feeling close and relaxed, and they did not want to leave, therefore we started to chat about their lives in general and about the research and our lives in the metropolis. The detailed results, and more importantly the summary comments of why farmers had ranked households thus, are to be found in Appendix 1.

Farmers ranked mainly on the basis of their knowledge of income and expenditure criteria rather than on family labour. The results clearly show that the top households normally have higher non-agricultural income, and family expenditure is relatively low, followed by the better off households with members engaged in seasonal work outside, and where family burdens are less (i.e. no aged or sick member to care for and no children at school). Category 7 can be viewed as a threshold. Households in category 1 to 6 always have certain income from work outside of the village, whereas households in category 7 to 10 all obtain their major income from agriculture, lack labor, or have aged, handicapped or long term sick members, or are single member households. Burdens in terms of expenditure are not on taxes and levies, but on having children at

school and the care of elderly members. For many households in category 5 and 6, their income is not lower than the households in the upper categories, however, they have more family burdens, especially when they are paying for two children at school, or for their children at university, which is indeed excessively expensive for them.

### **Delineating Household Income and Expenditure Structure**

Since household income and expenditure is, as we have mentioned, important to current family financial status, we further explored household income and expenditure details by taking some households for delineating the average structure of household economic operations. Thus on meeting some farmers in a public space of the community we mentioned that we would like to discuss with them the situation of household income and expenditure in the community. “We itemize all our income and expenditure, correct?” One farmer seemed to understand quickly and clearly. We were all familiar with each other by then and hence the interaction was conducted in a rather informal and pleasant manner. “Yes, well we would also like to know the weighting of different income and expenditure items.” We were responding to the farmer who had spoken first. Then the farmer again ventured, “But the income and expenditure situation will differ for households.” A very smart comment! When relaxed in this way the interactions and exchanges show how highly perceptive farmers are. “You are absolutely right, the structure of income against expenditure is very different from one household to another”. However, we explained that we wanted to roughly know about the average in the community. We went on to ask them whether they would first brainstorm and then list for us all items of general income and expenditure that families might face. They were then asked to weight the different items using dried beans. A farmer fetched a basket of them from a nearby household for the purpose. About six farmers took part. We put a large sheet of paper on the ground and put the basket of beans on the paper to prevent it from blowing away. The paper was divided into two large columns - one for income and one for expenditure. One farmer said, “If we talk about expenditure, the largest would be on farming inputs, including buying fertilizer, seeds, pesticide, diesel, electricity costs for irrigation and for agricultural tools.” He was then asked to write them down as an item under the expenditure column. “Yes, expenditure for daily necessities should also be included.” Expenditure of daily necessities was readily agreed by all the farmers there, and they indicated that the daily necessities would be items for cooking, such as grain, rice, millet, oil, salt, soy sauce, vinegar, vegetables, and so on. “I think the biggest expenditure is on schooling”, said one farmer. “It indeed costs a lot to send children to school, the teachers are not all qualified, but the schooling is still too expensive, I think the government should do something about this...” He continued to complain about the high cost of rural schooling. And many farmers there expressed agreement. The heated arguments and sometimes disagreements clearly revealed that the income and expenditure situation indeed differed among households because each was arguing on the basis of his/her own family circumstances. The listed items were then placed on the paper in rows and a column was made for each of the participating farmers. Each was then asked to distribute the beans against each one of the income and expenditure items to represent their own views of the weightings of the different items, i.e. the more the number of maize beans, the more the importance or weighting of the item, and *vice versa*. After all

the farmers had completed this, one farmer was asked to average the results and calculated the percentage, as shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Weightings given to income and expenditure categories in Nandugang Village

Household income			Household expenditure		
Item	Average no. of beans	Percentage	Item	Average no. of beans	Percentage (%)
Side line enterprises	18	31.0	Schooling	20	31.8
Wage income	17	29.3	Farming inputs	19	30.2
Livestock raising	11	20.7	Health care	8	12.6
Forestry and fruit trees	7	12.1	Taxes and levies	6	9.5
Farming	4	6.9	Livestock raising inputs	5	7.9
			Agricultural Tools	3	4.8
			Daily necessities	2	3.2
TOTALS	57	100.0	TOTALS	63	100.0

The biggest source of household income is from what I call sideline or family based initiatives and almost at the same level is income from wage labour (either from working in the cities or in local mining and other enterprises). Livestock raising and fruit production make up another third with income from crop cultivation being relatively little since it is mainly for consumption. Although cash income from forestry and fruit trees is less than livestock raising at this moment, it has potential for the future. As I described earlier, the township is promoting this as a leading industry in the area. In recent years farmers have planted a relatively large area of fruit trees, medicinal plants, and timber forests which will start producing in the coming years. In contrast livestock development is handicapped by the limited land carrying capacity as well as the general policy of protecting the ecology and environment.

The results show that education and farm inputs far outweigh other items and amount to more than 60% of household expenditure. Fodder, equipment and veterinary costs are part of livestock raising and inputs into agricultural tools include items like three-wheeler motorcycle transport, and barrows and carts etc. Daily necessities were seen as costing the least, suggesting that farmers are, on the whole, very largely able to meet their own daily food needs. Clothing costs were not specifically mentioned. Schooling costs have increased drastically during recent years, in many cases farmers cannot afford higher education for their children. Farming inputs in relation to what they earn from it are very high but this is to discount the fact that it provides their daily consumption needs.

This income and expenditure exercise gives only a general picture and could include some bias from the fact that so few farmers were involved in the exercise. However we believe the general picture to be valid and consistent with other data already presented about constraints and opportunities in the rural economy.

## Constructing the Seasonal Calendar

Although one can observe what farmers are doing during visits, it is still useful to construct a more comprehensive annual, month by month picture of farming activities. It gives a better understanding of labour requirement over the year as well as the time needed to fulfil one's obligations to community undertakings. The time after dinner is always the most relaxed time for farmers and they were used to us visiting them at such times.

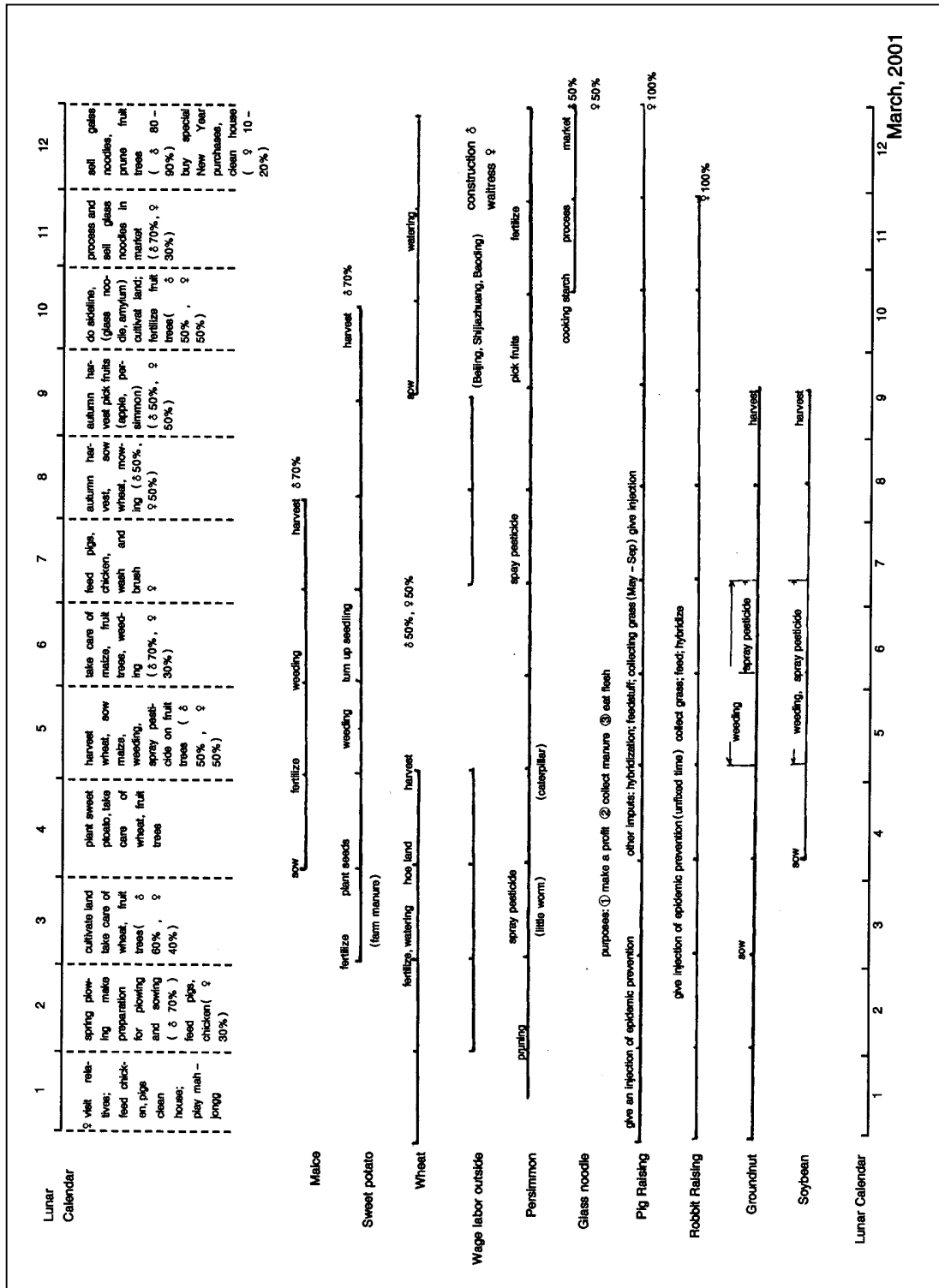
We came to Mr. Liu Zhengyin's home in Nandugang one evening and they had obviously just had dinner, since the wife was still busy tidying up bowls and plates. They were happy to see us and asked whether we had yet eaten. This is a typical custom of politeness in rural societies, even when you know your visitors will have eaten. We asked if they minded having a discussion and whether this would disturb their evening, to which they modestly said they were indeed free. We asked Mr. Liu Zhengyin whether he could find a few more farmers to join us and he quickly gathered a few others, including two women. We explained that we wanted to know what they did in each month of the year, and that they could use their own way to illustrate this. We put a large sheet of paper on the raised platform bed, and gave them pens. "We certainly know very clearly what we do all the year, but how do we put it on paper?" one farmer asked the others. We told them they could easily draw a line and indicate the twelve months of the year. Mr. Xu Wenlou did this and we asked them to confirm whether they would use the solar or lunar calendar. As expected they used the lunar calendar. We asked the wife of Mr. Liu Zhengyin to bring some beans, which she happily did. We explained to the farmers that we could first use the beans to indicate the extent of busyness in each month of the year, the more beans, the busier, and *vice versa*. They discussed together and in the meantime put maize grains under each month. They adjusted the number of grains among different months many times. When they achieved consensus, we asked them to count the number of grains and we marked the number for particular months on the paper.

When this initial exercise was completed, we roughly knew the extent of busyness of each month in a year. Then we asked them to discuss and list the major items of work in each month, for instance ploughing, sowing, grazing, harvesting, and game playing etc. Where a clear gender division of labour existed, the rough division in terms of percentage for each gender was to be marked and Mr. Xu Wenlou was chosen for noting the resulting discussions. He started to indeed act as a moderator by joking with the two participating women. "Ok, what do you do in January?" he joked. One woman remarked "Stay free, eat and sleep." The others all laughed at what she had said, because rural people often regard the life of a pig as one of only eating and sleeping. From then on the atmosphere relaxed and more jokes and laughter accompanied the entire discussion process. Another woman added: "We feed pigs, chickens, clean houses." One man said: "We also feed pigs and chickens." The woman did not agree and said: "You can say what you want to say and I will say what I want to say." The man agreed with a smile, "But you always go to relatives" he added. It seemed they were wife and husband. The woman said: "Yes, I have been busy all year, and shouldn't I go to relatives in the

Spring Festival time?” Another woman said at this moment, “We are free in January and February, can you find something for us to do?” She was asking us, and we replied: “Yes, we will discuss what you can do in our project.” Finally they agreed to put the items of visiting relatives, feeding chickens, ‘spring cleaning’ the house and playing Mah-jongg as the major activities of January. Following this, they completed discussions about the remaining months. The process highlighted that the two women had done most of the family reproduction work as well as raising animals, and many of the farming tasks, because the men were away for work outside the village. When we asked why the women did not go out for work they told us it was because they had children at school.

They were then asked to give attention to their engagement in the production activities listed. These ranged from maize, sweet potatoes, and wheat farming, working away, persimmon tree management, glass noodle making, pig and rabbit raising, groundnut farming, to soybean farming. Then, for each production activity we asked them to indicate the flow of work required for the entire production cycle, i.e. each step required in the process. The flow of work for each production activity was illustrated in a line by pointing out the key milestones of the work. By completing all such lengthy discussions and exercises, a comprehensive seasonal calendar was constructed (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6 Seasonal calendar of Nandugang Village



The results reveal that the busiest months are March, May, August and September of the lunar calendar. However, even after September farmers are not free, since they are again



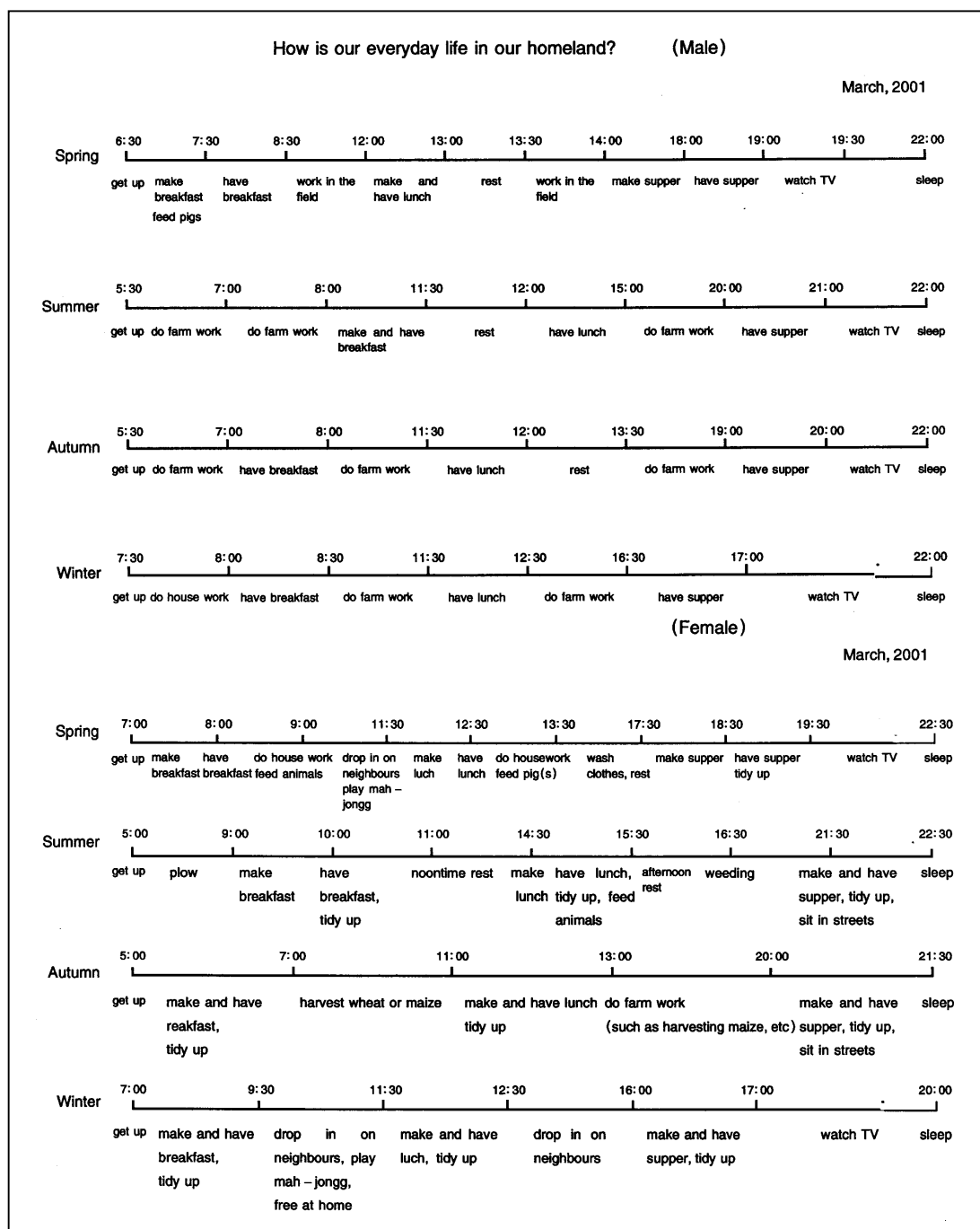
engaged in sideline productions such as glass noodle making and selling etc. From a gender point of view, men have more free time in February, April and July, whereas women have more free time in February, March, April, July and November. These results were in fact an important reference point for deciding the timing of our visits to the community. In addition, we can see that men's work is concentrated more into a few months, whereas, women's work is distributed more throughout the year, including tasks that are done on a 365-day basis. In general, men are more engaged in farming, while women bear almost sole responsibility for animal raising and for household chores.

### **Tracking Household Daily Routine**

One evening while 'sitting in street' in Sanggang, we saw Ms. Hao Hefeng, head of the community women's union with four other women. Nearby, three men were also chatting and we asked them to join us and discuss together what they do everyday. One of them said what they did was not as valuable as our work, but we disagreed and said: "No, our work is only different. In a society, everybody does his/her own work, and nobody can say that somebody's work is more important than the other's." We felt that the statement was probably seen as too academic and political, because farmers did not continue to argue. But we know that farmers admire the outside world and also for this reason wish their offspring to one day leave farming and have a career outside the rural community, which can most easily be achieved by entering university or being promoted in military service. One woman asked whether we were referring only to activities in this autumn season. We said no. Another woman added: "But our activities are also different to the men." Later they agreed to discuss their daily routines in two groups, male and female, and also to divide the year into four seasons in order to differentiate the daily routine by season. In each group, one farmer was elected to take the lead in writing the results on paper.

In the male group, the elected farmer wrote as the title 'How our life is every day in my home land?' In rural communities, some farmers are indeed very innovative with language and often they write and speak in a very literary manner. Sometime they create their own discourses, their own idioms that can only be understood locally. As usual the discussion took a little while to warm up.

Figure 4.7 Daily routine of male group (up) and female group (down) of Sanggang Village



The results revealed that farmers have very different daily routines according to the season, and the daily routine for men and women also differs according to season (see Table 4.5). Males have more work in the spring and winter season, while for females this is the case for the summer and autumn seasons. In the spring and winter season,

females appear to have more leisure/entertainment time than males but in the summer and autumn months in addition to family chores and reproduction work, they are as equally engaged in agriculture as the men and work longer hours. In general women do more family reproduction chores. The mode of work division by gender in the community follows the general tradition of other rural communities, that is, males are more engaged in household external affairs, and women are more responsible for family internal affairs. We must note that neither the men nor the women mentioned the time gave to their children's daily educational needs. In general this might mean they leave the responsibility for their children's education to teachers, not necessarily being able to help their children with text learning. Many observations indicate that whatever the time given to children's learning, what families do encourage and ensure is that children study at home and not only play.

Table 4.5 Farmers' time allocation in hours per day in Sanggang Village

	Time in production work		Time in reproduction work		Total time in work		Total time in leisure	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Spring	8	0	3.5	6	11.5	6	2.5	9
Summer	10	9	0	5	10	14	1	0
Autumn	10.5	11	0	5.5	10.5	16.5	2	0
Winter	7	0	0.5	3.5	7.5	3.5	5	10.5

### Community Institutional Networks

Although rural communities are sometimes remote or in poor areas, they are socially well articulated with the outside. This external articulation is as important to the operation of a community as its internal organisation. A community's interactions with the outside can be represented by its network of institutional connections.

Again through getting farmers together in one of their homes, we tried to explain to them in local language and local ways the idea of a community's institutional networks. We explained that this referred to all the kinds of relations that a community has with the outside, be they formal or informal, governmental agencies or non-governmental agencies or even strategically placed individuals. Again when asked to illustrate the discussion results on paper the man elected, Liu Zhenying, wondered: "Yes, we can draw some of our community's relations, but I think there are some relations we do not know, it is better to ask village cadres, they have more relations." Immediately we realized that the term of 'relations' used in our explanation had caused misunderstanding, because in Chinese societies 'relation' has been used frequently to show a kind of favorable and personal connection between people that can bring benefits to somebody, though often having negative consequences for others. This is closer to the notion of social brokers as used by Boissevain (cited in Long 1977). In

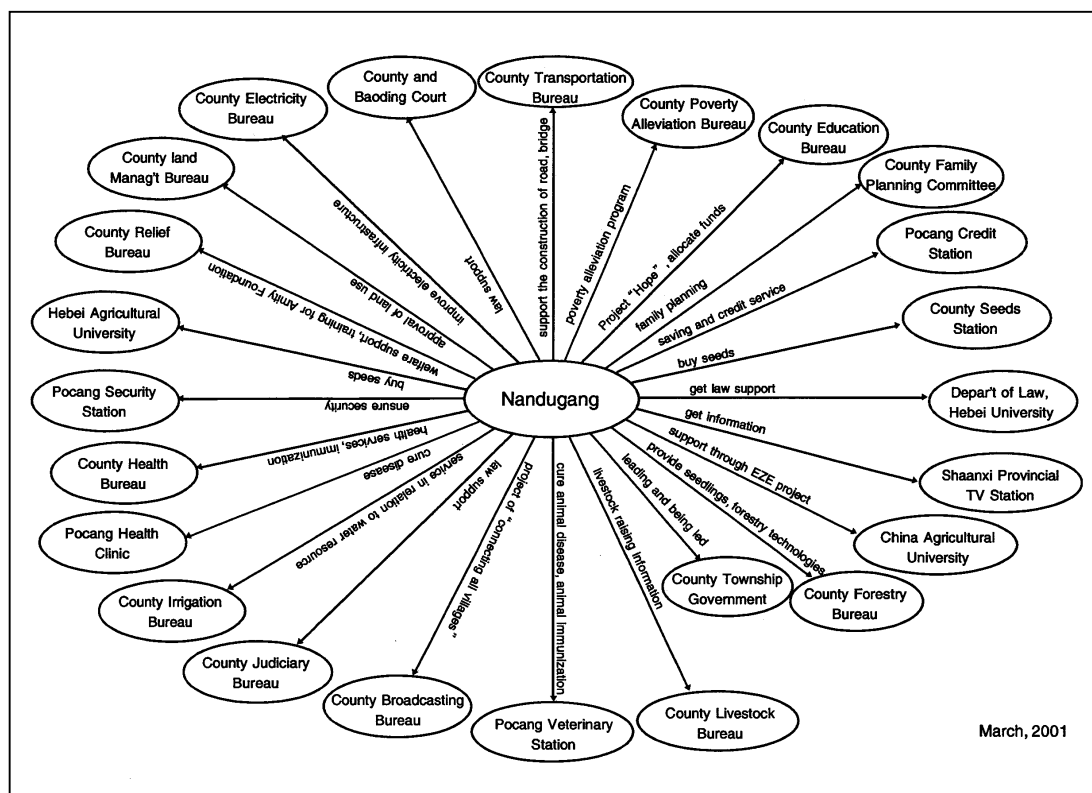
some cases such relations are connected with issues of ‘corruption’. We clarified that what was meant here were those connections of the community with the outside that everybody was aware of and not those special relations that individuals or cadres might have. Again we suggested noting their difficulty that Mr. Liu could firstly draw a circle in the middle of the paper, and write the name of the community Nandugang within the circle. For all the outside institutions that they thought had connections with the community, they could put them in circles around the central circle linking them with lines and indicating by the length of the line the closeness and importance of the connection. The shorter the line the closer/more important the connection, and *vice versa*. Then they could draw a line or two lines to show whether the connections were one or two-way connections with the contents of the connections written along the line(s). Farmers were silent for a moment, we realized that they were brain storming. Then Mr. Liu asked the others, “What have you identified?” Mr. Wang Jinsuo, the deputy township party secretary, who was also there, said: “There are many connections with outside, for instance, the Pocang Township government is one of them.” After such enlightenment, the farmers seemed to have suddenly grasped the idea. “Yes, China Agricultural University should be the first one, because they have helped us to construct the water tower and drinking water pipelines (under the EZE project).” “The village bridge was built with support from the County Transportation Bureau, so this bureau should be included.” “The County Forestry and Education Bureau have also supported us, they should be in.” “Also the County Poverty Alleviation bureau.” Following this, they quickly listed many institutions that had once supported their community. They believed that the institutions that had supported them should be regarded as the outside connections, and they obviously used the notion of support to prioritize the institutions.

After this, Mr. Wang from the township said: “We also have connections with those institutions that have not provided financial support to us, for instance the County Family Planning Committee, don’t you have connection to them?” This was readily acknowledged. (Almost all families have been connected to family planning affairs in rural communities in China.) “The County Land Management Bureau, because we have to get their approval for house construction.” “The Hebei Agricultural University, because we trust the seed quality that we buy from them.” “The Shaanxi provincial TV station and the Department of Law of Hebei University should also be included, because there are two people working in the two institutes who are originally from our community” and so on. Following this line of thinking, farmers listed more and more institutions with whom the community had had connections without receiving direct material support. The list was based mainly on their past experiences with those institutions. But they had listed first those that had provided direct material support, and those they had trust in. For example, when it was suggested that the County Irrigation Bureau should be included, another farmer disagreed because they had refused a request for support to build a bridge, which in their view it was their duty to support. One farmer said: “Yes, but we got 20,000 yuan from the County Poverty Alleviation Bureau.” And another responded, “Mm, even if we don’t know what was done with the money.” Another farmer then reminded him in a joking manner that his comment was probably being recorded. The farmer retorted: “I don’t mind even if the central television station is here.”

Farmers obviously feel free in the current context of society at large to express their opinions openly. When one farmer listed the Baoding Prefecture Forestry Bureau, another farmer complained strongly, “The last time they gave our community some seedlings in the name of poverty alleviation, we had to pay 0.8 yuan per seedling. We later discovered the nursery farmers got 0.4 yuan per seedling, and the bureau got the other 0.4 yuan per seedling. So much for poverty alleviation! It has become a business trade with our community.” In China any support in the name of poverty alleviation is supposed to be free or highly subsidized. Another farmer then complained about the misconduct in the implementation of the Sino-German Afforestation Project in the community. From then on, the discussion became one about their complains towards certain institutions and about certain affairs in the community. At one point a conflict erupted between a male and female over the township credit station. The man had said “The Pocang credit station is not important, because it cannot provide credit and has no creditability.” However, this strong attack on the credit station immediately irritated a woman whose husband was partly responsible for the management of the station. She regarded the comment as an attack on the good standing of her family and as non-recognition of her husband’s work. No matter how much we and others tried to mediate, they continued to argue and quarrel. In fact what the farmer had raised is a general problem confronting local credit stations in China. Later, the male farmer left the discussion with a lot of anger. We did not expect such a situation but have come to realize that many local realities can be sharply exposed by this kind of probing exercise.

After brainstorming about all the institutions connected with the village, they tried to allocate their importance on the paper by using different line lengths indicating social distance as well as explanations along the connecting lines. When discussing which one should be put the closest to the central circle of Nandugang community, farmers said, “Physically China Agricultural University is the farthest, but they should be put the closest, because they have supported us the most.” So again material support became an important criterion for ranking the closeness/importance of the various institutions. But they also recognized that the intensity of the connections with the Pocang Township Government made it the most important institution and it should therefore be placed closest to the community on the diagram. After properly allocating all the institutions with differentiated distances, farmers finally wrote down the contents of connections between the community and outside institutions. The final output is presented in Figure 4.8 by the diagram they produced. These results are summarized by Table 4.6.

Figure 4.8 Institutional diagram of Nandugang Village



It appears that either through language confusion or because of the design of the exercise, farmers saw the connections with outside institutions flowing in one direction only. Note that the diagram includes only outward pointing arrows with descriptions that indicated what benefits they might or did obtain from these institutions. They did not seem to see any two-way connections. But the exercise itself asks the farmers to view institutions as abstractions and not in terms of the interpersonal links that clearly exist and are reciprocally important for villagers and institutional staff of many kinds. Of course it is not unusual for people to reify the idea of government institutions or the State or the China Agricultural University, that is they consider them as collective institutional actors. But the realities of relating to those institutions and using them require attention to evolving interpersonal relationships. The study draws attention to the importance of interpersonal ties in many contexts for establishing good personal relations and for achieving goals. The method was successful in indicating the importance for them of the various institutions.

Table 4.6 Institutional network of Nandugang Village

Rank of importance	Name of the institution	Contents of connection
1	Pocang Township Government	Leading and being led
2	County Forestry Bureau	Provide seedlings, and forestry technologies
3	China Agricultural University	(Through the EZE project) support the construction of community drinking system, revolving funds, training and community library
4	County Transportation Bureau	Support for the construction of community bridge, road construction
	County Poverty Alleviation Bureau	Poverty alleviation program, support for community infrastructure improvement
	County Education Bureau	Project 'Hope', allocating education funds to rural communities
5	County Family Planning Committee	Family planning
	Pocang Credit Station	Saving and credit services
	County Seeds Station	Buying seeds
6	County Livestock Bureau	Providing livestock raising information
	Pocang Veterinary Station	Curing animal disease, and animal immunization
	County Broadcasting Bureau	The project of 'connecting all villages', also supporting the village cable television station
	County Judiciary Bureau	Law support
	County Irrigation Bureau	Service in relation to water resource
	County and Baoding Court	Law support
	County Electricity Bureau	Improvement of electricity infrastructure
	County Land Manag't Bureau	Approval of land use, such as house construction
County Relief Bureau	Welfare support, also organizing training for the Amity Foundation	
7	Hebei Agricultural University	Farmer trust the seeds that they buy from there
	Pocang Security Station	Ensure security
	County Heath Bureau	Health services and immunization
	Pocang Health Clinic	Curing disease
8	Department of Law, Hebei University	One staff working there is from the community, thus, can get law support
	Shaanxi Provincial TV Station	One staff working there is from the community, thus can get information

## Understanding Household Social Networks

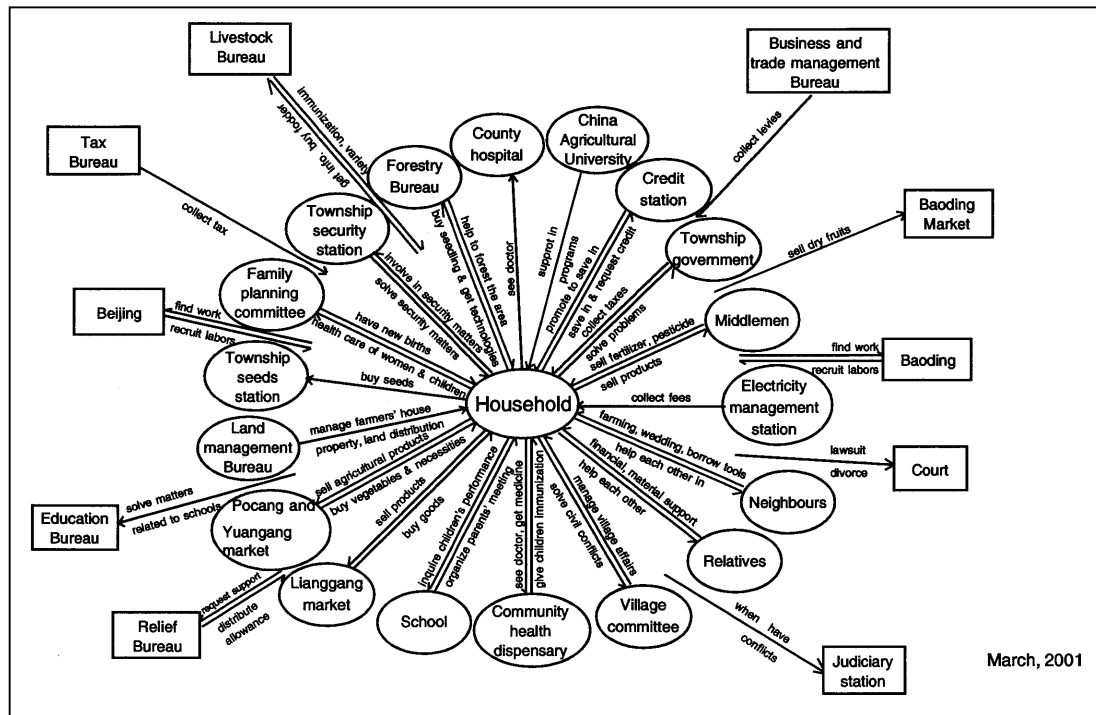
A similar exercise was conducted with a group of individuals concerning how rural households are articulated with various institutions, groups and individuals from outside. At the beginning of a discussion on this, one woman farmer simply said: "We are such a poor and remote community that we do not have contact with the outside." We argued: "We don't believe you, don't you go somewhere when you need to do something?" She replied, "We don't go anywhere, we stay at home all year." Other women added, "I don't go out even once a year." "Where is there to go, we don't go anywhere." Obviously in the women's eyes, all the quotidian undertakings are taken for granted. Their comments at times indicated their weariness with daily repetition. We then asked them, "Where do you go if you have a temporary difficulty?" "Where do you go if you have conflicts with your neighbours?" "Where do you sell your rabbits?" After these questions the women and men immediately realized the contacts/networks/relations to which we were referring. "We often ask relatives, friends or neighbours' for help when we have temporary difficulties." "Of course we go to the village committee, to the director of the committee, to the community party secretary when we have conflicts with others." "Normally middlemen come to our community to collect our products, but we also go to Pocang and Yuangang market, even to Lianggang market to sell our products and to buy things." We then confirmed that, "You see, you are not isolated, as you said, you have contacts/relations with the village committee, with your relatives, your friends, your neighbors, and also the market, in fact you have more networks." This was agreed by all.

The discussions were put on paper as for the other exercises and this time the group was able to make the one and two way line connections. The Figure 4.9 and accompanying Table 4.7 provide the results. The network figure gives a fuller picture of the institutions, groups and implicit interpersonal relations that households have for resolving a range of possible problems. Middlemen, neighbours, relatives as well as organizations play a role in facilitating this process. In some cases, as we see in the figure this entails accessing a wider field of institutional actors. The table shows how the farmers involved in the exercise ranked the importance of these various bodies and networks as well as described the kinds of contents and their relations to problematic social, economic, livelihood, health and other problem situations.

This network exercise, like the previous one, provides only a very rough picture of the processes involved. By their very nature networks and networking arise out of the dynamics of particular social situations and therefore they are difficult to capture in a snapshot of a rather abstract kind. However, on a more positive note, these findings concerning institutional and personal networks point to the key domains and arenas of household and community life. I leave to a later chapter a fuller elucidation of particular cases involving the mobilization of networks and institutions for the pursuit of particular goals concerned with farmers' initiatives.



Figure 4.9 Household social network of Nandugang Village



March, 2001

Table 4.7 Household social network in Nandugang Village

Rank of importance	Name of the network	One/two ways	Contents of relation
1	School	Two	Parents inquire children's study performance from the school, school also organizes parents' meeting
	Community Health Dispensary	Two	Farmers see doctor, get injections and buy medicine from the health dispensary, the dispensary is responsible for child immunization
	Village Committee	Two	Village committee manages village affairs in relation to farmers, farmers go to village committee for civil conflict solving
	Relatives	Two	Help each other, in terms of financial and material support
	Neighbours	Two	Help each in farming, weddings and funerals, borrow tools and so on
	Middlemen	Two	Farmers sell products to middlemen, middlemen also sell fertilizer and pesticides etc. to farmers

	Electricity Management Station	One	Collects electricity fees from farmer households
	Township Government	Two	If anything cannot be solved in the community, farmers go to the township, the township collects taxes and levies from households
	Credit Station	Two	Farmers save in and request credit from credit station, credit station promotes farmers to save in the station
	County Hospital	One	Farmers see doctor there
	Forestry Bureau	Two	Forestry bureau helps farmers to forest the area, farmers buy seedling and receive technologies from the bureau
	Township Security Station	Two	The security station comes to a household if the household is involved in security matters, farmers also go to the station to request the station to solve their problems, for ensuring security
	Land Management Bureau	One	Land management bureau manages farmers' house property, and land distribution
	Pocang and Yuangang Market	Two	Farmers buy vegetables and daily necessities from the market, but also sell agricultural products there
	Lianggang Market	Two	Farmers buy goods from the market, and also sell products there
	Township Seeds Station	One	Farmers buy seeds from the station
	Family Planning Committee	Two	Is responsible for family planning and healthcare of women and children, farmers go to the committee for having new births
	China Agricultural University	One	Supports farmers in drinking water supply, revolving funds, training and community library
2	Beijing	Two	Some organizations from Beijing come to the community to recruit labour, farmers also go to Beijing to find work
	Relief Bureau	Two	Farmers request relief support from the bureau, the bureau also distributes allowances to retired persons, persons injured in war
	Education Bureau	One	Farmers go to the bureau if there are matters that need to be solved related to schools
	Court	One	Farmers go to the court for lawsuits, or for divorce
	Baoding	Two	Some organizations from Baoding come to the community to recruit labour, farmers also go to Baoding to find work
3	Livestock Bureau	Two	Bureau offers animal immunization service, provides good variety of animals, farmers also get information and buy fodder from the bureau

	Business and Trade Management Bureau	One	Collects levies from households
	Tax Bureau	One	Collects tax from households
	Baoding Market	One	Farmers sell dry fruits in the market
4	Judiciary Station	One	Farmers go if they have conflicts with others

## CHAPTER 5

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### EXPLORING MULTIFARIOUS FARMER DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

#### Understanding Farmer Initiatives

Having become socially accepted into the research community and constructed profiles of the four villages of the study, I am now in a position to understand better the complex social, economic and cultural environment in which local actors organise their life worlds. My research is therefore now ready to move on to its second stage and to the central theme of the study - farmer development initiatives.

As defined in Chapter 1, a farmer initiative is the impetus that sufficiently and necessarily drives a farmer (or group of farmers) to formulate and pursue a realistic plan aimed at creating space for manoeuvre and improving his/her (or their) life circumstances. Here 'plan' refers not to a written or official document, but to the kind of ideas, frameworks, or concepts that guide a farmer's actions. In the context of community development, a farmer initiative can be a kind of impetus that drives a farmer to engage in a new area of community or household development. Such farmer initiatives are always context focused and may often be seen as a response to some kind of problematic situation, though not always so.

In this Chinese case we can identify farmer initiatives when actions are defined and entered into that go beyond the potentialities and opportunities of the existing farm household economy to embrace new livelihood pursuits. Here we focus on those activities that involve self-organising enterprise, though they may not, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, be entrepreneurial in the usual sense. While a key component of rural initiatives is that they are recognised once actions are embarked upon, they are of course often an extension or complement to existing livelihood practices.

Hence, the study of the process of a farmer development initiative requires a full in-depth sociological analysis of specific innovative community and household undertakings. Such undertakings are embedded in the careers of particular actors, - those innovative farmers, or pioneer or 'vanguard' farmers, struggling to create new opportunities for themselves and others. Hence they constitute a kind of endogenous development process whereby they create new spaces or niches for improving or expanding their livelihood activities. Understanding these processes has largely been ignored in China, though there is a rich body of research on this theme in Europe carried by Jan Douwe van der Ploeg and his Wageningen team. Most rural studies in China concentrate on the broad parameters of structural change that are taking place through the opening up of the economy to market forces. Also some of the processes identified and described here have long historical roots that go back to the days of collective production when opportunities for individual initiatives were much more constrained.

The challenge is to conceptualise and elucidate the processes of interaction between actors and factors in order to unravel how particular farmer initiatives are incubated and socially shaped in practice. The following research starts with the process of identifying those innovative local actors who can be regarded as initiators of new livelihood options in their communities. This will provide material for the selection of some twenty cases to follow up in detail.

Let me first explain the logic behind the notion of innovative actors and initiators using the concept of agency. According to Long (2001),

‘Persons or networks of persons have agency. Agency refers to the knowledgeable ability, capability and social embeddedness associated with acts of doing (and reflecting) that impact upon or shape one’s own or others’ actions and interpretations. Agency is usually recognised *ex post facto* through its acknowledged or presumed effects. In addition, they (may) attribute agency to various objects and ideas, which, in turn, can shape actors’ perceptions of what is possible....the notion of agency attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion. Social actors attempt to solve problems, learn how to intervene in the flow of social events around them, and to a degree they monitor their own actions, observing how others react to their behaviour and taking note of the various contingent circumstances.’ (p. 241-242, 16)

All people have agency to act, to respond, to cope with life, and to solve problems, and different social actors will act, respond, cope and solve their problems differently and to a greater or lesser degree. In the context of rural household and community development, individuals will use their agency to engage in the pursuit of various undertakings or initiatives for achieving their own benefits. I call this *development agency*. Thus all rural actors may express the intention to better their livelihood situations, but (especially in the rural context examined here) this can only be pursued effectively by starting something new. It is for this reason that I stress the importance of *innovative agency*.

So who are these innovative rural actors? In the research community, it appears that they are those able to realise their development agency in one or more spheres of activity. As the previous chapter documented, access to farming resources, particularly to the main resource – arable land - is practically the same for all households. Landholding, following the implementation of the household responsibility system, gave households equal rights of access, depending on family size. Furthermore, because of the frequent shortage of water, households can produce little more than to meet their consumption needs. Irrigation is seasonal and thus year-round production is limited. Access to mountain land is open to all households, though those with better social and cash resources are more strategically placed to bid for it. There is also little chance for local waged farm work and very few opportunities for local off-farm employment. Therefore, people have to turn to developing other kinds of initiatives outside of crop production. The latter include activities such as livestock raising (rabbit, goat, etc.), fruit tree development (plum, persimmon, walnut, chestnut, etc.) and afforestation, growing

medicinal plants, food processing, trade, mine and transport businesses, and working outside to accumulate the contacts and funds necessary to these undertakings.

It is important to emphasise, however, that the initiators who are the subjects of my cases in this study are, for various reasons, not necessarily the more wealthy farmers. First, as analysed in the previous chapter, there are many factors that make some rural households better off than others or even wealthy by local standards. They may receive large cash injections from the support of children permanently working for government agencies or business companies (here I refer to those who have permanently left the community, and who have become 'citizens' of urban areas). Another distinction is between families who as yet do not have the educational costs for children at school and those who have more than one child in school or more particularly those who have children in post-secondary education. Hence initiators of new enterprises may generate additional income but, for the above reasons, face higher expenditure and therefore in terms of wealth status do not stand above their neighbours, though eventually they may do so. Other families may have the costs of a long-term sick member, or previous debt burdens that limit their overall wealth prospects. Second, innovative development undertakings may not be cost-effective, given the business environment. Third, some undertakings (e.g. afforestation and fruit production) might bring profits only in the long run.

### **Selection of Actors with Development Initiatives**

The core of my research was aimed at analysing how different farmer development initiatives were socially constructed. This required the study of careers of innovative actors in relation to household and community development. The selection of appropriate cases for study became critical. My aim was to identify farmers who had one or more kinds of development initiative.

Through entering into the community, constructing community profiles and interacting with specific individuals and groups, I was able to obtain a great deal of information on the structure, operation, social and cultural domains, and institutional network of the community, as well as basic data on each household. More importantly, the small-scale rural development project that we brought to the community and that involved farmers in all stages of planning, design and implementation contributed to the building of trust with them. This provided a solid basis for the selection of a larger sample of cases. This chapter discusses the selection of cases and presents vignettes of them with the aim of offering the reader with a picture of their general characteristics. But, first, let me take the reader into the process of selection.

I was already aware of which farmers were engaged in innovative activities, and village cadres had introduced me to the major community development undertakings. My research plan was eventually to choose twenty cases of a broad range and to document their careers. The twenty were to be evenly spread between the four village communities, that is, five from each village. Keeping this target in mind, my preliminary list included 15 to 20 candidates in each village, that is, 60 to 80 in total, whom I knew had been engaged in various initiatives. I then consulted with key figures in the community for advice about whom to include.

Such consultations served the purpose of cross-checking and supplementing the preliminary list with additional suggestions. I began with those we had closest and most direct contact with, that is, families who had accommodated us and with whom we had had meals during our stay. The issue was normally broached in an informal way, for example during meal times and after-dinner conversations. Once in Nandugang village when I asked Mr. Liu Zhenkun for his suggestions about the selection of farmers with development initiatives, he replied asking whether I already had farmers in mind. I told him yes, seventeen possible candidates and I gave him the names on my list. He corrected some information, which was indeed useful. However, he went on to express very different opinions on two farmers in my list, saying, "I don't think these two farmers are good for your study." He explained: "They are not well-behaved, and it is difficult to manage them." I understood from this that he meant that they were not obedient to his administration. Clearly Mr Liu's view on who were innovative farmers was somewhat different to mine and this remained the case during the course of the study. Of course, I did not remove the two farmers from my list. When asked whom he would add to the list, he said I should talk to Mr. Zhao Yunshan. His family was very poor when he was young and his parents died when he was a child. It had been a great achievement for him to rise to his present position of village deputy party secretary. Following Mr. Liu's logic, he also recommended Mr. Zhao Shungang, a member of the party advisory committee. But my follow up on these two farmers showed that they did not fit the purpose of my case studies.

In Sanggang, I first asked the village party secretary, Mr. Xu, to suggest farmers to interview. Since he has overall responsibility for the administration and management of the village, he certainly knew well the situation of each household. He gave his opinions openly as did his wife, who is also a farmer in the village. Some of her recommendations overlapped with her husband's but some were different. My experience in the community had taught me that women were sometimes more straightforward and did not find it difficult to express opinions different from those of their husbands or men generally. Thus I added more candidates to my list.

The view of village cadres can, of course, be very different from those of other farmers in the community. So my next step was to consult ordinary farmers (some of whom were in opposition to the village cadres), so as to obtain more complete information on potential candidates for the case studies. In general, farmers are very familiar with each other's households, including knowledge about their development undertakings. In Sanggang village one such farmer consulted was Zhao Laishen. I met him in his orchard when he was collecting the ripe plums. He greeted me and invited me to taste the fruits: "If the taste is good, in the future we can probably sell some to your university." I purposefully avoided this suggestion, not knowing how realistic it was, and replied, "You have a very good harvest, let me help you." If you reinforce farmers' expectations, or make them promises, then you must be sure that you are able to deliver or you will lose their trust. I tasted his fruit and joined his work. I had learned much about him from his open manner. He turned out to be a very accommodating person and had good relations with his neighbours, helping them in many ways. I was impressed with his rich knowledge on forestry production and fruit tree cultivation, as well as on veterinary matters. He had attended training sessions and other farmers recognised that

he was the most informed on such matters in the village. Because of his own orchard and other work he was finding it difficult to respond to all the demands made on his time. Recently, during the leisure seasons, he had organised training courses on fruit tree growing and forestry production, dealing especially with the pruning and grafting of fruit trees. He had even taken on an apprentice to train in veterinary knowledge and skills, thus reducing his increasing burden of providing technical help to farmers in other villages.

Due to his special background and his close relations with other villagers, he became my most important informant in the village. After working in his orchard for awhile we took a rest in the shade of a plum tree and I offered him a cigarette. While he was smoking, I took out the list of farmers and asked his opinion on who should be removed from and who kept in the list. He said my list was not complete and added the names of other farmers with initiatives. In addition, several farmers on my list were involved in very similar undertakings, and so on his advice I removed some. Others I retained in order to compare scales and timing of initiatives.

Thus from my own pre-selection and the several rounds of consultation, I obtained sufficient information on farmers that might be included as cases in my research. From the development initiatives represented in Sanggang village I chose glass noodle making, goats (a kind for selling both the meat and wool), lean swine and rabbit raising, *youtiao* making (deep-fried twisted dough sticks), sewing clothes, transport, fruit tree cultivation, local cake processing, and a calcite-processing enterprise. At this stage, I had identified ten farmers with one or more of such development initiatives, and similar activities were identified in the other three villages. Thus, I had in mind a total of about 40 farmers in the combined research community (four villages) of whom twenty would eventually form the core of cases analysed as vignettes in this chapter.

I could at this point have chosen my twenty cases but preferred instead to obtain a fuller picture of the forty. There still remained many uncertainties as to how correct the information was, and how far they measured up to the criteria I had defined for selection. There was also the potential problem of whether particular farmers would willingly talk to me about their careers or spend sufficient time going over details etc. I needed to see how the cases would work out in practice. It was a trial and error process. Only once these uncertainties had been resolved could a selection be made.

Let me briefly illustrate the kinds of obstacles I had to overcome and how they were dealt with. For example, in Sanggang, I had a wealthy farmer called Xu Zaoquan on my list. However, he was very busy and I could scarcely find an appropriate time to see him. Since I also needed follow-up sessions on some matters, I made an appointment through his cousin, the village party secretary, Mr. Xu Changquan. But after half an hour he was no longer concentrating on the discussion. Although the case may have been of value to my research, it was just simply impossible to have a comprehensive conversation about his personal and household development career. Mr Xu had been the previous party secretary of the village and several farmers expressed negative comments about him, especially concerning how he had become wealthy. I therefore decided not to pursue this case since to do so might affect my maintenance of good relations with others in the village.



A similar problem arose in Nandugang. The party secretary, Mr. Liu, had recommended two candidates. The first, Zhao Yunshan, warmly welcomed me to his home, offered me apples and peanuts, but after a whole evening of discussion my doubts were confirmed. As deputy party secretary he was well liked and regarded as innovative by the secretary. But he did not fit to my research purpose. Although capable, his thoughts were not innovative. He had a strong dependence mentality and rarely searched for external development alternatives. In addition, he spoke in officialese that lacked tangible meanings, which made me feel I was conducting a political interview. I was not disappointed since I had been prepared for such trial and error, but for the same reason I still wanted to try with Mr. Zhao Shungang,, his other recommendation. His home was neat and orderly, giving a strong impression of the kind of people they were. Again my initial impressions were confirmed. His thinking was very narrow, and his career lacked diversity. He was comfortable only with farming in the village and had never tried external alternatives.

Another candidate from Nandugang was chosen on the basis of his family's good economic standing. However, when I entered his home yard (houses are usually given privacy by walls surrounding their house and yard), I immediately had the feeling that this would not be a successful case. His house was in chaos, the yard and the house were dim. The farmer himself was indeed very honest, and sometime smiled to himself. I did not know whether it was because he could not understand what I was saying to him, or due to other reasons, He had been very indifferent to my questions. Instead, his mother of eight-three years, and one of his neighbours competed to answer my questions. Eventually he answered one of our questions but we could not clearly hear or understand him and his neighbour had to repeat it for us, like an interpreter. After several rounds of such conversations, I obtained his major career information and ascertained that he was not innovative in action or ideas and thus not the kind of person I was looking for. Having rejected both of Mr. Liu's suggestions I returned to his house in low mood. When he inquired about the results of my visits, without any intention I said that I probably should have started with him (he was also on my list). His gentle smile and reaction seemed to tell me that he had all along thought himself a suitable candidate but had been too shy to recommend himself. The following interview with him revealed that he fit my research purposes perfectly, and I might even say that if I had not interviewed him, my case studies in Nandugang village would not have been complete.

The success of the case interview with him strengthened my confidence to continue exploring candidates for research in that village. Recalling all such kinds of experiences, one sees the ups and downs during this trial and error process. Sometimes the reasons for rejecting are as important as those for choosing.

### **Overview of and Interaction with the Selected Farmers with Development Initiatives**

The case studies are analyses of the careers of the selected farmers in relation to their household and community development. The various undertakings throughout a farmer's career were analysed, in particular, how their initiatives started and were

socially shaped and eventually implemented. In practice, in most cases the study of the farmer's career was *de facto* the study of the history of the household livelihood development.

Eventually I ended up with the twenty cases I wanted to explore in more detail. This took normally five to eight one to three hour sessions with the farmer in various locales in the community. Table 5.1 is a brief overview of the twenty cases, including their names, village within the research community, sex, age, household size and wealth situation as ranked earlier in the villages.

I include in many of the narratives that follow, how my interviews and interactions with the farmer were conducted. There is only one female included in the cases - Ms Li Hui. This has nothing to do with gender sensitivity. In Chinese rural societies, the husband is normally the head of a family, and as stated, the studies on the male case farmers are in fact studies of their entire household livelihood development, including also the contributions of their wives and other family members. From the records collected, in many cases, such as for Mr. Liu Zhentiao and Mr. Zhang Yuxing, there was strong involvement of their wives in the interaction process.

The table includes the wealth ranking. Some villages chose fewer categories than others, for example Sanggang villagers chose ten categories, and therefore the case farmers in that village were ranked out of ten categories, and so on for the other villagers.

Table 5.1 Overview of the selected case farmer actors in the research community

Village	Name	Sex	Age *	HH size	Wealth rank in the village
Nandugang	Zhao Huanbang	Male	73	4	1 of 9
	Zhao Hanwen	Male	51	4	4 of 9
	Xu Wenlou	Male	47	4	4 of 9
	Liu Zhentiao	Male	46	5	4 of 9
	Liu Zhenkun	Male	48	5	1 of 9
Sanggang	Zhao Wenyong	Male	48	4	3 of 10
	Xu Xinquan	Male	46	3	5 of 10
	Lu Jianxun	Male	41	4	6 of 10
	Zhao Laisheng	Male	53	4	5 of 10
	Li Hui	Female	34	4	3 of 10
Yuangang	Zhao Zengyuan	Male	51	4	2 of 6
	Zhao Huiyuan	Male	48	5	3 of 6
	Zhang Yuxing	Male	40	6	3 of 6
	Yuan Shaopeng	Male	45	6	3 of 6
	Yuan Ronghai	Male	43	3	3 of 6
Baoshi	Xu Jinlan	Male	65	4	5 of 9
	Zhao Shengli	Male	33	3	1 of 9
	Xu Jinfa	Male	44	5	2 of 9

Chen Gengshen	Male	37	4	1 of 9
Xu Yinfu	Male	42	4	2 of 9

\* Using Western calendar year 2001

After much deliberation I decided to include all twenty vignettes of the case farmers. Selecting only a sample would have denied the reader the opportunity of appreciating the richness and variety of life stories, experiences and initiatives taken by individual farmers in their efforts to create a better life for themselves and their families. It fills out the village picture and gives the kinds of livelihood initiatives possible in these years of Chinese history. As I have said before, this research reveals not only the present circumstances of people in the new China but helps us to explore some of the roots of these small but important initiatives to resolve the pressures of creating a more satisfying life. I therefore ask the reader to bear with me in reading the descriptions that follow.

### **Zhao Huanbang (Nandugang Village)**

Zhao Huanbang is 73 years old and lives with his wife, who is 65. They have two adult sons who live outside but continue to be residentially registered members of the father's household. Both are married and have settled in Yixian County capital. The elder, Zhao Xudong, is 38 years old and works in the county road maintenance bureau. He was promoted from an ordinary worker to become bookkeeper and due to his hard work is head of a road section. The younger son, Zhao Weidong, is 31 years old, and working in an electronic business in the county capital. Their wives worked in the same garment factory though they have given up their jobs to care of their children.

When Zhao Huanbang talked about his two sons, I could feel how proud and caring of them he was. It is certainly important in his life that his sons are both capable and more importantly that they both show filial loyalty, often bringing their wives and children back home to their grandparents. Although his two sons have taken great care of and support Zhao and his wife, he still shows concern about using community resources for their benefit. "I know I am getting old, and I am not able to work outside, but I have contracted about 70 mu of mountainous land. You see, I should reduce the burden on my children." He contracted this land in 1998, and in the same year he planted fast-growing timber trees, which he expects to be able to harvest next year. In 1999, he planted two mu of medicinal plants in this same contracted area. In addition, he has 4.5 mu of arable land, of which 2.2 mu is for growing sweet potatoes, 1.6 mu for maize, and 0.3 mu for groundnut. He explained: "This is mainly for feeding mouths." As regards cash income, Zhao stresses that his children have supported him a lot. The pigs he raises and the produce from his mountain land will make him self-reliant when the trees mature. "Before 2001, there will be little income from the mountain land. The only income I get is about 400 to 500 yuan a year by selling the twigs of the chaste tree (*jing tiao*) that I collect for weaving baskets." His income will increase from the trees next year and he expects to get 300 to 400 yuan then from the medicinal plants. His major expenditure is on food, and 100 yuan each on pesticides and fertilizer. His main career in relation to household livelihood development includes the following milestones.

In 1947, he was assigned to official work in the township due to his good performance at transporting grain to Shanxi Province. His curiosity about the outside and the information he obtained helped him get this assignment. In 1962, he quit his official job and came back to start farming or as he expressed it, 'to reconstruct his homeland.' This change was due to the influence and enlightenment of a close work colleague. Then in 1982, he started red stone processing and marketing, based on the information he obtained from this trusted friend who belonged to the same social network he had developed and extended during his work in the township. In 1992, due to the decline of this business, he returned to agriculture. His latest undertaking was initiated through information received from his son, from the village party secretary, from the media and affirmed after a personal visit to Mr. Xu Jinlan, another of the case study farmers from Baoshi village, in 1998.

Zhao Huanbang was in fact the first case selected in Nandugang. I had rejected two other candidates. I was not confident as I was jolted along the road to Beigou hamlet on the back of a tractor that this trial interview would not again come to anything. This worry was removed a short later when I struck up conversation with a farmer in front of me. He was not very tall but very smart. His face carried a smile while we discussed and although not talkative, his expressions were all to the point. When I told him my research purpose, he nodded, understanding my intention. He seemed very confident of what he was going to say. After that we had several discussion sessions, which all went very smoothly, and we sometimes laughed a lot. I talked of the main undertakings of his career, and particularly how his different initiatives had been generated and developed. He was especially animated when talking about his experience of local red stone processing. While we were both enjoying the discussion, a colleague of mine and the village party secretary, Mr. Liu Zhenkun, turned up. Their visit to another farmer household for an interview found the farmer not at home, so they called in at our place. I predicted that our discussion would deteriorate by their sudden presence. Zhao Huanbang would not feel as free to enjoy flaunting his life career in front of Mr. Liu, who must have been very familiar with his past. And so it happened. Our discussion became plain conversation. Realising the situation, I winked at my colleague and getting the message stood up saying to Mr. Liu, "Secretary Liu, I have something to discuss with you, can we go to your place?" Mr. Liu reacted with a smile, "Ok, Huanbang, you continue to speak about your experience, no need to have any reservations, you can speak about what you want, I am leaving. With me here you are probably too shy to speak." He had also realised the uncomfortable situation caused his presence.

### **Zhao Hanwen (Nandugang Village)**

Zhao Hanwen is 51 years old, the same age as his wife. He has two daughters. The elder, is 25 years old and works for the county agriculture bureau. The younger is 20 and a young farmer in the village. Zhao's has about 4 mu of arable land cropped with wheat, maize and vegetables. He keeps 4 goats, 20 chicken, 2 pigs and some rabbits. In the mountain land he contracted there are 4 apple, 40 chestnut, 16 peach and 40 apricot trees. Recalling his career, he mentioned three stages, joining the military, coal mining and agriculture. The major milestones include the following. In 1966, because of the

Cultural Revolution, he quit school and started farming,. 1970 was the great turning point of life career, when he joined the military and achieved a good record. In 1975, he made a mistake (he forgot to lock up an ordnance depot) and he quit the military to return to his village. In 1984, he simply followed others and joined the ‘unplanned and unchecked floating population’ (*mang liu*), seeking a new life outside the village. In 1985, he went to mine coal in Shanxi Province, in search of new opportunities, through information obtained when chatting with a friend in the village. His coal mining undertakings proved very successful due to the extended social network he had built and the trust of his boss. In 1992, he returned to the village when his father passed away. By then coal mining had become unfavourable and he was appointed village party secretary. In 2000, he contracted 1.8 mu of arable land for crop farming, and 2 mu of mountain land for planting fruit trees. He also started raising chickens and goats. In his own words, he planned to engage in vegetable production. Such undertakings were initiated on the basis of knowledge and information from many years of being outside.

It took me some effort to catch Zhao Hanwen. Although his house neighbours Mr. Liu Zhenkun’s, where we were staying, many farmers were busy in the fields. As Zhao Hanwen said, “My feet have not touched the ground these several days.” Under such circumstance, I could only catch him in the evening. When I entered his home yard one moonlit night, the tidy piles of maize in a corner immediately impressed me. His daughter, Zhao Na showed me in with a smile and I was touched by the warm atmosphere of his family. When I finally met him, I was struck by his strong character and appearance. It was difficult to believe he was 51. My immediate impression was conversing with him would require only frankness, because he would not play words with you. I told him of my purpose and joked, “I am coming to write your biography.” He naturally replied, “Oh, good, I indeed wish to write one, there is too much sinuosity in my life.” He smoothly recalled his main undertakings, as if he had prepared such a speech. In some of the following sessions he often commented, “Some officials are corrupt. This is not good for society.” He emphasised the point again when he talked about his ‘unfortunate fate of being village party secretary’. He said he was too straightforward, and got excited too easily. Our interaction proved this was so. When he recalled the moment he had heavy conflict with one village cadre and took a chair to him, he indeed became excited and his dark face got darker and his hair stood erect, just as if the cadre had done him wrong again. However, when he talked about his experience in coal mining, he was very calm and confident, as if he was again appreciating his achievement. As a researcher, I respected Zhao Hanwen, not just because he was not afraid of a village cadre, nor because of his coal mining achievements but for two other reasons. Firstly, when the manager of the coal mine connived with him to open another coal mine, and to compete with his boss for the market, he declined. Although he might have missed a great opportunity I admired his healthy moral values. As Zhao Hanwen simply said, “I could not betray a friend.” Second, when he was beaten on one occasion while he was the village party secretary, he blamed himself as well as the other. “It seems I am not capable of being village cadre”, he said.

### **Xu Wenlou (Nandugang Village)**

Both Xu Wenlou and his wife are 47 years old. She had been in poor health since a poorly performed operation for sterilisation some years ago. They have two children, a daughter of 22 who teaches chemistry in Pocang junior high school and earns about 400 yuan per month, and a son of 20 who is studying information mathematics and management in Shijiazhuang Trade University in the provincial capital. Xu Wenlou has 3.5 mu of arable land, mainly cropping maize, groundnut and sweet potato. In 1998, he contracted 30 mu of mountain land, and planted about 50 persimmon trees along the whole gully, as well as some additional chestnut, apricot and locust trees, which have not done as well as expected because of recent droughts. He said his family income is mainly from his work in the nearby mines (a calcite mine in the north mountain, and an ironstone mine in the south mountain) during the farming off season, where he can earn about 20 yuan per day from labouring. In addition, he expects more income from the 130 rabbits and 20 chickens his family is raising, though he sometimes lacks the funds for operating costs. The main family expenditure includes 5,000 to 6,000 yuan per year for his son in university, and 2,000 to 3,000 yuan per year for agricultural inputs and daily life expenses.

After graduating from high school in 1973, he became a teacher in the village. During the 1982 to 1983 school year he was dismissed from the school due to his violation of family planning regulations. Soon after, he went out work with the help and support of his brother-in-law. In 1984 he learnt from a fellow farmer that there could be a better work opportunity in Beijing. So, with an introduction from this farmer, Mr. Zhao Shunjiang, he went to Beijing and this time worked as a bookkeeper and at the same time as a cook and was later given responsibility for many company activities, having won the trust of his boss. In 1987, he came back to the village, again due to his wife's health problem, and through his efforts he was again given a teaching position. From 1997 to 1998, he gave up the opportunity of becoming an official government teacher because he could not pay the commission fee. His resources were needed to pay the tuition fee for his daughter to study in college. After a while, his relative invited him to be the head of Dalonghua liquor factory, because he had experience of cooking, buying and bookkeeping. His relative trusted him because of the kinship relation. Thus, he quit his teaching position.

In 2001, he started raising rabbit. A friend provided him with information and he did a cost-benefit calculation, which promised reasonable profit. While raising rabbits raising he introduced some technological innovations and he stuck to rabbit raising for the next few years. Recently he quit his job as village bookkeeper, which pays very little to earn money working in the nearby mines.

Mr. Xu Wenlou does not have the deeply weathered face of a farmer. His appearance suggested a more prosperous living and a certain intellectual character. Later I learned why. He had been a teacher, bookkeeper and a good cook who knew how to mix wines. A versatile man! He was sensitive to information, liked to ask questions, and was good at deep thinking. He wanted to know about the University, especially about the employment situation after graduation. He said: "My son is in university, I have to pay attention." During our several interviews he showed continuous interest in and asked about application to the revolving funds of the EZE project. He planned to enlarge the scale of his rabbit initiative. He appeared to have big plans. When recording his life

history he often turned to his wife for the details. He gave the general impression of a man who sought out alternatives and adjusted his development strategies in accordance to changes in the environment.

### **Liu Zhentiao (Nandugang Village)**

Liu Zhentiao is 46 years old. His father had died some three months previously. His mother is 87 years old and in poor health. His wife, Guo Xiuhua, 49 years old, is a very capable woman. His 18-year-old son is studying in high school in the county capital. He is the hope of the family. Every year his study expenses amount to about 6,000 to 7,000 yuan. His fifteen-year-old daughter left school when she was in grade five because she was not interested and the family was finding it difficult to support her studies. In 2001, Liu Zhentiao contracted 10 mu of dry arable land where he grew vegetables, fruit trees and groundnut. In addition, he has 6 mu of arable land for grain production for family consumption. He has not contracted mountain land for two reasons. First his family did not have sufficient labour and he wanted to start a vegetable greenhouse. He worked in one in Lianggang Township in 1996 and 1997, and found it profitable. He also raised about 10 chicken and 40 rabbits. Rabbits can be sold after 7 to 8 months and they fetch about 20 yuan each. The major income includes agriculture and selling vegetables in the nearby Pocang, Lianggang, Yuangang and Qiaojiahe markets, from which he earns about 3,000 yuan a year. He expects some income from fruit trees in the future. He mainly sells vegetables. The main expenditure of the family includes his son's study expenses, his mother's health bills and daily necessities

In 1974, he graduated from junior high school and was made responsible for recording work points (*gong fen*) for the villagers. In 1984, he joined a training course on fruit tree pruning held in Lianggezhuang Township from which he later became a kind of 'expert' in the village. In 1985, he started small-scale trading of vegetables and contracted 1 mu of orchard. His trading undertakings were influenced by his kinship network and then from gaining information at the local markets. In 1986, he joined a study tour to Wanxian County for learning fruit tree cultivation techniques. From 1994 to 1995, he was engaged in vegetable cultivation in Lianggang Township after visiting his wife's parents there and turned to greenhouse production there from information obtained in the market. From 1998 to 1999, he cultivated vegetables in Nandugang Village. His success has benefited from knowledge and experience from books, previous training and study visits, and from his own technological innovations.

He and his wife were together for the interviews and his wife many times competed to answer my questions. I had the impression that his wife's participation in many household affairs is much higher than his. She is much more open and straightforward. When they recalled the years of particular undertakings, their opinions sometimes differed and I did not know what to do when they argued. Without the presence of his wife, he spoke much more fluently. Both he and his wife were interested in applying for the revolving funds of the EZE project.

### **Liu Zhenkun (Nandugang Village)**

Liu Zhenkun was chosen as one of the twenty cases for in depth study detailed in Chapter seven. He is 48 years old and the current village party secretary of Nandugang Village. His 47-year-old wife is a capable and straightforward woman. He has a daughter in grade 4 in the village school and a 25-year-old son who teaches vehicle repair in the Shijiazhang vehicle technology school and acts as a driving instructor. His daughter-in-law works at home in farming. His family has about 7 mu of arable land, mainly cropped with maize, wheat and sweet potato etc. In 1997, he contracted about 50 mu of barren mountain land, and after two years he now has poplar, chestnut and walnut trees growing there. He expects to harvest the fruits as of next year. He expects 1,000 to 2,000 yuan income from the produce. In 2000, he again contracted 20 mu of idle land from nearby Yuangang village. He will start site preparation next year and plans to raise poultry (chicken, duck, goose, goats, etc.) and five to six pigs a year there. One will be for family consumption, and from the rest he expects to earn about 200 yuan profit per pig. The poultry will be mainly for receiving guests. As village party secretary he receives many guest officials from the county and township. Raising poultry is his best way to feed them, but this will certainly be priced and reimbursed by the village collective. Nandugang village is one of the 35 'model' villages in the county because of its good governance, including the implementation of the Sino-German Afforestation Project. Liu Zhenkun proudly said: "Whenever there are officials and experts, including foreign ones, coming to Pocang Township for field supervision missions, the township always shows them to my village."

His main source of income includes his commission share from the two mines contracted by Yang Changyou and Xu Zaoquan from nearby villages, from fruit trees, livestock raising, the groundnut oil extraction service and allowance from the village collective. His family expenditure includes buying durable items, school fees for his daughter, agricultural inputs and daily expenses.

In 1964, he joined the rebel group, which largely balked his career moves during the next ten years. Between 1975 and 1977 he courted his wife. He overcame the barrier in terms of family wealth disparity and political group difference between his family and his wife's family, and eventually they were married. In 1981, his family got land from the first round of land distribution. In the same year, he was recommended as a boiler worker in the military, and from then on he actively and intentionally developed and extended his social network. In 1982, he started a cement tile producing enterprise in co-operation with a relative, from where he learnt much about business operations. Before starting this enterprise he had consulted his relatives and done a cost-effectiveness calculation. In 1986, under the influence of friends in the village and a classmate, he engaged in small scale trading in Baoding, the municipal capital, where he learned about the market and started to appreciate the importance of personal networks. In 1988, based on information from the media, as well as his recognition of the hard work and risks of small scale trading, he started agricultural undertakings, believing there could be a good future in agriculture. In addition, government policy was also conducive for contract development. In 1989, he had the contract to collect village electricity fees. In 1993, encouraged by the township party secretary, he was appointed director of the village committee. In 1995, he was promoted to the village party secretary. He successfully organised villagers to build the local road and bridge, for which he got the support of various county agencies. Due to the good work, Nandugang



was awarded the title of model village in and from then on his opportunity for contact with the outside and to enhance his social network has grown. In 1997, he contracted 50 mu of barren mountain and in 2000, he contracted 20 mu of idle land and invested shares in two mine enterprises, which brought him a good income.

Since we stayed at Liu Zhenkun's home, we had many opportunities to chat with him in a relaxed environment. He was an eloquent speaker and his sense of humour enriched the colour of research life in the community. He was aware of his capacities and once said: "In the nearby communities, nobody can speak as well as me." He recalled his miserable childhood, his youth and the early years of his marriage with great sympathy, and of the time he successfully got support from outside agencies for his village with pride. One could feel that his way of thinking had changed from that of the ordinary farmer after he became village party secretary. His circle had been greatly extended, his views broadened, and his development horizons lifted. I was deeply impressed by the harmonious relations between him and his wife, which were full of love, confidence, trust and respect. When he spent time in discussions with us, his wife always reminded us in a joking manner, "Don't listen to him, he only talks big." In fact, she was very proud of his abilities. One day, when Liu Zhenkun went to the township and came back very late, we joked with his wife, "He must be playing *Mah-Jongg* there, how will you punish him when he comes back?" We thought she would joke with us, but surprisingly she said: "I am sure he has not finished his business there." Such trust has developed during their joint endeavours in household development.

### **Zhao Wenyong (Sanggan Village)**

Zhao Wenyong is 48 years old. His family consists of four members, his wife, his son and a daughter. His son is 22 years old and often migrates for work when he is not farming in the village. His daughter, 15 years old, is studying in the township junior high school. His main family income is livestock raising. Currently he has the biggest scale of goat raising in the village, with 90 goats. Although he is illiterate he had business acumen. In his own words, "I cannot farm very well, but I know business, and I can do herding." Since he was 10 years old, he has had something to do with goat raising. Before the reform in 1978, he said he was 'a small dealer striving under the strict plan economy', since trading and dealing was prohibited before 1978 and treated as a crime of 'engagement in speculation and profiteering' or 'playing the market' (*tou ji dao ba*). After the reform, he was proud of being a specialised goat farmer. He is very straightforward and said: "Although I am illiterate, but I am very good at reckoning." He herded for the village from 1963 to 1970, collected medicinal plants from the mountain from 1970 to 1972, worked as a wage labourer in Zaozhuang Municipality of Shandong Province from 1972 to 1973, and worked as a cart driver for the community from 1973 to 1977 taking products to market and bringing back goods needed by the community. During this period, he established a broad social network. He married when he was 25 in 1978, since when he has been engaged in goat herding and small-scale goat raising and trading. In 1982, he opened a small retail shop in the village.

Mr. Zhao Wenyong was one of the farmers chosen for a more detailed case analysis (see Chapter 7).

### **Xu Xinquan (Sanggang Village)**

Xu Xingquan is now the deputy village party secretary. He is 46 years old. His family has five members, his parents (father of 84, stepmother of 89) and his 41-year-old wife and 16-year-old son who is studying in the county high school. He has 5 mu of arable land, 2 mu can be irrigated and 3 mu is dry land. He contracted 20 mu of barren mountain land, and 11 mu of idle land which he has planted with 500 apricot, walnut, persimmon, plum and grape trees. His mainly family income is from the raising of three sows, 2 lean swine, and a sow with 21 piglets. Additional family income is from glass noodle processing, grape and fruit trees and allowance from the village collective. Xu Xingquan likes to chat and discuss questions with friends. He likes to read books, magazines and newspapers on science and technology, and also likes to write. He subscribes to two newspapers, *Hebei Science and Technology* and *Hebei Farmers*. In 1997, he was invited as a specially commissioned local correspondent for the *Hebei Science and Technology* magazine. He likes to watch television, his favourite programs include, the news, lawsuits, the weather forecast on CCTV 1, (China Central Television), agricultural news and experience of becoming rich on CCTV 7, and countryside views on Shandong Television. He likes to make friends and help others, and is eager to learn more on fruit tree cultivation. The key events in his life include his mother's death when he was six (father married again when he was seven), and illness for four years from the age of fifteen. He married when he was 21 and had a son when thirty.

His main development undertakings include glass noodle processing from 1982 to present, vegetable cultivation from 1990 to 2000, goat raising in 1992, and grape cultivation from 1997 to present. Vegetable cultivation was started through chatting to a neighbour who got the information from his relatives in Mancheng County that borders Yixian County. He considered it to be low risk. He actively searched information from the media, especially newspapers on vegetable cultivation, and he also established a social network through a special newspaper column called 'window of making friends'. He had co-operation from neighbours, fellow villagers and relatives in glass noodle processing and goat raising, largely through different modes of self-help. Grape cultivation was suggested and influenced by a member of his social network, in addition, he consulted the community technical expert and also paid a visit to an experienced grape grower. In 2000, under the promotion of an outside company, he started to raise lean swine. In addition, he had been the head of a production team from 1992 to 1998, and since 1999 he has been the village deputy party secretary.

### **Lu Jianxun (Sanggang Village)**

Lu Jianxun is 41 years old. His family has 4 members, his wife who is 43 years old, a daughter and a son. His daughter, 18 years old, is studying in a Zhuozhou normal college. His son, 12 years old, is a student in grade 6 of the village primary school. His family cash income mainly comes from his *youtiao* making enterprise. He has 3.5 mu of arable land, and 40 mu of barren mountain land where some trees have been planted. He

raises rabbits and has been engaged in working outside, has been township officer for land management, township technician for rabbit raising, vegetable cultivation, clothes making and *youtiao* making.

He likes to read books on science and technology and watches programs on CCTV 1 and 7. Although many villagers like to play *Mah-Jongg*, he is an exception. Compared with others, his home yard is not big, but the difference is that there is a table tennis table made from cement there. Many children in the village often play table tennis in his home yard. He constructed it because he likes to play table tennis too, and when many children play at his home he is obliged to stay at home and therefore escapes playing *Mah-Jongg*. Lu Jianxun's father was a government employee in the county relief bureau. When he retired, he returned to his village and his family was able to draw on a fixed pension fund regularly. After his father died, his family situation deteriorated, hence he had to actively search for alternatives. He had already started rabbit raising when he was at school. However, he was not very successful due to rabbit disease. In 1978, he graduated from high school. He worked as a temporary wage labourer in Fengtai District of Beijing Municipality from 1978 to 1979, and then worked as a temporary wage labourer in Zijingguan Township of Yixian County from 1979 to 1981. This outside wage labour work was due to help from his father's social network. He was engaged in farming and rabbit raising from 1981 to 1987, mainly because of his personal interest and experience, as well as information gathered from his classmate network and from the local market. He tried to learn also from books, which enhanced his technical skills. He was appointed township land management officer and technician for rabbit raising from 1987 to 1991. With the help of his sister and brother-in-law who lived outside of the community, he engaged in clothes making from 1999 to 2000. Since 1991, he has also been engaged in *youtiao* making. This enterprise was suggested by his wife.

Mr. Lu Jianxun is one of the case studies of Chapter 7.

### **Zhao Laisheng (Sanggan Village)**

Zhao Laisheng is 53 years old and lives with his wife, his son and a daughter. Although he only studied till junior high school, he has a special interest in animal science and botany. He likes to read books, magazines and newspapers on science and technology. His main family income is from agriculture. He has 3 mu of orchard, producing fruits as from last year. Many of his activities have been connected with fruit trees. When he was young, he learnt a lot about fruit tree cultivation and veterinary technology by himself. He worked in the village fruit tree production team during the commune period. He was also the veterinary expert of the village. He has participated in a lot of training courses on agricultural technology and has much more knowledge of agriculture than other villagers. He possesses many books, including *Veterinary science, 300 questions on fruit trees, New development in Veterinary Science*. He was responsible for fruit tree management in the village forestry production team from 1966 to 1967. He was engaged in reed mat weaving from 1968 to 1980 and in agriculture from 1980 to 1984 after the land reform. He went to Shanxi to work as a temporary wage labourer in 1984, and in 1985 he managed the collective fruit trees for the village. He contracted a fruit orchard in Laiyuan County from 1987 to 1990. This was due to the information he got

through an outside relative's visit. He constructed his house in 1990 and afterwards got married. He contracted a fruit orchard in Nandugang village from 1990 to 1997 in co-operation with classmates. He contracted a fruit orchard in his own village from 1998 to 1999. His fruit tree undertakings during several periods have a lot to do with his technical knowledge and experience developed through strong personal interests and various training courses and books. Through such undertakings he has established a network related to fruit tree development within which members frequently interact and exchange information. He also keeps two beehives in his orchard after chatting with an outsider whom he encountered in the local market.

### **Li Hui (Sanggang Village)**

Li Hui is the only woman farmer selected. She is 34 years old, studied till junior high school. Her family has four members, her husband and two daughters, the elder in junior high school, and the younger in primary school. She was one of the pioneers of rabbit raising in the village. She had 70 rabbits. Her husband is good at electrical welding and this and the rabbit raising is the basis of the family income. Her farming is mainly for consumption. Before she married in 1988, she worked as a temporary wage labourer in Beijing and the county capital, which gave her a lot of social experience. She is a typically capable rural woman - good at speaking and taking action. She always said that, "If I had had more courage, I could have continued my work in Beijing, which might have been much better."

In 1982, she graduated from junior high school, and went to Shanxi to work as a temporary wage labourer and from there to Beijing from 1983 to 1987. This work mainly started through her kinship network and from her curiosity to work outside the community. In 1990, she had her first child. After that she had two years of engagement with forestry development by contracting mountain land. A relative outside the village had told her it would be profitable. In 1999, she bought a refrigerator from Lianggang Township for selling ice-llollies in the community. This was based on rational cost-effectiveness calculations. Since 1999, she has been engaged in relatively large-scale rabbit raising, suggested by her husband on information from a colleague when he was working outside. She improved her knowledge and experience of rabbit raising through exchanges with fellow farmers. In the meantime, she also started a small enterprise producing rabbit hutches, because her husband had electric welding skills and experience. During the operation of such small-scale initiatives, she promoted her products by disseminating information through local posters.

The first time I met Li Hui was during a group discussion in the village, when I asked every one to introduce themselves. She impressed me a lot by saying, "I am Li Hui, my mother gave me this name because she wanted me to have wisdom." Hui means wisdom and is her given name.

### **Zhao Zengyuan (Yuangang Village)**

Zhao Zengyaun is 51 years old, and is now the director of the village committee. He studied only primary school. His family has four members, his wife, his daughter and a son. His daughter, 21 years old, graduated from high school, and his 19 years old son

from junior high school. They are both farmers in the village, and sometimes find labouring work outside. He was one of the first in the village to start fruit tree cultivation. His main source of income is from the marketing of fruit, and irregular trading of various agricultural products. His family has now four orchards, in total 14.5 mu, planted with 700 plum trees, 150 peach trees, 50 apricot trees and 150 persimmon trees. He has 3.6 mu of arable land, cropped with maize, sweet potato, etc. Some of his fruit products are marketed through middlemen passing through his village. However, Zhao Zengyuan also actively searches for other channels. For instance, his two children often sell fruits in nearby local markets, or distribution centres, and also go to nearby villages to exchange fruit for grain. When he was in his early childhood, due to his family's poverty, he was adopted by another family. He completed his primary school by earning cash from collecting medicinal plants in the mountains. After primary school, he went to the County capital to search for work. In 1970, he was fortunately recruited into the military and during his six years of service gained a lot of knowledge and experience. In 1976, he returned to his village and farmed. One year later, he got married. In the early 1980s, he started small scale trading of peanuts and leather products. In 1987 and 1988, he tried watermelon trading, and in 1989, he tried wool/cashmere trading during which he experienced a risky trip to Heilongjiang Province to collect wool. In early 1990, he traded peanuts in nearby villages, in the meantime he started trading grasshoppers collected from local villages and selling them to Lanzhou and Yinchuan City, about 2,000 km away. In 1994, he traded sweet potatoes by collecting them from local villages and selling them in Zhangjiakou market, about 350 km away. His various trading activities were undertaken after cost-effectiveness calculations, influenced and enlightened through chatting with classmates, consulting with his wife and with her support and trust, from his experience, as well as from his social networks developed during trading. 1995 was the turning point of his career when he contracted a plot of land and planted it with plum trees. Since then he has largely reduced his trading engagements, instead devoted his efforts to fruit trees. Fruit tree production was initiated through information gathered from outside relatives and from local markets. His success has also been connected with his social network. In 1997, he purchased a three-wheel motorcycle for agricultural use. In 1998, he contracted another plot of land for planting plum trees. Starting in 1999, he obtained an income from plum production of about 20,000 to 30,000 yuan per year. In 2000, he constructed a new house and his children went for temporary wage labour to Tianjin Municipality.

The poverty of his childhood motivated Zhao Zengyuan to struggle to improve his livelihood options. His life trajectory illustrates that he has not passively adapted to the changes in society, but has instead, actively searched for alternatives and opportunities that the political changes have opened up.

### **Zhao Huiyuan (Yuangang Village)**

Zhao Huiyuan is 48 years old. He has a wife, two sons of 24 and 20, and a daughter aged 10. He is very good at fruit tree management and won second prize in the provincial competition for grafting skills in 1993. Many farmers in the nearby communities ask for his help on grafting. His wife is 48 years old, and engaged in fruit tree management, farming and housework. The older son is a college graduate, and now

works in Baoding steel factory and already has city residence status, though his father still sees him as a village family member. The 20-year-old son studied only to junior high school level and after graduation migrated for work. He has little contact with his parents. Zhao Zengyuan knows only that he is working in a brick-making factory. His daughter is in grade three of the village school. His family has the usual 6 mu of arable land, cropped with maize, groundnut and sweet potato. Family income is mainly from fruit production. The contract for one of his orchards is solely in his name, while the other five are jointly contracted with other farmers or relatives. His career is mainly reflected in his early engagement in small-scale trading and later in fruit tree development. When he was in high school, he started small-scale peanut trading during his vacations. After graduating from high school in 1971, he started to collect Chinese prickly ash and other local spice products to sell to the Northeast provinces of China, some 3,000 km away. However, in 1978, this venture failed because the company in Qiqiha'er Municipality of Helongjiang Province violated the contract they made with him. His trading undertakings had a lot to do with the pressures brought by his family's poverty and hunger, but also through his social network. In 1981, he bid for the contract on an area of 270 persimmon trees belonging to the village collective, since when he has greatly improved his tree grafting skills by learning from textbooks and field practice, and this has resulted in more economic benefits for his family. His engagement in persimmon tree development was enlightened in interactions with his wife, when she shared with him her experiences in her parents' home in neighbouring Mancheng County. And the plan was consolidated by his visit to the orchard of his parents-in-law. In 1994, in co-operation with Zhao Guo'an he jointly contracted 7.8 mu of land and planted it with fruit trees. After that, he contracted another three plots of land for fruit tree production jointly with other farmers, i.e. 14 mu with Yuan Guoqing in 1997, 12 mu with Zhao Guoquan in 1999, and 240 persimmon trees and 2 mu of land with Yuan Shaopeng in 1999 and 2000 respectively. These various kinds of co-operation with neighbours and friends were a way to obtain the resources needed for such initiatives.

### **Zhang Yuxing (Yuangang Village)**

Zhang Yuxing is 40 years old, and studied till high school. His family has 6 members, his mother, his wife, and his three daughters. His 44-year-old wife graduated from high school and is a very capable and hard working woman. His two older daughters are now both studying in high school, and the youngest is in junior high school. His family has 7 mu of arable land, cropped with maize, sweet potato and groundnut, etc. Some of the produced maize is for family consumption, and some is used to exchange with wheat, which is a common practice in the village. Middlemen bring wheat flour to the village and exchange it for maize. The sweet potato production is about 1,500 to 2,000 kg per year, some for family consumption and the rest can be processed to 200 to 250 kg of sweet potato starch, which can be sold in the market for 500 to 1,000 yuan per year. He has 57 rabbits, and 2 pigs, and the contract on one orchard with 100 hawthorn trees, though production is low. He still does small-scale retailing in the local market, which can bring about 800 yuan of cash income for the family per year. He had a retail shop in the village, which closed last year. Zhang Yuxing is the son of a previous village party secretary. With his father's help he was sent to learn fruit tree grafting skills after graduated from junior high school in 1979. From 1984, he was appointed township

technician for 10 years. In 1996, he contracted 2 mu of land for fruit tree development and two years later he contracted about 50 persimmon trees from the village. In 2000, he started with two rabbits and that has become relatively large scale. His undertakings have a lot to do with his past experience, cost-effective calculations and his social network.

When I came to Zhang Yuxing's home for the first time, I was impressed with the lively atmosphere of the family. It was summer vacation and his three daughters were all at home. They enjoyed giving their comments. When I told Zhang Yuxing that I intended to explore his past undertakings, his eldest daughter said: "My father only likes to do big things, he doesn't like to do small things." He seemed to understand my purpose very quickly, and started to tell me his family's privileged position when he was young. "I am the only son of my family, my father was the village party secretary at that time, thus, I had a comparatively good life when I was young. I did well at school and studied till high school, and after that I passed the exam to be a technician." Obviously he was very proud of his technical capability. His wife was also very open and actively joined our interactions. In fact she is one of the few women in the village to have studied in high school. She also told me that when she was 21 years old, she went out to her uncle's place, the north-east of China, which is about 3,000 km away. She said that was the first time she had been so far away. She originally planned to get work there, but said: "I have serious carsickness, after one month there, I found it difficult to work so I came back." I found our discussions had always something to do with the three daughters. Their studies have certainly placed a great burden on the family, as Zhao Yuxing said: "My daughters want to study and I have to try my best to earn money, it is all for them." His smile while saying this seemed to tell me that he was indeed happy with this burden. He was very satisfied with their performance in school. Maybe in the future, one of them could go to university, which would benefit the entire family.

### **Yuan Shaopeng (Yuangang Village)**

Yuan Shaopeng is 45 years old and illiterate though he has no problems with calculation. His family has 5 members, his 42-year-old wife, two daughters and a son. His wife farms and looks after the household. His elder daughter is 16 years old and in primary school and helps on the farm. The younger daughter is 14 years old, studying in junior high school and also helps with the cooking and helps her father with the reckoning when he sells plums at the local markets. The son is 10 years old and in grade three at the village primary school. After the second daughter, Yuan wanted a son. However, family planning policy did not permit his family to have another child, so he and his wife went to north-east China to evade the family planning policy. Three years later (1992), they had a boy. When they returned he was fined 3,000 yuan and all his family valuables were taken away.

He has 5.5 mu of arable land, cropped with sweet potato, maize, groundnut, etc. All is for family consumption except for some of the sweet potato. They keep 4 pigs, which can bring about 1,200 yuan to the family a year. He has four orchards of 12 mu, which bring an income of 3,000 yuan a year. The biggest expenditure for the family is the education of the three children.

A few years ago, when Yuan came back from temporary migrant labour the village was advocating the contracting of village land. He reasoned that working outside meant relying on his physical labour, but when he was old it would be difficult to do that sort of work again. So for the future of his family he looked for an alternative and contracted a plot of land. When he was a child, his family was very poor, thus, when he was 12, he already worked for the village (brigade at that time) to earn work points. In the early 1980s he was the head of his production team for two years. From 1981 to 1983, he worked as a temporary wage labour in brick-making factory in north-east China and earned 300 to 400 yuan per month and was satisfied with his work. The second time he went he did not return and did not contact his home or his parents. His parents missed him and at the end of 1986 asked others to tell him so and he returned. His parents introduced him to a girl that he married in 1987. After marriage, he went out again to work as a temporary wage labourer, but neither his wife or parents supported his leaving, so he had to be back after one year. Since then he has rarely left his village until in 1989 when he and his wife went to north-east China to evade the family planning policy. In 1988, he co-operated with others in small scale trading of peanuts, which was his first experience of business co-operation. In 1994, under the encouragement of his neighbours, he contracted land for fruit trees. In 1998 he replaced the plum variety in his orchard, and in 1999 he again contracted idle land to plant fruit trees. During the winter leisure time in 2000, he co-operated with Yuan Shaoming and successfully traded sweet potatoes. In 2001, he again co-operated with Yuan Shaoming and jointly contracted 2 mu of land to start seedling production. For each of the fruit tree undertakings, he had made cost-effectiveness calculations and frequently exchanged information with neighbours, and had visited successful cases of fruit tree development outside the community.

### **Yuan Ronghai (Yuangang Village)**

Yuan Ronghai is 43, single, and educated to grade five of primary school. He lives on his own but supports his 73 years old father and 69 years old mother, neither of whom can do any agricultural work. He has 4 mu of arable land, copped with maize, sweet potato, groundnut, etc. Every year, he divides his grain with his parents. He also contracted 5 mu of land planted with plum trees and some medicinal plants. He keeps a pig and 13 rabbits. Agricultural inputs are the major expenditure of his family. He likes reading and has bought books on medicinal plants and fruit cultivation, rabbit raising, and *kungfu* novels. Yuan Ronghai was very clever at school coming top for the township when he graduated but his parents could not afford to let him stay on and he started farming. In 1978, when he was 18 (the village was still in the commune period), he went with other villagers to Tianjin to do construction work. He earned 1.5 yuan per day, 45 yuan per month, and 30 yuan was for the village collective but he was satisfied with the work. Later he went to Beijing and learned some basic skills in construction, such as cement mixing and bricklaying. When he was 20, he went to Xinjiang Autonomous Region as a temporary wage labourer on local vegetable farms earning 40 yuan per month. When he was 25, he worked in the coal mines in Shanxi Province and stayed for the following five years, after which he went to Harbin City of Heilongjiang Province, about 3,000 km away to work in a brick-making factory. From 30 to 35, he worked in construction in Inner Mongolia. When he was 38, he went to Hunan Province and learnt to drive there. In 1998, when he was 40, he returned to the village and



contracted 5 mu of land to grow fruit trees and plans to contract village idle land for to develop this further.

I included Yuan Ronghai in my case research because of my special interest on him. He was always one of those chatting in public spaces. As he said: "I don't like to stay at home when I am free, I like to chat with people." I joked with him: "Does your wife give you so much free time?" I regret that comment to this day, for later I discovered he was still single. However, he was not irritated by my question. In rural areas, unless a family is too poor for a man to marry, it is not normal for a man like Yuan Ronghai to stay single. Therefore I purposely kept an interest in him. When I had a chance to chat with him separately, I was highly impressed by his romantic life experiences. He likes tourism because through his travels he has learnt to appreciate the beauty of the land, to broaden his views, to experience the rich modes of life in different areas, and has enjoyed the country's diversified cultures. While working away he would work hard for half the year and then with the money earned would travel for six months. He fell in love with a divorced woman he met in Inner Mongolia. However, the woman had a daughter and did not want to quickly marry again. The several interactions I had with him were relaxed but usually I discussed with him during evening time, because I felt the villagers were always looking at him with strange eyes. Villagers viewed him as 'a man who does not do honest work, a groundless and unstable man.' However, from him I saw a lot of the motives of rural people to change.

### **Xu Jinlan (Baoshi Village)**

Xu Jinlan is 65 years old and lives with his three sons. The eldest is mainly engaged in farming, the second works outside of the village, and the youngest son operates a retail shop in the village. He has 4 mu of arable land cropped with maize, potato and vegetables. He has a 2 mu of seedling nursery, which can bring 5,000 to 6,000 yuan a year, and 2 mu of medicinal plants worth another 2,000 yuan per year. In addition, he receives a fixed retirement allowance of about 4,800-yuan per year from the county forestry bureau. After he completed primary school he was engaged in farming till 1953. From 1953 to 1962, he was a party secretary working in Lianggang Township, and from 1962 to 1978 he was again engaged in farming in his village. Since then his career has had much to do with forestry.

From 1978 to 1993, he led the establishment and development of the Pocang Township forestry farm, and from 1993 to 1999 he was head of the township forestry station. He retired in 1999 and continued farming and forestry development in the village. Xu Jinlan is well known in the nearby local communities. He has devoted most of his efforts to afforestation and forestry management. When he started the township forestry farm in 1978, he only had 10 spades and 10 picks. After 15 years of endeavour, the forestry farm realised 12,000 mu of manual afforestation, established 50 mu of nursery, 4 mu of fruit trees and constructed 19 office rooms. The present value of the forestry farm is estimated to be 15 million yuan. From 1965, Xu Jinlan himself tended 11,000 mu of pine trees that were developed by aerial seeding, realised 5,500 mu of enrichment planting, raised 1.16 million seedlings and 400 new varieties of persimmon trees. He helped local villagers to establish new fruit orchards totalling 2,000 mu. In addition, he had planted about 2,000 Chinese prickly ash trees on spare land, grafted 25,000 fruit

trees, and pruned 80,000. In addition to his practical action in forestry development in the local area, he himself had conducted various forestry-related researches, and had published many research articles in national, provincial and local academic magazines and newspapers.

In 1993, he was included in the 'Series of Entrepreneurs in China', and in 1995 he was included in the 'Anthem of Pioneers' compiled by the County Party Committee, and in 2000, he was included in 'Contemporary Chinese Scholars in China'. Although some of these publications are profit oriented (in that they collect fees from the ones they include), this is still a measure of his recognition in the county for his contribution to forestry development, particularly in Pocang Township. During this forestry-related work, he obtained a lot of valuable information and knowledge from outside villages, from books and magazines, from his study visits to various places. He has been very active in technology innovations that have contributed greatly to his success. His technical expertise has brought him reputation and trust, which in return has contributed to the successful operation of his forestry development. He has broad social networks, particularly technical subject focused networks. He is a very careful person. He has often come up with new ideas due to enlightenment from what he has seen. He has also great support and trust from family members.

Xu Jinlan was the first case I selected in Baoshi Village. Once he starts to speak of past undertakings, it is difficult to stop him. He always follows his own way and order whatever you ask. He certainly welcomed us and was probably familiar with people from research institutions or universities. Some in fact think him a bit unsociable and eccentric, very few could chat with him for such a long time as I did. During the first session he had a lot to tell me, and I had difficulty in leading our discussions, mostly I was following him. He showed me a lot of prizes he had won. After I completed the first session, I was extremely impressed and said to myself: "Can there be such a man in Baoshi Village!" I had eight sessions of discussions and interactions with him. After the first session, I felt more familiar with his way and manner of speaking. Thus during the second session, I asked about his actual forestry undertakings, but again he led me to all the theories he had about forestry practice and development, all his papers and the practical research he conducted. So, I again did not get much of what I wanted from him during the second session. During the third session, I asked him to tell me the background and justification for all his prizes. He enjoyed recalling the splendid achievements of his career. I learnt a lot about his past actions from this third session.

Of the five cases selected for detailed study in Baoshi Village, he was the only one who actively approached us many times during our stay there. He asked for our contact details and said he might come to see us in Beijing in the future. From him, I have felt the strong eagerness of local people for connections with the outside. I took a photo of each of my case farmers. When we went to take his photo, he thought his clothes were not clean enough and changed them, and he washed his hands and head. What I did not understand was that he also washed his feet. It took some time therefore to take the photo. The night before we left the village, he came to us again, and we could see he was disappointed. The next time I went back, I heard from others that he had often inquired when we would be back. In general during the later sessions of interactions with him, I was more able to lead the discussions. It was indeed a big shift.

## **Zhao Shengli (Baoshi Village)**

Zhao Shengli is 33 years old and the current village party secretary. His household comprises himself, his wife and a daughter. His wife is 30 years old, mainly engaged in farming and housework and his 11-year-old daughter is in grade four of the village school. His family has about 2 mu of arable land, cropped with wheat, maize, sweet potato and groundnut, etc. He keeps 2 pigs, has 24 persimmon trees, 5 apple trees, and some other fruit and timber trees. Most of the produce is for family consumption. His main family income includes about 10,000 yuan a year from operating a knitting mill, his 1,440 yuan a year stipend as party secretary, about 5,000 a year from his rented out restaurant, and about 500 yuan from agriculture. His main family expenditure each year includes receptions 5,000 yuan, living and education 5,000 yuan, caring for his parents around 2,000 yuan a year, and other miscellaneous expenses of about 5,000 yuan.

Zhao Shengli is well known in the village because of his political role, and because he is one of the wealthiest farmers. He is only 33 years old, but has rich development experience. He finished junior high school and from 1984 to 1985 studied electrics in a technical school in Shijiazhuang, the provincial capital, following an interest he had from childhood. From 1985 to 1989, he worked in the vermiculite mine in the village, and his success had a lot to do with his kinship network. From 1989 to 1991, he operated an electrical equipment/appliance repair shop. From 1991 to 1993, he went to Beijing for temporary work through the information of a friend. From 1993 to 1995, he again worked in the vermiculite mine. Since 1995, he has operated a knitting mill. The initiation and operation of this knitting mill was largely connected to information gathered from one of his relatives, his personal study visit and special support from his strong kinship network.

He was appointed head of the village militia in 1993, head of the village security and protection committee in 1994, village deputy party secretary from 1995 to 2000, and now is village party secretary. His village cadre career was highly encouraged by township officials and has helped him to build a broader social network. In 2000, he built a restaurant, now rented out to others for 5,000 yuan a year. This restaurant undertaking was again supported by his kin network, and benefited from his reputation and trust from others. His ideas are very advanced and in the mainstream of Chinese society. He often gets a lot of ideas and information from newspapers, magazines, television, and study visits to various places. We both enjoyed speaking together. He had three wishes. One was to have a tapped drinking water supply for the main hamlet of the village, now realised with EZE project support. Another was to solve the drinking water problems of the other hamlets, and the third was to construct a water check dam in the village. In him one saw the charming character of a young village cadre, and what he has achieved can be attributed to his various experiences and his broad social network.

We were warmly received in Baoshi Village by Zhao Shengli and his colleagues on behalf of the village when we firstly arrived, but after we were accommodated in the deputy director's home, Mr. Chen Gengshen, we did not see him often. He always excused himself by saying he was very busy. I conveyed my complaints to him through

Mr. Chen Gengshen and eventually he came. For this first session with him he was formally dressed. Later I realised that he enjoyed talking with us very much. We were of similar age, and had a lot of common language. However, due to the internal conflict between him and Mr. Liang Shutian, the director of the village committee, he purposely did not involve himself too much with our activities in the village, otherwise, Mr. Liang Shutian might have been jealous. I took this to mean that he wanted to give him the opportunity to get familiar with us first, because in rural areas, good connections with people from outside, especially from Beijing, are seen as honour and reputation. In total I had five sessions with Zhao Shengli. He speaks and expresses his ideas well and was sometimes provocative and at others encouraging. The first session took more than four hours. He knew the logic behind my questions and being the party secretary, he had a lot to say in relation to many community issues. From our interactions, I could feel that he was a very good village cadre, and thought a lot about the community and its members. He made one feel optimistic about the future prosperity of the Chinese countryside, though his expressions showed him also to be a rather conceited man - the wealthiest and also the first decision-maker of the village.

The second session took place at his home – unusual in that it is a two-storey building. This time I was the one formally dressed because he had been so in the first session. His fan was broken and dressed as I was I suffered much from the heat. During this second session, he proposed to buy a set of speakers and amplifier equipment for the village, so that he could easily give notice to villagers and broadcast to the village how much the EZE drinking water project had contributed to villagers' livelihood improvements. He even said he would write a report and publish it in a newspaper to show the community's appreciation of our help. As I regarded him as key informant on the community, I often asked questions not directly related to my research. I touched upon the issue of his relation to Mr. Liang Shutian, since their conflict was known by all villagers. He never directly replied to my question. I also asked his opinion on the proposal to consolidate the dispersed land plots of households since many farmers complained that this was not good for agricultural development. Zhao Shengli mentioned only that there had been such a trial before and the difficulties had been tremendous. I could see he tried to avoid commenting on such sensitive topics. In general, our several sessions were all pleasant and I have a lot of interest in following his development tracks to see what will become of him. Of the five selected case farmers in Baoshi Village, I believe him to have the best prospects

### **Xu Jinfu (Baoshi Village)**

Xu Jinfu is 45 years old. His household comprises his wife, two daughters and a son. His wife is 38 years old, mainly engaged in farming and housework. His 19 and 18-year-old daughters are both studying in high school. His 17-year-old son is studying in professional high school. His family has about 4 mu of arable land, cropped with maize, sweet potato, groundnut and vegetables, etc. He keeps 2 pigs and on his contracted mountain land he has planted about 1,500 locust trees. He has two persimmon trees for family consumption. His main income is from processing coal (raw coal is bought in from outside the community and simple tools are used to make egg-shaped briquettes for burning) of around 8,000 yuan a year and from agriculture about 2,000 a year. The major family expenditure is education - about 10,000 yuan - and annual family living

expenses of about 5,000 yuan. He impressed me with his advanced ideas, and although he is not a village cadre he appears to have good ideas for development. He has a relatively good life but seems not yet to have fully explored his potential. He is stimulating and enlightening, always easygoing with others but strict on himself. If one day I should return to the village, I would certainly wish to visit him again.

Appointments were difficult to make as he always had the following three days planned. He would say: "I was born to be busy, and I am willing to be busy, because to be busy is better than doing nothing, furthermore, society's development depends on human creations, it is absolutely impossible if you only stay at home." Amongst the research farmers, he had experienced the most diversified undertakings, and importantly, although some undertakings might only have brought limited gains they had succeeded. He graduated from junior high school in 1971 and until 1981 was engaged in farming. That was during the Commune period. In 1981, his family was given land, which he farmed until 1983. He then with the help of his sister went to work for a year on railway construction in Shijiazhuang, the provincial capital, where an electrician helped him to extend his social network. From 1984 to 1985, he was the foreman of a small-scale construction project. From 1985 to 1987, through neighbours, he rented a brick-making factory in Laishui County. In 1987, he slaughtered pigs and bought and sold meat in local markets. This was started through information collected from visits to the local market. In 1988, he bought an irrigation pump and charged local farmers prices based on the market value for its use. From 1989 to 1994, he bought an oil extractor and started an oil extraction business after seeing another running well in a village 50 km away. From 1991 to 1994, he collected and processed vermiculite and sepiolite, because he realised its market potential and a friend encouraged him. Since 1995, he has operated a transport business in co-operation with three other villagers. This came from experience when engaged in the vermiculite mine business. Since 1996, he has operated a coal-processing business on information gained from a local temple fair (also a kind of market). In the meantime, he has undertaken some other kinds of sideline activities, such as trading in construction materials and moon cake processing. He is now preparing to go into large-scale scorpion raising in co-operation with Mr. Chen Gengshen, another of my case farmers. He got the information from newspapers and television about the prospects of a good market for them in future.

His talents are not obvious before better acquaintance with him. He is of very slight build and since he supervises his own coal enterprise his appearance is always a bit black. He is a good example of the Chinese proverb 'you can not tell a person only from his or her appearance' (*ren bu ke mao xiang*) or 'from the colour of his skin' in the English proverb. The first time I met him at dinner in Chen Gengshen's home. He had come to chat so I grasped the opportunity to talk with him. The first formal visit to him was one evening after dinner with many people at his home. He had lots of ideas and he asked me to help him to confirm the creditability of several items of information, he also asked my advice on which college or university his two daughters should select. He knew there was a training and study visit component within the EZE project and asked me to support a visit to a scorpion base. All the appointments with him were after six o'clock in the afternoon. The last session took place after 8 o'clock and in candlelight after a cut in the electricity supply.

### **Chen Gengshen (Baoshi Village)**

Chen Gengshen is 37 years old and he lives with his wife, son and daughter. His wife, 36 years old, is engaged in farming and housework. His 12-year-old daughter is studying in junior high school, and his 8-year-old is in grade 2. He has 2.6 mu of arable land, cropped with maize and potatoes. He also keeps a pig and some chickens for family consumption. He has 0.8 mu of nursery seedlings. As he said, , his family income is mainly from agriculture, his village cadre stipend is 1,000 yuan per year and from work in the nearby ironstone processing enterprises. His expenditure is on education and family living expenses. We stayed at his home during our research in this village and thus knew him well and often had the opportunity to chat. He is a young village cadre and one of the early farmers to start vermiculite mining. Thus his family economic situation is indeed good. His family is ranked as number four in the village wealth ranking. He graduated from high school in 1981, then he joined military in 1988. This gave him a lot of experience.

After he returned from the army he actively searched for information on future undertakings and contacted two vermiculite mines in Lianggang Township who supported him to start a similar venture in his village with his elder brother till 1990. In 1994 he was invited to work in the County foreign trade bureau responsible for vermiculite trade. This further broadened his horizons. He then opened another vermiculite mine with Xu Jinfa. From 1995 to 1999, based on the information he obtained he started mining sepiolite. From 1997 to 1999 he has also been engaged in transport, recognising its market potential engaged in vermiculite mine business. From 1999 to 2000, through the help of his brother he was selected to work as an electrician for the County Electricity Company. Since 2000 he has held the position of deputy director of the village committee. He is now preparing for large-scale scorpion raising in co-operation with Mr. Xu Jinfa. He always actively searches out information from his friends, relatives and personal (study) visits. He likes to learn from direct experience, believing what he sees rather relying on secondary information. He thinks favourable policy is important to local development undertakings.

During our stay in Chen Gengshen's home we developed a deep friendship. He trusted us enough to pass on information about village hearsay, about norms and regulations, the conflicts amongst villages, amongst village cadres, as well as his future plans. Our interactions were not fixed but went with the mood. We played cards and watched television, and ate and drank together. We called him brother and his wife took great care of us. I never treated him as one of my interviewees, but a close friend and his family were a close link with the community.

### **Xu Yinfu (Baoshi Village)**

Xu Yinfu is 42 and lives with his wife of 38, a son at junior high school and a 19-year-old daughter studying in a professional college. He has 2.5 mu of arable land, cropped with maize and sweet potato and 2 mu of land planted sparsely with persimmons for family consumption. He also raises 2 pigs and some chicken. He claims his main income is from transport, his allowance as head of the village credit station, and from pig raising. His main family expenditure is on education and living expenses. His family

is the only one in the village to operate a truck transport business. He bought the truck in 1995. In the beginning he co-operated with others, but later he operated on his own. He has been involved in various undertakings and has learned several skills, tiling, building construction, etc. He said he could make a building from designing it to finished product. He is not afraid of taking risks. He is a righteous man, and was once a village cadre. He graduated from high school in 1978 when he was 19. In 1981, he was made responsible for recording work points for the brigade (now village). From 1981, he worked outside for 7 years on construction, during which he received a lot of support from his kin network. In 1987, he returned to his village and was appointed village bookkeeper. In the same year he started to manage the village credit station due to his recognised capability. From 1991, he was the electrician for 5 years, and in 1995, he bought a truck and has operated the transport business since. His transport business was initiated by enlightenment during an interaction with Mr. Chen Baoxiang, a villager in Baoshi, and jointly started in co-operation with Mr. Chen Baoxiang and Xu Jinfa. When these two withdrew their shares Xu Yinfu operated alone. The business gives him a lot of opportunities to go outside and he actively looks for new technologies and ideas that may suit the development of his village. He likes to read books, magazines and newspapers, and likes to watch TV, and relies on information from his network of friends and acquaintances. He also paid a visit to Shanxi Province, where the vegetable greenhouse has developed well.

He was the only one in the village who responded with indifference in our meetings. If he did not want to respond to a question, one could hardly get an answer no matter how one led him. His wife treated us with warm hospitality, she heard that I was involved in the revolving funds business under the EZE project in the village and was interested to know more about it. Probably under her influence he was more and more co-operative in the later sessions and we were thus able to complete the case study. However, when asked for comments on certain community affairs, he always said “Not bad”, and would be pressed no further. I could only conclude that he was either worldly-wise or playing safe. It could have been satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the conditions under which he was living.

### **Experience Gained in Relation to Interactions with Case Farmers**

Although trust had been built through our research and implementation of the project, collecting detailed case data required adapting to farmer’s work times and habits. The major difficulty was making appointments. Many farmers followed the tradition of ‘starting work in field from sunrise, starting rest after sunset’ (a Chinese idiom, *ri chu er zuo, ri luo er xi*). Thus, it was often not appropriate to fix a time in terms of a definite hour and minute. Sometimes, even after making an appointment, a farmer might still not come due to work requirements or urgent family matters. These are realities and attempts were made to choose locales and times to suit the convenience of farmers. Normally after the first session or encounter with a case farmer, follow up sessions usually went much smoother. The following records some specific experiences of the interactions with case farmers.

The preparation phase for collecting the case material included thinking about how and when to contact a case farmer, and the best place for discussion. I could get in contact

through community key informants familiar to me, or through the members of the family with whom we stayed, or through the village cadres. In some cases it was possible to go directly to the farmer's household, or ring him by telephone. Respect and following local customs regarding courtesy were important. For instance, if the farmer did not have time for several days I politely told the farmer that he must continue with the things important to him and ask if I could come again. If the answer was yes, the farmer would not normally decline the later appointment. When I made an appointment I had to explain clearly the intention of my interview. Appropriate explanation was often the key to the success of the follow-up sessions. It helped the farmers to move away from their cautious concern since when contacted they usually asked what I wanted with them. This simple question could be very sensitive, because no matter how trusted or integrated we had become, we were still outsiders in their eyes. I had always avoided using terms 'rural survey', or 'research survey', etc., because the term survey and investigation are the same in Chinese, and have strong negative connotations. They are words used in connection with corruption or crime and are associated with visits from the higher level coming for 'investigation' or 'survey'. In most of the cases, I explained to them like this, "You know we are from agricultural university, we have a small scale development project in your village. We want to chat with you on life in your community. In addition, we have heard you have been doing very well in relation to your family livelihood development, we are very interested to learn how you have managed your past and current development undertakings."

After such explanations, farmers were normally very willing to co-operate in later sessions. I used 'chat' rather than formal 'interview', although it was in fact a kind of interview. Secondly they had been selected because they had been doing well, thus, it was not because there was something wrong with them. Thirdly I wanted to learn from them, meaning they were appreciated and respected. As a Chinese idiom says, "If you respect me one inch, in return I will respect you ten." (*ni jing wo yi chi, wo jing ni yi zhang*) In return for my respect they were then, in the Chinese way, supposed to return it tenfold in the following sessions.

During the first session of interaction with a farmer, although I had my research purpose in mind, if had not already been armed with the farmer's family basic situation, the sessions would have been conducted less successfully. As for the farmer, this might be the first time in his or her life that they had ever been interviewed by an outsider, so the farmer would lack the experience to know what to expect and would not therefore know how to be prepared. Of course the EZE project made it easier since the farmer might think my interview was naturally related to the operation of the project and questions and suggestions were often made on the project. In this case, the discussion would wander far from the research focus theme. Therefore, we found it better to begin chatting about his or her basic family situation. "How many members are there in your family?" "How large is your arable land?" "What does your family raise?" "What crops do you cultivate?" "How many children do you have? How old are they? What are they doing?" "What events have occurred in your family during recent years?" and so on. They are in fact the topics one usually finds them chatting about among themselves.

During discussion one is often required to give some response to information, sympathy over sad events or compliments when farmers become excited over happy and enjoyable



things. Such comments can express understanding and support, which would certainly contribute to further trust building. For instance, during my interaction with Mr. Zhao Wenyou, he talked about the marriage of his son. Through the matchmaker's introduction, his son got engaged to a girl and his family spent in total about 30,000 yuan. However, sometimes the girl will change her mind and the situation brought Zhao Wenyou a lot of headache and worries. When he talked about this, I expressed my great sympathy saying: "Parents are indeed not easy today." During my discussion with Ms. Li Hui, she talked about her rabbit-hutch making business. I was very curious and asked how she had come up with the idea and how she had promoted her products. She said she was enlightened when she saw many information posters on the electricity poles in the rural area and so she did the same, which had great impact. She was very happy and animated when she told me about this and I complimented her. This diversion also gave us a short a break because such interviews are time consuming and require the interviewee to recall many past experiences.

During interactions with farmers they sometimes mentioned their conflicts with other families. Such confidences required great sensitivity, because in rural communities anonymity is 'weak', meaning almost non-existent, and since all families know each other they know of such quarrels etc. When someone being interviewed talks about conflicts with others, he or she might make complaints about those others. For instance, during interviews I heard complaints about cadres and of unfairness in revolving funds distribution. At that moment, it was better for me not to comment, because the farmer's comment could probably be one-sided, and my comment could be taken for support and would quickly be spread to others, or the farmer could take advantage of this which could possible lead to further conflict. In addition, messages passed on this way get largely reshaped, sometimes reaching the opposite of the original meaning. In this regard, I would like to bring forward one of my experiences.

In the initial stage of my research in one village, I had relied heavily on one key informant to help me by introducing me to my intended case farmer households. In the end, I thought I had taken so much of his time that I wanted to show my appreciation. I gave him 200 yuan and told him that he should not let other farmers know. However, when I came to the community the next time, I realised that many farmers knew what I had done. Some farmers even thought we had employed the key informant to work for us and that he was going to receive regular payments. I was very surprised because this would negatively affect my follow up research conduct. Later I got to know that in fact the key informant spread the information himself, because he liked showing others how I had appreciated his help, which was regarded as an honour for him.

Finally, at the end of each session, especially at the end of the last session, I certainly would feel relaxed and happy for the completion of a successful case. At that moment, it should not be forgotten that I had taken so much of the farmer's time, and it would have been wrong to leave in a hurry and return home with my own great happiness. Instead, I had to take time to thank the farmer for his time and kind co-operation, and also to express my willingness for future contact, and above all best wishes must certainly be expressed to the farmer for his or her future.

## **Overview of Farmer Development Initiatives and Critical Factors**

The 20 in-depth case studies explored the pace of development of the selected farmers or farmer households. The focus has been particularly set on the milestones in terms of the various new development initiatives in the farmers' career or in the history of the households' development. I studied how each of the particular initiatives was generated and incubated, socially consolidated, and realised in practice and looked the critical factors involved in each stage. The detailed process of such generation, consolidation and realisation will be analysed in the following two chapters.

Tables 5.2 gives a summary overview of the variety of initiatives that farmers are currently involved in, and the number of case farmers involved in any one of those activities. The multifarious development initiatives and the related critical factors of each of the 20 case farmers are again listed in the table in Appendix 2.

The table shows that of the 20 cases, ten are related to outside wage labour. Nine farmers have taken initiatives concerning the raising of livestock, scorpions and bee-keeping. Seven have been involved in the development of various local enterprises, six in forestry development, and six in small-scale trading of various local products. Five farmers have initiated fruit tree development, three local mine businesses, and three local tertiary services. Three farmers have set up transport businesses, and three have been involved in the community administration and similar management tasks. Two farmers are engaged in vegetable cultivation, two have contracted orchards from other farmers and are involved in outside construction and factory projects. And two have taken up contracts with local institutions for the collection of fees of various sorts or have received payment for the management of particular private enterprises. One farmer has taken initiatives in respect to arable farming, one has opened an animal slaughter business, and one has focused on the development of community infrastructure.

Table 5.2 Categories of farmer development initiatives and number and rank order of cases involved

No.	Category of farmer development initiative	No. of cases involved	Rank
1	Outside temporary wage labour	10	1
2	Livestock raising including rabbit raising, goat raising, lean swine raising, plus bee keeping and scorpion raising	9	2
3	Local production enterprises (including cement tile production, glass noodle processing, clothes making, <i>youtiao</i> making, rabbit hutch making, knitting mill, oil extraction, coal processing, local materials (red stone) processing and marketing, etc.	7	3
4	Forestry development (by large-scale contract, planting trees and medicinal plants and timber )	6	4
5	Small-scale trading (including trading of vegetables, peanuts, leather products, goats, ice-lollies, wool, grasshoppers, sweet potato, Chinese prickly ash, spice products, etc.	6	4
6	Fruit tree development (including plum and other fruits)	5	5
7	Local mine business (vermiculite and sepiolite)	3	6
8	Local tertiary services, including retail shop, electrical equipment/ appliance repair shop, local restaurant, irrigation	3	6

	service for villagers, etc.		
9	Transport business	3	6
10	Community leader/ village administration, including management of village credit station	3	6
11	Vegetable cultivation and development including grape cultivation, etc.	2	7
12	Contracts of orchards, construction (foreman), brick making factory	2	7
13	Local tasks/mission contract (collecting electricity fee, the management of relative's enterprise)	2	7
14	Agricultural (farming) engagement	1	8
15	Slaughter business	1	8
16	Community infrastructure development	1	8

Table 5.3 provides a breakdown of the cases and the rank order of the categories of critical factors. Twenty such cases are connected with social networks, 15 with information derived from networks, 12 with past experiences, 7 with information from media and publications, 7 with calculation of cost-effectiveness, 6 with enlightenment from interaction with members in networks of outsiders and family members, and 6 with trust. The number of cases that have connections with information from study visits, information derived from the market, visits to successful cases, influence by members in social network and family members and others, consultation with others, and self-help and co-operation represent 5 for each. The number of cases connected with questions of reputation (respect, creditability) and interests, beliefs, curiosity *vis-à-vis* the outside world, etc. is 4 for each. The number of cases that have connections with technology innovation, knowledge from publications and training, and study visits, and skills and technical capability is 3 for each, and 2 each for connections with enlightenment from observation and favourable policy.

Table 5.3 Categories of critical factors and number and rank order of cases involved

No.	Category of critical factors	No. of cases involved	Rank
1	Social networks (kinship network, network of colleagues, friends, village fellows, neighbours, classmates, leaders, technical subject-focused social network and so on)	20	1
2	Information from social networks (friends, classmates, workmates, previous colleagues, villagers, neighbours, relatives especially outside relatives) during interactions, visits, and chat and information and experience exchange in community indigenous (including subject focused) arenas	15	2
3	Experience	12	3
4	Information from media, newspaper, magazines, books, television	7	4
5	Cost-effectiveness calculations, low risk based on rational analysis	7	4
6	Enlightenment from interaction/chatting with members in social networks, with others such as county electric workers, outsiders encountered with in local market, from chatting with	6	5

	neighbours in community indigenous arena, from interaction with family members (wife, husband)		
7	Trust (especially kinship trust, family trust)	6	5
8	Information from (study) visits	5	6
9	Information from market, local temple fairs (and market analysis)	5	6
10	Visits, study visit to successful cases, such as an experienced grape grower	5	6
11	Influence by members in social networks during interactions, and by family member (husband, wife), encourage by others such as township officials	5	6
12	Consultation with relatives, friends, community technical <i>elite</i> , village fellows and family members (mainly wife or husband)	5	6
13	Self-help and co-operation (with neighbours), with friends/villagers, relatives, through classmates network, co-operation for scarce resources	5	6
14	Reputation, respect, creditability	4	7
15	Interests, belief, curiosity on outside world, pressure	4	7
16	Technology innovation	3	8
17	Knowledge from books, magazines, training and study visits	3	8
18	Skills and technical capability	3	8
19	Enlightenment from observation of others' practices	2	9
20	Favourable policy	2	9

The critical factors presented in this table offer a preliminary summary of the results for the 20 cases. Many of these are interrelated and some in fact can generally be grouped into broader categories. In later chapters I explore the significance of such combined factors.

## CHAPTER 6

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### IDENTIFYING THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL COMPONENTS OF FARMER INITIATIVES

My aim in this chapter is to provide a general overview of the characteristics of the 20 farmers chosen as case studies in their social and cultural context, followed by a discussion of the critical factors that contribute to the emergence and development of farmer initiatives. I leave for Chapter 7 the analysis of how these come into play through documenting the dynamics of selected farmers' life histories and strategies.

Having selected the cases of farmer initiatives for detailed analysis, I designed a questionnaire survey to administer (see Appendix 3 for details) consisting of two parts. The first focuses on general household demographic information, land and other resources, cropping, livestock raising, forestry and fruit trees, non-agricultural undertakings, household income and expenditure, and so forth. The second part was composed of open-ended questions aimed at eliciting farmers' views about critical factors and at filling in the social context of their lives. The following provides an analysis of the results of this survey.

#### Social Characteristics of the Case Farmers

##### *Demographic information*

Table 6.1 provides information on the age, household size and formal educational level of the selected case farmers, as well as the wealth status of the farmer households in their particular villages. The average age of the case farmers is 46.8 years. The average size of their households is 4.3, a little higher than the community average (4.0 for Nandugang Village, 3.9 for Sanggang Village, 4.0 for Yuangang Village and 3.5 for Baoshi Village). The average household labour force is 2.2, again a little more than the community average (2.0 for Nandugang Village, 2.0 for Sanggang Village, 1.5 for Yuangang Village and 2.0 for Baoshi Village). In each of the four villages, there are some ten households that comprise only aged members and they are thus not included in the labour force numbers.

##### *Education*

Of the 20 case farmers, 2 are illiterate, 4 completed primary school, 7 studied in junior high school and 7 completed high school. To enter university a student must have completed all eleven or twelve years of formal education (5 years, in some areas 6, of primary school, 3 of junior high, and 3 years of high school). In order to compare with the community average, I have used a simple mathematical conversion for the education levels (i.e. 0 for illiteracy, 2 for completion of primary school, 4 for completion of junior high school, and 6 for completion of high school). Following this mathematical

conversion, the average educational level for the farmers is 3.9, which means that they completed primary school but fall slightly short of graduating from junior high. Following the same conversion method, the community average educational qualification is 4.1 for Nandugang Village, 3.8 for Sanggang Village, 3.7 for Yuangang Village and 3.9 for Baoshi Village. Therefore, it can be concluded that, in terms of formal educational qualifications, there is no difference between the 20 selected case farmers and the community average.

### *Wealth status*

Concerning wealth status I again found it necessary to use a conversion formula, since different villages ranked their households into different numbers of wealth categories (of their own choosing) - Nandugang Village chose 9 categories, Sanggang 10, Yuangang 6, and Baoshi 9. In order to do this I have proportionally converted the wealth ranks arrived at by farmers in each village into a ranking scale of 10 categories. This gives an average wealth rank status for the 20 cases of 3.7 out of a possible maximum of 10, meaning that on average they fall between categories 3 and 4. This result implies that the 20 households are neither among the wealthiest nor poorest groups, but represent those better-off households above the average of the four villages.

Table 6.1 General situation of the case farmers

Village	Name	Age	HH size	HH labor force	Education		Wealth rank in its village	
					Last education	Math. Conversion	Rank by farmer	Conversion into 10 categories
Nandugang	Zhao Huanbang	73	4	2	Primary	2	1 of 9	1.1
	Zhao Hanwen	51	4	1	Primary	2	4 of 9	4.4
	Xu Wenlou	47	4	1	High	6	4 of 9	4.4
	Liu Zhentiao	46	5	2	Junior high	4	4 of 9	4.4
	Liu Zhenkun	48	5	4	Junior high	4	1 of 9	1.1
Sanggang	Zhao Wenyou	48	4	3	Illiterate	0	3 of 10	3.0
	Xu Xinquan	46	3	2	High	6	5 of 10	5.0
	Lu Jianxun	41	4	2	High	6	6 of 10	6.0
	Zhao Laisheng	53	4	4	Junior high	4	5 of 10	5.0
	Li Hui	34	4	2	Junior high	4	3 of 10	3.0
Yuangang	Zhao Zengyuan	51	4	4	Junior high	4	2 of 6	3.3
	Zhao Huiyuan	48	5	2	High	6	3 of 6	5.0
	Zhang Yuxing	40	6	2	High	6	3 of 6	5.0
	Yuan Shaopeng	45	6	2	Illiterate	0	3 of 6	5.0

Baoshi	Yuan Ronghai	43	3	1	Primary	2	3 of 6	5.0
	Xu Jinlan	65	4	2	Primary	2	5 of 9	5.6
	Zhao Shengli	33	3	2	Junior high	4	1 of 9	1.1
	Xu Jinfa	44	5	2	Junior high	4	2 of 9	2.2
	Chen Gengshen	37	4	2	High	6	1 of 9	1.1
	Xu Yinfu	42	4	2	High	6	2 of 9	2.2
	<i>Average</i>	46.8	4.3	2.2	3.9		3.7 of 10	

### *Land resources*

Table 6.2 provides information on the land resources and household size of the case farmers. The average amount of arable land is 4.3 mu per household, and the average household size is 4.3, thus the average per capita arable land is approximately 1.0 mu. This in fact corresponds to the average for the research community. The total arable land for Nandugang, Sanggang, Yuangang and Baoshi villages is 828 mu, 720 mu, 1,200 mu and 502 mu respectively, and their populations are 726, 696, 1,230 and 687 respectively, thus, the average per capita arable land of the entire area is approximately 1 mu. This clearly shows that the case farmers do not deviate greatly from the patterns of landholding for the four villages, and most are fairly close to the average for their particular village. The table also reveals that none of the case farmers has a single concentrated plot of land but farms a relatively large number of small, scattered holdings.

This result certainly shows that these villages conform to the (arable) land distribution practices in rural China following the land reform, where the amount of land allocated to households depended upon their size and on soil fertility. Once land distribution had taken place it was possible for some farmers to exchange their plots with those of others for the convenience of farming. It was also possible for farmers to contract lots of dry land on the mountain slopes and cultivate them. In addition, some households converted parts of their arable land for growing fruit trees, though the areas are small. However, in legal terms, all such conversions of land use require official approval by the local land management bureau, although throughout the research area (and elsewhere in rural China too) it is not unusual to find cases of informal, unregistered land transfers. Therefore the land cultivated by each of the households cannot be correlated with the number of family members in any exact proportion. The table, as I suggested above, also underlines the fragmentation of land characteristic of most rural areas in China. This acts as a constraint to the development of commercial farming. For instance, in the research community, landholding per household is very small (i.e. 4.3 mu), and the average number of land plots 7.2, giving an average plot size of about 0.6 mu. Many such household plots are dispersed in different locations and often at some distance from each other.

Mountain land was also originally distributed fairly equitably, with all households having the right of access to lots through a system of contracting out. Today each farmer household has a certain amount of mountain land contracted through auction for timber, fruit tree and medicinal plant production. However, as the table shows, Zhao Wenyu is an extreme case. He has succeeded in contracting some 500 mu of barren mountain land for grazing his large herd of 90 goats (case details in Chapter 7). Excluding Wenyu's case, the average holding of mountain land for the case farmers is just over 20 mu, which is about the same as for the research community as a whole.

Table 6.2 Land resources of the case farmers

Name	Arable land		Mountain land Contracted (mu)
	Area (mu)	No. of plots	
Zhao Huanbang	4.5	8	75
Zhao Hanwen	4	7	20
Xu Wenlou	3.5	5	30
Liu Zhentiao	6	9	17
Liu Zhenkun	7	8	70
Zhao Wenyu	4	7	500 (for grazing)
Xu Xinquan	5	10	30
Lu Jianxun	3.5	8	40
Zhao Laisheng	4	9	5
Li Hui	4	6	5
Zhao Zengyuan	3.6	3	14.5
Zhao Huiyuan	6	5	10
Zhang Yuxing	7	7	10
Yuan Shaopeng	5.5	6	15
Yuan Ronghai	4	10	5
Xu Jinlan	4	5	8
Zhao Shengli	2	9	5
Xu Jinfu	4	4	15
Chen Gengshen	2.6	11	3
Xu Yinfu	2.5	6	6
<i>Average</i>	<i>4.3</i>	<i>7.2</i>	<i>20.2 (excluding Zhao Wenyu)</i>

### *Household production*

General information relating to cropping, livestock raising, forestry and fruit trees, non-agricultural undertakings, family income and expenditure has been elaborated earlier when I summarised the twenty vignettes pertaining to the case farmers in Chapter 5. The discussion that follows focuses mainly on issues that were raised through the open-ended questions.

### *Gender division and family decision making*



Table 6.3 summarises the general picture of the division of family decision making by gender. From this table, we can conclude that men take a greater share in decisions about cropping (56%), children's education (74%), purchase of durable items (63%) and marketing of products (66%), whereas their wives or other female members take more responsibility for decisions concerning livestock raising (74%) and daily expenditure (75%). These findings are consistent with what we know about other rural situations in China. The interviews highlighted how, in the area of cropping, men take the lead in deciding on the crops to cultivate, the area distribution of these crops, as well as the inputs and field management, though obviously in some cases women will take the principal role (see e.g. the cases of Zhao Wenyong who claims that his wife is fully responsible, Li Hui, a woman, who says she takes 80%, and Liu Zhenkun who indicates that his wife is 60% responsible). In the area of livestock, women take the lead in deciding on the operation and management of household animal raising, and also undertake many of the tasks involved, though again there are a few exceptions (e.g. Zhao Wenyong points out that it is he not his wife who is in charge of the large herd of goats, and Zhao Hanwen who says he takes 90% responsibility for the chicken and goats). In respect to children's education, it is, with one exception (Xu Wenlou), the husband who takes the main role. It is argued that in most rural families it is the man who is most likely to be more qualified in terms of schooling, and thus deemed to be more capable of helping children with their studies. Again, apart from Xu Wenlou (an extremely active man combining farming with various outside jobs), decisions relating to the purchase of household durable items, such as televisions and furniture, fall to the male head of household or are jointly undertaken. In contrast, it is the wife, mother or mother-in-law who manages the household budget for food and other necessities (though there are some exceptions, e.g. Zhao Hanwen, Zhao Wenyong, and several others who share this task). In the interviews, it emerged that, although a few men are well known for their culinary skills, it is the women who bear the burden of household work. In the area of marketing of products, it is the men who are said to make the decisive choices concerning the marketing of products (i.e. where and at what sort of price should one sell). It is generally assumed that men are in a better position to do so because they are more familiar with trading outside and are likely (due to having from time to time worked outside) to have contacts in distant towns. But having said this, it is important to stress that in fact about a half of the recorded percentages show that men and women collaborate in marketing decisions.

The results of the table, then, point to the importance of a gender division of decision making and labour. However, as the discussion has emphasised, the patterns are somewhat more variegated since a number of cases do not conform to these 'norms'. This point is brought out later in some of the detailed case studies.

#### *Key events in the case families during recent years*

Table 6.4 provides an overview of key events as defined by the case farmers. The table shows that most farmers put the education of their children as a priority. In fact some of the households do not have children of school-going age, otherwise the figure might perhaps have been much bigger. This confirms the generally held view that Chinese rural families pay great attention to the education of their children, even though they may not always have sufficient resources to see them through the various levels.

Farmers pointed out that especially when a child has passed the national examination and enters college or university, there is great joy in the entire family, also because he or she will be able to obtain a permit for urban residence ('citizenship'). This marks the point at which the child, as it were, ceases to be classified in the 'farmer' category. This is the hope of most rural families.

Table 6.3 Gender division of family decision making of the case farmers (%)

Name	Cropping		Livestock Raising		Children education		Purchase of durables		Daily expenditure		Marketing of products	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Zhao Huanbang	80	20	40	60			60	40	50	50	50	50
Zhao Hanwen	90	10	90	10	90	10	50	50	80	20	90	10
Xu Wenlou	80	20	20	80	20	80	20	80	20	80	50	50
Liu Zhentiao	50	50	20	80	80	20	50	50	10	90	50	50
Liu Zhenkun	40	60	0	100	50	50	100	0	40	60	80	20
Zhao Wenyong	0	100	100	0	80	20	80	20	80	20	100	0
Xu Xinquan	70	30	50	50	70	30	50	50	50	50	80	20
Lu Jianxun	50	50	10	90	80	20	50	50	40	60	50	50
Zhao Laisheng	60	40	50	50	50	50	50	50	20	80	60	40
Li Hui	20	80	70	30	40	60	50	50	0	100	50	50
Zhao Zengyuan	80	20	0	100	100	0	0	100	0	100	100	0
Zhao Huiyuan	80	20	20	80	80	20	100	0	0	100	100	0
Zhang Yuxing	100	0	0	100	80	20	100	0	0	100	50	50
Yuan Shaopeng	100	0	0	100	80	20	50	50	0	100	50	50
Yuan Ronghai*												
Xu Jinlan**												
Zhao Shengli	0	100	0	100	90	10	100	0	20	80	0	100
Xu Jinfa	50	50	0	100	80	20	50	50	20	80	100	0
Chen Gengshen	50	50	0	100	90	10	90	10	2	98		
Xu Yinfu	10	90	0	100	95	5	90	10	10	90		
<i>Average</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>74</i>	<i>74</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>34</i>

\* The question was not put because the man was unmarried

\*\* The question was not put because the wife had died recently

Most farmers placed the construction of their houses as the second priority. It appears that the reason for this is that many had recently built their houses and saw this as marking publicly the improvement of their livelihoods in the years following the rural reforms. Almost half of the case farmers regarded their houses as a symbol of their financial capacity. Likewise, many had recently purchased durable items such as televisions and video CDs, and had installed telephones in their homes. One of them had even bought a computer for his daughter who was employed as a temporary wage worker. In addition, many of the other major events listed by the case farmers were concerned with the recent launching of development initiatives, such as contracting

mountain land for planting fruit and timber trees, livestock raising, vegetable cultivation, rural enterprises of various kinds, and participating in training programmes for new skills and in outside temporary wage labour. Purchase of agricultural vehicles was mentioned as an important event for rural families, due to the large amount of capital required.

The rest of the events recorded focused on family affairs such as the death or sickness and hospitalisation of a family member; or new technologies or changing varieties of fruit trees, or the change of administrative personnel. And one case farmer (Liu Zhenkun) drew attention to the difficulties faced by village cadres drawn from his own personal experience. Mr. Liu Zhenkun has held the position of party secretary of Nandugang Village since 1995. He has undertaken various actions oriented to community reform and rural development. These have certainly affected different farmers' interests that seem to have led to organised hostilities against him and his properties. Even before he became party secretary he faced problems in the village during which the gate of his house was destroyed. Then in 1995, 26 popular trees in his mountain land were damaged by stripping their bark. In 2000, five of the rooms at his house were set alight, followed, in November 2001, by the destruction of two more rooms by an explosion. It was fortunate on the latter occasion that during the attack the research team was staying in Sanggang Village, and not, as we often did, in the two rooms of his house that were blown up. Mr Zhenkun insisted, though, that the attackers would never have carried this out if we had been lodging there. Although he was not prepared to openly point his finger at the culprits, the drama clearly reflected the complicated power struggles taking place in this rural community.

Table 6.4 Key events in the case families during recent years

Event	No. of cases	Rank
Children going to school, high school, to college or university when residential permit has to be transferred	9	1
Construction of house	8	2
Buying TV, or VCD, or other durable items, installing telephone	6	3
Contracting mountain land for fruit and timber production	5	4
Buying agricultural vehicle	3	5
Livestock raising (rabbits, lean swine, etc.)	3	5
Family member(s) being sick or hospitalised	3	5
Starting new enterprises such as knitting mill or coal processing	2	6
Outside temporary wage labour	2	6
Elder family member passed away	2	6
Becoming village cadre	2	6
Vegetable cultivation	1	7
Engagement in small-scale trading	1	7
Destruction of village party secretary's house and mountain land trees	1	7
Changing variety of fruit trees	1	7

*Main constraints on household livelihood development of the case farmers*

Table 6.5 gives an overview of the major constraints on the development of livelihoods and their ranking identified by the case farmers. The results show that lack of capital investment is considered the single most important critical constraint, which is clearly in line with much of rural China, especially in peasant farming areas. This is also the reason why the revolving fund component was included in the EZE project for the community. The lack of technology, followed by lack of information and outside contacts, are also ranked high. Despite the fact that local farmers – here and elsewhere in China – have often already anticipated or identified appropriate technologies for improving various production lines, the research institutions in China are not yet able to fulfil the demands of farmers in this regard. Linked to this, are the ways in which farmers seek out relevant information to meet their farm/household needs. They do this on the basis of the contacts they have built up with various outside actors and institutions. Other constraints include unfavourable policy (e.g. forestry and environmental regulations that are unfavourable to goat raising and thus generate conflict between these two activities and interests). And similar problems arise in respect to the lack of irrigation facilities. Additional constraints mentioned relate to the burden of children’s schooling, and the need to change the varieties of fruit trees grown as well as the generally underdeveloped local markets and prevalence of family debt.

Table 6.5 Main constraints on household livelihood development

Constraint	No. of cases	Rank
Lack of capital	11	1
Lack of new technology	7	2
Lack of information/lack of contacts with outside	6	3
Burden of children’s schooling	2	4
Fruit trees should change with new varieties	2	4
Unfavourable policy	2	4
Lack of irrigation facilities	2	4
Market is not well developed	1	5
Debt	1	5

### *The purpose of earning money*

The survey also explored what farmers saw as their prime reasons for seeking to earn money. Although at face value this question seemed likely to occasion rather mundane answers, in fact it served to provide further evidence of the central importance of securing and improving family livelihoods and children’s educational needs. The ranking in Table 6.6 clearly confirms this. Interestingly, even some farmers did not have children at school, they still, as a matter of principle, underlined the use of earned income for improving the standard of education of children so that future generations could benefit. That is, they expressed a strong belief in education being the route to a better quality of life. From this it followed that subsequent sons and daughters would reap the benefits too, through the making of ‘better’ marriages and reducing the burdens of bringing up their own children. Indeed, some elderly farmers (like Zhao Huanbang) carry on ‘living for their offspring’ energetically well into their seventies.

However, having described the positive attitudes expressed towards children's education, it is also important to recognise that gender inequality in Chinese rural communities is prevalent because all major property items are generally left to a son or sons. When a daughter marries her family equips her with a dowry, but it is male offspring that stand to benefit from any accumulated property. It was for this reason that some farmers listed one of their purposes for earning money as the marriage and eventual settling down of their sons. In modern China the amount of property left to sons has, it appears, increased as some rural families and their urban kinsmen have become more affluent. On the other hand, there are other cases, such as that of Zhao Laisheng, where families become poorer on the marriage of their sons, since they can no longer depend upon the latter's financial contribution to the running of the household.

House building figures less prominently than one might have supposed. Perhaps the reason for this is that many of the case farmers had only recently invested in improved housing (see Table 6.4), preferring instead to invest their scarce capital in the establishment of new orchards and other promising production ventures. In line with this is the 'desire to get rich' before spending much money on household durables.

Table 6.6 Purpose for earning money of case farmers

Purpose	No. of cases	Rank
Improving family livelihood	12	1
Securing children's schooling, so that children's life can be better than now	10	2
Making better life for children	3	3
Investment on production (such as new orchard, etc.)	3	3
Construction of house	3	3
Getting richer	2	4
For son(s) to get married	2	4
Care of elder family members	2	4
Buying durable items	1	5
Reducing the burden for children, and look for something to do, good for health	1	5
Aiming at larger undertaking	1	5

#### *Social contacts of the case farmers*

In the interviews all case farmers were asked to talk about their social contacts and associated contents and modes of interaction. The detailed results are provided in Table 6.7. The brief discussion that follows focuses primarily on the different categories identified by the farmers as persons or institutions actively contacted by them. Details concerning the specific contents and modes of contact associated with the different categories are set out in the table.

The data depict a multiplicity of types of contacts, covering relatives (including both kin and affinal ties), neighbours and fellow villagers, friends of various kinds (i.e. ex-

classmates, ex-colleagues in the military, work-mates and others who are business partners, customers and business contacts), and a variety of others who occupy positions in government administrative and technical agencies at village, township and county levels. Specific mention was also made of the community technical *elite* specialising in forestry and fruit tree management, the school teachers, the township credit station, officials dealing at township and higher administrative levels, and the market officer in Zhangjiakou market. A few responses brought forth a number of more abstract institutional kinds of contact, such as ‘the media’, ‘the Dongwei lean swine company’, ‘research institutes’ and ‘co-operation partners’ (i.e. people who co-operate with each other in respect to specific tasks). The mention of the media is related to the special case of Mr. Xu Xinquan who is commissioned as the local correspondent for the technical magazine *Hebei Science and Technology*. He often writes local newspaper reports and certainly gets information from the newspapers.

But, perhaps, it may seem surprising that no special mention is made of party functionaries. The reason for this could be that farmers do not readily separate government from party officials, though it may also be that farmers see their contacts with party office holders as mostly concerned with formal administrative processes linked to government policy implementation. If farmers do go to government offices it is usually for specific technical or official reasons, and therefore many of them do not see themselves as developing strong social ties with such officials.

Another interesting detail about the types of contacts identified, is that family members working temporarily working away or as permanent government employees, are separated off from those relatives (kin and affines) who continue to live in the village, or at least are near enough to visit on a more or less daily basis. This differentiation into two categories of ‘family’ members clearly reflects the social reality of many farmers whose lifeworlds embrace and are shaped by both present and absent family members.

## **Social and Cultural Settings and Repertoires of Everyday Life**

### *Cultural and entertainment activities*

Table 6.8 is an overview of the cultural and entertainment activities among local farmers, indicating their timing and location. The different events are ranked by the number of interviewees who mentioned them, not by how important they might be within the research population as a whole. Of course the results cannot document (even roughly) how many persons participate in these different events. However, the survey does bring out a number of general points. In the first place, the most frequent and popular cultural and entertainment activities concern watching television at home and reading newspapers, magazines and books in the house or, as some informants pointed out, in the orchard. Farmers like to read subjects on science and technology, government laws and policy, fruit tree cultivation, and novels. These kinds of events are more individual and home-based than ‘sitting in street’ or free chatting, and going to markets and temple fairs that are ranked third. The latter are more public and group-focused.

Table 6.7 Social contacts of case farmers

Types of contact	Contents of contact	Modes of contact	No. of cases	Rank
Relatives (kin and affines)	Help to search for outside wage work, borrow money, discussions on how to earn money, fruit tree cultivation and children's schooling, help each other with technology and information	Free chat, meet in market, visiting especially during festivals and for family occasions	12	1
Friends, including classmates, military-mates, work-mates, and previous colleagues	Help each other, partner in business, offering business opportunities, getting information, and discuss and help in many other aspects	Home discussions, mail, face to face chat, chat while playing <i>Mah-Jongg</i> , telephone, home visits, get-togethers	9	2
Community technical <i>elite</i> , forestry and fruit tree experts, farmers in the village and from other villages	Help in pruning and grafting, exchanging varieties, obtaining new technology, discussions on fruit tree cultivation, getting new information, exchange of information and experiences	Telephone, inviting to come, chat in the field, free chat, meet in the village, visit them	7	3
Neighbours and fellow villagers	Exchange of information, discussions about local matters, help when in difficulty, take part in weddings and funerals	Face to face chat, home visits	7	3
Technicians (from County Forestry bureau and other line agencies)	Buy fruit tree species, sell seeds, obtain fruit tree information and goat raising techniques	Visit the agencies, telephone, technicians come to visit the community	6	4
Business partners (including customers, traders, etc.)	Business co-operation, getting business opportunities from them, selling products to them	Telephone, visit each other, traders come to the village or they meet in local markets	6	4
Research institutes	Get new varieties, technical information and other support	Writing letters, telephone, visits	3	5
Officials (township, and high levels)	Community development and other issues	Inviting for food, discuss when they come to the village	3	5
Family members (working outside as wage labour or govern't employees)	Information, help of various kinds	Telephone, visit them or they come back	2	6
Dongwei lean swine company	Lean swine raising	Telephone, visit	1	7
Teachers of children	Information on children's	Visit teachers	1	7

	study			
Media	Report, and get information	Mail	1	7
Co-operation partners	Co-operation in field	Contact each other	1	7
Township credit station	Working relation	Telephone	1	7
Market officer in Zhangjiakou market	Getting marketing information, security protection	Visit, telephone, Invitation for meal	1	7

Socially and culturally ‘sitting in street’ plays a significant role in rural community life since it involves farmers freely chatting together about their lives, community affairs, children’s education, news items, and many other interesting topics. Such events take place more often during evenings in summer when the weather is hot and when people seek the cooler open air. The chosen locale is usually some public space in the village, on the side of a street, at crossroads, or in front of the gates of some houses. Going to a market or temple fair is equally important in community life, and the functions of rural market places are as much socio-cultural as they are concerned with commodity exchange. For farmers and their family members it is just as much a recreational activity as a necessity for trading or buying and selling goods of various kinds. Farmers in the research community have three local markets within easy access: Yuangang, Pocang and Lianggang markets. All three markets open once every five days without overlap. In addition, there are five to six temple fairs in the year. One of the biggest is that which takes place on January 24 of the Chinese lunar calendar in Yuangang village, when a massive number of goods and local products are brought together for trading. Such temple fairs are concentrated market events but they are also occasions for the performance of local operas. These operas are also performed on special days after the autumn harvest, when farmers celebrate the fruits of their year’s hard work. As a form of general entertainment, watching opera was ranked fourth among the various recreational activities. As the table shows, *Mah-Jongg* is the most popular of games mentioned, followed by playing cards and Chinese chess. *Mah-Jongg* is a typical Chinese game that is played by four persons. Bets are laid, which the interviewed farmers say makes it a very attractive game. It is frequently played in breaks between periods of agricultural work and especially at Spring Festival. One farmer said that he liked to play this game when he felt bored. The game is normally played at a farmer’s home. Farmers also like playing games in the street or other public places. It is a frequent sight to see chess players concentrating on their moves watched by a group of onlookers, and the same goes for card playing.

Other cultural and entertainment activities in the community include listening to the radio, community meetings, playing local musical instruments, lantern fairs, playing table tennis, local performances of the *Yangko* dance of north China, or the costumed ‘lion dance’ (*wu shi*), and watching films. The interviewees also mentioned the tourist-type visits, organised study activities and ‘experience exchange’ meetings. Organised family planning community discussions – one of the major tasks of local government in China – were pinpointed by one farmer as important cultural activities. In fact, except for these family planning sessions, village assemblies or inter-village community gatherings are very infrequent. It was suggested the main reason for this was that households are very individual-oriented. This trend has been reinforced by the system of



household production responsibility applied to rural areas. On the other hand, farmers commented that village meetings did not generally proceed smoothly, due to the difficulty in achieving consensus on many community collective issues. Yet despite this, some farmers continue to consider community meeting important events in their lives. Also because of the improvement of farmers' livelihoods, some have begun to invest some of their savings in making tourist visits to nearby cultural centres and recreational sites, and some have participated in organised learning activities. One farmer even mentioned playing bowling in Beijing when the four village party secretaries were invited in November 2001 to China Agricultural University where they were exposed to the game for the first time. Bowling now features as one of the more popular recreational pursuits in the cities and provincial towns of China but mostly for the better off professional and commercial groups.

Table 6.8 Cultural and entertainment activities identified by the case farmers

Activity	Time	Location	No. of cases	Rank
Watching television	Evenings	Home	12	1
Reading newspapers, magazines and books	Leisure time, or evenings	Home or in orchard	10	2
'Sitting in street' / free chatting	Agricultural leisure time, or evenings in summer time when the weather is hot	Village street side, or at crossroads, or in front of gates of house	9	3
Going to market/temple fair	Market days, or during temple fairs (5-6 times a year, especially on January 24 of the Chinese lunar calendar)	Yuangang market, Pocang market, Lianggang market	9	3
Watching local opera performance	After autumn harvest or during temple fair (5-6 times a year, especially on January 24 of Chinese lunar calendar)	In the village, or one of other three villages, especially Yuangang Village	7	4
Playing <i>Mah-Jongg</i>	Leisure time, evenings, during Spring Festival, when bored	Home	6	5
Playing cards	Evenings in summer	Home or village street	4	6
Playing Chinese chess	Often, during noon time in summer, or evenings	Home or village street	3	7
Listening to radio	Evenings in summer	Village street, or home, or any other place	2	8
Playing local musical instrument	January in lunar calendar, or evenings or rainy days	Home	2	8
Local <i>Yangko</i> dance, 'play lion'	January of lunar calendar	The village	2	8
Watching films	Seldom	Cities	2	8

Study visits	Organised by township/county	Various places	2	8
Tourism/study tours	May 1 <sup>st</sup> holiday	Nearby tourism sites	2	8
Community meetings	Irregular	Village public place	1	9
Lantern fair	January 15 every year in lunar calendar	The village	1	9
Playing table tennis	After work	Home	1	9
Playing bowling	January 2001	Beijing (during their recent visit)	1	9
Participate in 'experience exchange' meetings	Organised by the Township or County	Outside	1	9

### *Chatting in the lives of case farmers*

At various points in previous chapters, I drew attention to the large part that chatting and chatting contexts play in the lives of villagers. Table 6.9 provides an overview of chatting as reported by case farmers in terms of chatting partners, locations, contents and modes of chatting. The result shows that farmers most frequently chat with their neighbours and other villagers. This of course is facilitated by physical proximity. The location for chatting is flexible - in the village street, especially in summer when the weather is hot, or in the fields or at their homes. The contents of such chatting are very diversified and include many aspects, such as household affairs, societal and community affairs, exchanges of experiences and information, family life, outside wage work, entertainment, news, history, opera, things in the market, and so on. Such chatting can take place during sessions of 'sitting in street', or while playing games such as *Mah-Jongg*, Chinese chess, or playing cards.

The second ranked chatting partners are what one might call 'subject'- or 'profession-related' farmer friends, meaning those farmers who are engaged in similar production activities, like fruit tree development, rabbit raising, and so forth. Such chatting takes place at their homes over a cup of tea or while they are working in the fields, and will include the exchange of information, especially about markets, new undertakings, science and technology, news, production, and entertainments. Or it may be pursued through telephone calls. The emphasis that farmers give to this type of chatting shows the importance they accord to keeping up with technological matters and learning from 'vanguard' farmers.

The third type of chatting concerns farmers' relationships with their relatives (kin and affines), general friends such as (ex-) classmates, army friends, work-mates, and the technical *elite* and others considered knowledgeable. Although farmers are likely to interact regularly with kin and friends living in the village or nearby, they will tend to see more of their immediate neighbours and seek out their subject-related friends whenever they need to. Chatting with relatives normally takes place at home when they visit each other. They talk mostly about family affairs, family difficulties, and children's study problems, and they pass on information of various kinds, and gather together on special occasions. Chatting with friends also often takes place during visits they make to each other's homes, at a place where they get together to play games or over the phone.

Friends largely talk about current events and things relating to community affairs, economic development, new undertakings, tax and levies, and social matters generally. Other chatting partners include officials from the Township and higher levels, peers (i.e. persons of roughly the same age), elderly persons, middlemen and small-scale petty traders when they meet them at the markets or when traders come to the village. Some of these more fleeting relationships - with what are often called 'honest persons' - of course, pass on information crucial to particular farmers' livelihood interests.

Several of these categories are very general and overlap. This perhaps is why chatting with family members is ranked low. Farmers simply take for granted the importance of family members in everyday life. On the other hand, some farmers may feel that communication with family members is insufficient.

Table 6.9 Overview of chatting in the lives of the case farmers

Chatting partner	Location	Contents	Mode	No. of cases	Rank
Neighbours and fellow villagers	Village street, especially in summer, or in fields or at home	Household affairs, societal and community affairs, exchange of experiences and information, family life, outside wage work, entertainment, news, history, opera, things in the market, etc.	Face-to-face chat, or when playing <i>Mah-Jongg</i> and other games	10	1
Subject-profession-related farmers	Home or in the fields	Information exchange, market information, new undertakings, science and technology, news, production, and entertainment	Chat while drinking tea, telephone, (home) visits	7	2
Relatives (kin and affines)	Home	Family affairs, family difficulties, children's study, information, entertainment, etc.	Chat during visits	5	3
Friends	Home, gatherings	News, new things, societal and community affairs, economic development, new undertakings, tax and levies, and so on	Chat during visits, telephone, or while playing games	5	3
Technical <i>elite</i> , knowledgeable persons	Home or in the fields	New information, exchange of experiences, economic development, technology	Chat when meet	5	3
Officials	In village or at home	What are they 'busing' about? Community affairs	Chat during their visits	4	4
Same aged persons (peers)	Home, streets, fields,	Information and knowledge, household and community affairs,	Chat when meet or watching	3	5

	market or fair	production, etc.	opera, or when playing <i>Mah-Jongg</i>		
Elderly persons	Community street, home	Exchange experience, listen to life stories	Chat when meet	3	5
Middlemen, small scale traders	Village, market	Information	Chat while trading	3	5
'Honest persons'	Home or public place	Family difficulties, societal and community affairs, etc.	Casual chat	2	6
Family members	Home or in fields	Family things, feelings, etc.	Chat when meet	2	6

### *The functions of chatting*

On the basis of this general picture of chatting, farmers were asked to share with us what they thought were the functions of chatting. Table 6.10 summarises the outcome. Here it is interesting that farmers placed 'learning (or the production of) knowledge' as the most important function. Following the ranking sequence, chatting was described as enabling farmers to learn knowledge from their chatting partners, particularly concerning ongoing production issues, as well as where to obtain information of various kinds. Therefore, although chatting in many cases takes place spontaneously without any pre-planning, farmers do have clear objectives of what they might learn from it that could be useful for their livelihood and community affairs. Through chatting, farmers and their chatting partners help each other and mutually supplement each other's information. Chatting therefore aims to get to know others and others' practices and ideas, through which farmers' social network are enhanced and mutual understanding with their chatting partners strengthened. Certainly through chatting, farmers exchange experience and practice with their chatting partners. Chatting is also a kind of entertainment, and is regarded by most farmers as better than watching television, especially when they are in a bad mood or feel bored. Furthermore, it can contribute to the launching of new development undertakings and includes discussions on new development options that emerge from chatting with friends and partners. Interestingly, chatting can also contribute to conflict resolution, since through chatting people may get to know and understand each other better, thus removing points of friction or incompatibility. Other functions of chatting of course include the development of mutual influence, joint decision making and assistance, and the general broadening of individuals' horizons and points of view.

Table 6.10 Functions of chatting

Function of chatting in life	No. of cases	Rank
Learning (production) knowledge	7	1
Get information	6	2
Helping and supplementing each other	5	3
Getting to know others, and others' ideas and practice	4	4

Entertainment, better than watch television, when in bad mood, anti-boring,	3	5
Exchange of experience and practices	3	5
Starting new development undertakings, discussing new options	2	6
Conflict solving by chat	2	6
Mutual influence	1	7
Helping to make decision	1	7
Advice to each other	1	7
Broadening views	1	7

### *Information sources of the case farmers*

In order to deepen the understanding of the significance of social contacts and information exchange, farmers were asked about sources of information and modes of obtaining and judging the credibility of the information they receive.

Table 6.11 summarises the results. It shows that farmers get most information from television and radio, as well as from printed materials such as newspapers, magazines and books. However, some of them think that information from media sources has low credibility, because a lot of it is released through advertisements that often turn out misleading or erroneous. On the other hand, other farmers think that information from such channels is highly credible, because they believe that the government would not cheat them. Some advertisements may not be fully true, but they are vetted by authorised agencies, and therefore should be trusted.

In addition to these types of impersonal sources, farmers also get a lot of information from friends, classmates, military-mates, work-mates, and previous colleagues, where the credibility is judged high. Another important information source is the market, or more precisely market actors such as traders, middlemen, customers and business partners. Business partnerships entail various forms of co-operation, underpinned by assumed reliable information. Farmers also obtain information from technical line agencies and their technicians, as well as relatives and household members working outside the village, and from local expert farmers and neighbours who also receive a good credibility rating. In contrast, information gained from study visits, outside research institutes, and training courses is judged only average in credibility.

### *The centrality of social reputation*

The credibility of information is therefore principally linked to the social and personal standing of the person or institution disseminating it. Hence reputation is recognised as one of the most important aspects that guide how people relate to each other and shape their social identities. All 20 farmers commented on the importance of reputation. This is reflected in the Chinese idiom, ‘Geese leave voice when they pass through, whereas people leave reputation (*ren guo liu ming, yan guo liu sheng*).’

Tables 6.12 and 6.13 present what the survey revealed about the functions of reputation and the importance of building of a good reputation within the rural community. One of the most highly ranked functions associated with having a good reputation was identified as being able to get things done through the help of others – something clearly evident in the running of a successful trading enterprise where trust among partners and between buyers and sellers is an essential ingredient. But, on a more general level, some farmers defined reputation as a fundamental principle of human behaviour and societal living. Achieving a good reputation facilitates making good relations and the recognition of mutual interests with others in society. Some farmers in fact believed that a good reputation brings not only social but also economic benefits. A good reputation gives high prestige to the individual but it also helps to reinforce and preserve the image of ‘the good society’. This is illustrated by the case of Zhang Yuxing who has acquired a reputation for his technological skills in relation to fruit growing, which brings many people to him seeking advice.

Table 6.11 Information sources, modes and credibility

Information sources	Mode	Credibility	No. of cases	Rank
Television and radio	Watching or listening at home	Low, average or high	18	1
Printed materials, books, magazines, newspapers	Subscription, reading, borrowing from others, mail	Low, average or high	16	2
Friends, including classmates, military-mates, work-mates, and previous colleagues	Mail, telephone, meetings, chat	High	9	3
Market, including traders, middlemen, customers and other business partners	From chatting with traders, telephone, mail	Average or high	6	4
Technical line agencies and their technicians	Technicians come, or farmers go to visit them	High	5	5
Relatives (including family members working outside)	Visit, chatting, telephone	High	4	6
Community technical <i>elite</i> , expert farmers	Chatting, telephone, visit	High	3	7
Neighbours	Chat	High	2	8
Study visits	See and listen	Average	2	8
Outside research institutes	Go and search	Average	1	9
Training courses	Following lectures	Average	1	9

When questioned about how to build a good reputation, farmers cast the biggest vote for honesty (Table 6.13). They also stressed fulfilling one’s promises, being generous, having good technical expertise and useful experiences to share with others, acting to help others, being righteous, and trusting and respecting other individuals. Many of

these qualities they saw as the result of receiving a ‘good education’ from parents and teachers.

Table 6.12 Functions of reputation

Function of reputation	No. of cases	Rank
Getting things easily done with others’ help	5	1
Good for business operations such as trading, etc.	5	1
Trust when asking for help	5	1
Making good relations and contacts	3	2
General principle of human behaviour	3	2
In fact reputation is a kind of economic return	2	3
High prestige and good image	2	3
Encouraging self development	1	4

Table 6.13 Measures for building a good reputation

How to build a good reputation	No. of cases	Rank
Be honest	10	1
Fulfil what one has said	3	2
Be generous	2	3
Good technical expertise	2	3
Successful experience	2	3
Help others by action	2	3
Be righteous	1	4
Long term efforts	1	4
Good education by parents and teachers	1	4
Trust others, do not suspect others	1	4
Respect others	1	4
Ensure quality of products	1	4

#### *Case farmers’ views on trust*

Exploring further the question of trust, the survey revealed that 18 of the farmers expressed the view that trust was very important to them. As Table 6.14 shows, their responses relate to several points. The first concerns the notion that trust is needed in order to secure help from others. Help is asked for and offered mostly within certain delimited groups of trustworthy individuals and families. Maintaining good relations and contacts therefore hinges on trust, and so does co-operation between individuals and groups. As some farmers put it: “People like to chat with honest and trustworthy persons and to keep good relations with them.” “If you have others’ trust, they will like to do things with you.” “If others do not trust you, they will not pass on to you good

information.” And, of course, being accepted into any group requires the winning their respect: “If they do not trust you, they will not integrate you into their group.” “They will look down at you.” And if this happens then one is likely to be isolated from significant networks and influential people. One interviewee went on to say, “Isolation from ‘sitting in street’ (i.e. conversations and activities) is the heaviest punishment a farmer could suffer. One has to win the trust from one’s fellows”. This can only be properly achieved if one fulfils one’s promises, and it is generally this that measures a farmer’s standing in the community.

This comment about keeping promises is highly pertinent to the way in which the case farmers often regard government officials. Some officials make high profile visits to rural communities and finish off promising more than they can realistically deliver. Farmers are well aware of this and are wary of outsiders in general, unless they come through reliable contacts. On the other hand, generosity and the giving of hospitality to visitors are central values in Chinese culture, particularly among rural populations. A family might be very poor, but in most cases they treat guests, particularly those they see as important such as those from big cities and from abroad with the best they can provide. The measures they adopt to win trust are listed in Table 6.14.

Table 6.14 Case farmers’ views on trust

Importance	No. of Cases	Rank	Measures to win trust	No. of Cases	Rank
Get things done with other’s help	7	1	Fulfil what one has said	10	1
Keep relations and contacts	6	2	Care for and help others	5	2
Development engagements and cooperation	6	2	Do things on the ground by actions	5	2
Socialisation into the society	2	3	Be generous	5	2
Be proud of having others’ trust	2	3	Good personality, easy going	3	3
Win others’ respect	2	3	Be true and honest	3	3
			Do not harm others	3	3
			Education	2	4
			Good morality	2	4
			Good reputation	2	4

#### *Patterns of self-help in the community*

Closely linked to the issue of trust is the question of who helps whom and in what ways. Table 6.15 provides a breakdown of the types of help sought and the relationships of the parties involved. This shows that the most frequent kind of help that farmers seek is labour for various tasks such as house construction, the organising of weddings, funerals and other large public events, as well as for agricultural production. Such labour is usually sought and received from neighbours, relatives, and sometimes village friends.



The case farmers ranked labour as the most important type of help regularly needed, and pointed to the reciprocal ways in which labour flowed between households and within the community at large. Much of this is given on the understanding that later the favour will be returned by the receiver, when similar shortages arise. Hence a system of mutual labour exchanges spread throughout many aspects of community and household life, though it remained unclear as to exactly how individuals and households keep a tally of all this. Farmers and householders never seemed to have much difficulty in mobilising labour in this manner.

A second important type of help given involves the lending of money for the purchase of agricultural inputs, investment in businesses and new undertakings, and the buying of materials for house construction. In such circumstances, farmers usually ask the help of kin and affines or they may request this of friends and neighbours, and sometimes they resort to moneylenders. Among kin and friends it is unlikely that there would be any formal contract or agreement. Nor would interest be paid. But things are different for the moneylenders who usually specify a heavy rate of interest (1 to 3% per month). Yet, whatever the case, the deal struck must in part be founded upon some degree of trust. The need for financial assistance identified by the survey farmers corresponds with the earlier finding that the lack of capital constitutes one of the main constraints on household livelihood development.

A third example of seeking help from others concerns the loan of technology for such matters as fruit production, livestock raising and forestry development. This, again, draws attention to the significance of technologies and technical advice for launching new livelihood understandings. In resolving these problems farmers mobilise a wide range of contacts, ranging from relatives and friends to government technicians and expert farmers. And, once more, the interviewees stressed the importance of searching out information, not only for agricultural purposes but to find jobs outside or to enter new fields of business, as well as for bringing together the necessary resources for the organising family or community festivals. Having an extensive network with relatives, friends and others is obviously critical for the success of these ventures.

The organisation of public events involves many complexities. Although primarily the responsibility of individual families, they entail the participation of a mixed group of people, including friends, relatives, neighbours, village leaders and other kinds of patrons, and sometimes musicians and dancers. During such events – be they weddings or seasonal celebrations – the different categories of participants must be shown respect in accordance with certain Chinese rural customs of status and hierarchy. Indeed, it becomes a major task making sure that everyone feels comfortable and satisfied. It is said to be advantageous to call upon someone who knows the fine details of local custom in relation to kinship and other relationships. In northern China it is common to find members of the community social *elite* taking charge of much of this, since they are deemed to have the status and interpersonal skills required to manage all this.

In addition to these major kinds of help, a couple of farmers mentioned two other interesting forms. The first concerns the case of Mr. Zhao Laisheng who often goes to his friend in the village, the knowledgeable Mr. Xu Xinquan, when faced with difficulties in understanding some technical terms in the published materials he reads.

Then there is the case of Mr. Chen Gengshen who regularly borrows his military friend's mini-bus for making trips outside; and the case of Mr. Xu Jinfa who is reported to have recently asked his friend working in the county education bureau for help with his son's schooling.

Table 6.15 Overview of patterns of self-help

Content of help	Purpose	Whom to ask	No. of cases	Rank
Labour	House construction, weddings and funerals, large public events, and agricultural work etc.	Neighbours, villagers, relatives, friends	13	1
Borrow money	Farming and agricultural production, health care, business/new undertakings, house construction etc.	Relatives, friends, neighbours, and moneylenders	11	2
Technology	Fruit tree production, livestock raising, forestry development, etc.	Technicians, community technical <i>elite</i> , relatives, friends	3	3
Organisation of events	Weddings and funerals, etc.	Village social <i>elite</i>	2	4
Information	New development undertakings, outside temporary wage labour, etc.	Technicians, relatives, friends etc.	2	4
Knowledge	Understand some technical terms, etc.	Friends	1	5
Transport	Going out, borrowing a vehicle	Friends, military-mates	1	5
Taking children to school	Children's study	Friends	1	5

### *Borrowing of cash*

Table 6.16 gives a fuller picture of the patterns of borrowing money. Seventeen of the farmers confirmed that they had borrowed money from others. The table provides information on why and with whom they engaged in these transactions. The majority borrows from friends and relatives, though some farmers reported the possibility of making deals with moneylenders. While it is not normal for kin or friends to collect interest on the loans they provide, moneylenders require interest to be paid at between 1 and 3 % per month. Hence if the loan is outstanding for several months the interest payable escalates rapidly and the burden on the farmer and his household is huge (36% over a year). Whenever possible, therefore, farmers will ask kin and friends for help, since it is considered morally inappropriate for them to charge interest.

Table 6.16 also highlights how two farmers had borrowed cash from friends in the village because their relatives had asked to borrow money from them. This illustrates the problems that individuals face when approached by kin for financial aid. It is

enormously difficult to decline such a request, especially, as was the case here, when money is needed to cover the health care or hospitalisation of a sick family member. Moreover, although farmers regularly borrow cash to cover the costs of major investments in housing and new livelihood undertakings, many farmers stressed the point that it is events such as weddings and funerals that constitute the largest single consumption expenditure. It is on occasions such as these that farmers most readily resort to borrowing through their networks of kin and friends.

Table 6.16 Borrowing of case farmers

Purpose	From	Arrangement	No. of cases	Rank
Development undertakings, such as local household enterprises, fruit tree cultivation, small scale trading, livestock raising, etc.	Relatives, friends, moneylenders	No interest, or 1% per month, 2-3% per month	8	1
Construction of houses	Friends, relatives	No interest	3	2
Children schooling	Relatives, friends	No interest	3	2
Health care, hospitalisation	Friends, relatives, neighbours	No interest	2	3
To lend to relatives or others	Friends in the village	No interest	2	3
Agricultural input	Friends, relatives, neighbours, moneylenders	No interest, or 1% per month	1	4
Construction of irrigation wells	Friends, relatives, neighbours, moneylenders	No interest, or 1% per month	1	4
Family urgent needs	Neighbours, relatives, friends	No interest	1	4

### Case Farmers' Development Initiatives

In this last section I use the survey data to explore a number of dimensions that relate to the processes by which farmers develop new initiatives.

#### *Possible factors in relation to the generation and implementation of new development initiatives of case farmers*

Some farmers in the community have taken up the new kinds of initiatives that readers are now familiar with, livestock raising, fruit tree development, contracting mountain land for development, medicinal plant cultivation, processing of various kinds, mining, transport and trading, temporary migration for work, and so on. Tables 6.17 and 6.18 summarise the possible contributing or restraining factors to the generation and implementation of such initiatives. As one can see, information is ranked as the most important factor, followed by enlightenment from observing the practices of others and from persons in the farmer's social network. Information, obtained from a variety of

sources, is obviously considered by farmers as crucial to starting anything new. By 'enlightenment' is meant a process of learning and internalization of knowledge that is realised through interactions with other farmers and social networks in both so-called 'indigenous' and more formally organised arenas. Through this process, of course, farmers observe and sometimes test out the practices of others – something that was weighted highly in the interviews.

In addition to such social factors, having sufficient capital was also strongly emphasised. While capital is not crucial for initiating an undertaking, it is an important in that it acts as insurance for being able to follow through on the project at its implementation stages, when as can be seen in the next table, capital resources are considered crucial. The lack of capital support is a general constraint for most of farmers in rural areas and it is reasonable that before launching on a new venture they would first make efforts to ensure the needed capital is available. Before implementation farmers usually weigh up carefully the possible costs and benefits. Capital is, as we have shown earlier, usually raised through the activation of networks of social ties. They assess the economic feasibility of new development actions, and they try to minimise risks, but as the ranking shows, they are not afraid to take them.

They also consider whether the political and social environment is propitious. Favourable policy and conditions certainly provide some foundation for ensuring within new developments what actions are permitted or promoted and which are not. Well knitted social networks in relation to critical nodes is also considered important because farmers who occupy these positions can play a springboard role to breaking through thresholds that hinder new development actions. For instance, a personal introduction can lead to finding temporary work outside or obtaining a new species of tree or livestock. Similarly for trading and transport operations one needs to be well connected to all those bodies collecting fees and levies, such as market managers, tax collectors, toll collection officers, and so forth. Such connections are not for bribing, but to ensure fair conduct in the current incomprehensible legislative environment in Chinese rural society.

Next in ranking is market potential. Obviously before embarking upon the cultivation of new products market potential has to be well projected, based on the information available. Also visiting successful cases is useful, for as the Chinese idiom goes, 'hearing one hundred times is not as good as seeing once (*bai wen bu ru yi jian*)'. Marketing and natural resource conditions assume a greater significance at the implementation stage. Obviously when new products come on line they have to be successfully marketed, otherwise efforts come to nothing. Successful marketing again requires adequate information which farmers must seek out.

Given the poor natural resource endowment of the area in terms of water and soils, farming, and more recently livestock and orchards are vulnerable to natural disasters, especially drought. There are also problems that arise due to the competition between different production branches exacerbated by land fragmentation. Hence, for example, the need for harmonisation between livestock and forestry development. As I described elsewhere in the thesis there remains a major problem over grazing mountain land,

particularly with the large number of goat populations. In general government policy puts prohibitions on grazing.

Table 6.17 Possible factors for generation of new development initiatives of case farmers

Factors	No. of cases	Rank
Information	12	1
Enlightenment by others in the social networks and by others' practice	11	2
Sufficient capital	8	3
Good economic return/cost-effectiveness analysis	7	4
Favourable policy and environment	7	4
Well knitted social network in relation to critical knots (for all bodies for collecting fees and levies, introducing etc.)	6	5
Market potential	5	6
Visiting successful cases	5	6
Technology	3	7
Knowledgeability	2	8
Business capability	2	8
Good reputation	2	8
Risk taking	1	9
For getting better	1	9

At the generation stage, technology support is not considered important though during implementation it is a first consideration. Technology or technical guidance is at this stage critically important, because many of the initiatives that farmers are beginning to develop are technology related, and therefore technical support is essential for their success. Information and irrigation facilities are ranked next for implementation, which indicates that information needs to be continuously obtained and refreshed during this process, due partly to the rapid changes taking place in the general socio-political environment as well in the market. The factor of irrigation clearly confirms the physical constraint of water resource for both household and community use in the research villages.

Some factors rated, such as reputation and business capability may not be so relevant to the farmer himself, since no farmer is likely to initiate something he feels incapable of attempting. Knowledge and reputation are factors one might look elsewhere for and then again social networks become important.

Table 6.18 Possible factors affecting the implementation of new development initiatives

Factors	No. of cases	Rank
Capital resources	12	1
Technology/technical guidance	12	1
Information	7	2
Irrigation facilities	7	2
Marketing	5	3
Natural resource conditions and natural disaster	5	3
Broadened views and view from long term – long term orientation	3	4
Trust and support of family members	3	4
Favourable policy	3	4
Efficient management	3	4
Harmonisation between livestock and forestry development	1	5
Land is too fragmented	1	5
Physical labour condition	1	5

### *Past experience in family livelihood development*

The survey on past experiences was to learn to what extent these had contributed to current livelihood development. Sixteen of the twenty case study farmers confirmed that their past experiences were important for their current actions, the other four felt they were not, or were only of minor relevance. Some examples of farmers past experiences and the importance are listed in Table 6.19. For instance, trading experience may contribute to an understanding of the market and ensures that farmers do not get cheated. Pruning experience contributes to fruit tree production. Past military experience contributes to general knowledge and social experience. Migrant wage labour also helps to broaden views, and social horizons. Participation in training courses enhances ones' technical *elite* position and reputation. Past experience of goat and rabbit raising, vegetable cultivation, and so on helps to ensure success in similar undertakings. Past business co-operation may help in exploring further market potential as well as improving one's interpersonal skills, as does community service of various kinds. As Mr. Liu Zhenkun says "Although a village party secretary only earns four Yuan per day, it has real assets, and invisible property." It created opportunities to make wider contacts and thus extend his social network among the local political *elite*.

### *Importance of educational background in farmers' livelihood development*

The questions in the survey relating to educational background were focussed on the extent to which previous education had contributed to livelihood development. Nineteen of the farmers affirmed that a good education was important. Their answers show (Table 6.20) that they considered education important for producing knowledge for processing, understanding, analysing and interpreting government policies, laws and regulations, for learning farming and agricultural techniques, and more generally for obtaining information. From the farmers point of view the importance of knowing about policies, laws and regulation is to protect their interests, on the other hand, farmers show more and more interests in participation in political development. Farmers generally

recognise the importance of numeric skills, useful when buying and selling in the markets, exchanging maize for wheat flour and other similar transactions. Without these skills they have to get help from their children who attend school. This is reflected in the case of Mr. Yuan Shaopeng that when he sells plums in the local markets, it is his 14-year-old daughter who helps him to do the reckoning. Other uses of education are to be able to read the instruction for pesticides and fertiliser use, for broadening ones views, for dealing with uncertainties, improving one's business management capability, and so forth.

Table 6.19 Examples of past experiences in family livelihood development

Example of experiences	Importance reflected in livelihood development
Trading	Understand the market, not be cheated
Pruning	Ensure the fruit tree production
Study in schools	Knowledge, easy to understand technical instructions
Joining military	Knowledge and social experience
Outside wage labour	Broaden views, social experience, and information
Participated in training courses	Enhance technical <i>elite</i> position and reputation
Goat raising	Later start again
Watching television	Starting goat raising
Rabbit raising	Start again
Education experience	Children education
Vegetable cultivation	Start vegetable greenhouse development
Business co-operation	Help to explore market potential, improve interpersonal skills
Study visit	Start new undertakings
Community administration, being community cadres	Learn more leadership skills, broaden social network
Contract construction project (headman)	Improve management skills
Forestry engagement	To be community technical <i>elite</i> , core farmers

Table 6.20 Importance of educational background in farmers' livelihood development

Importance	No. of cases	Rank
More knowledge	10	1
Learn farming and agricultural techniques	8	2
Understanding policies, laws and regulations	8	2
Getting information	6	3
Analysis ability	4	4
Reckoning	4	4
Broadening views	2	5
More chances to succeed when you start a new undertaking	2	5
Business management capability	2	5
Technology innovation	2	5
Reading instruction for pesticides and fertiliser use	1	6
Ability to deal with uncertainty	1	6

### *The influence of others on engagement in new development initiatives*

The interviews also focussed on the influence others might have on new development initiatives. Seventeen farmers clearly stated that others had to some extent influenced them. The results show that farmers are most influenced by chatting and discussing with their friends. Secondly they are influenced by the community technical *elite* and by expert farmers in their own and neighbouring villages, again through visiting, seeing and chatting with them. Again we see the attention farmers give to technology and technical aspects when they start new initiatives. Others of influence include relatives, officials and community cadres, and family members. Township officials and local cadres have encouraged some of the case farmers. The influence of family members, usually spouses, often takes place through daily communication, and sometimes through arguing or even quarrelling. Farmers are also influenced by their neighbours and fellow villagers through seeing and chatting with them. Within subject related groups made up of members engaged in similar production activities, farmers are influenced by each other's unspoken or implicit competition. In other words, when a farmer see others are doing better in the same line of production, he will see how they manage it and try to do as well or better. Good performance of field production gives prestige thus competition popularly exists and is encouraged in rural societies in China. Similarly wealthier farmers are admired. Some farmers said they had taken on new initiatives after witnessing how well some other farmers were doing. As one said, "If he can be so rich, why can't I?" He was referring to Mr. Xu Xinquan, who had started lean swine raising, with the help of the outside Dongwei Company.

Table 6.21 Influence of others in the engagement in new development initiatives

Who has influenced	Mode	No. of cases	Rank
Friends	Chatting and discussion	10	1
Community technical <i>elite</i> , expert farmers	Visits, seeing and chatting	8	2
Relatives	Visiting and chatting	6	3
Officials and community cadres	Encouraging	6	3
Family members	Chatting, communicating, arguing Quarrelling	6	3
Neighbours, fellow villagers	Chatting and seeing	4	4
Technicians from line agencies	Visits	2	5
Subject-related farmers	Seeing and competing	2	5
Wealthier farmers	Enlightenment	2	5
Outside company	Promotion	1	6

### *The importance of consultation for new development initiatives*

Results on this question indicated that farmers were involved in consultation most with family members, usually spouses and children working outside. The spouse's support and confidence was crucial in starting a new venture since such an undertaking would involve an initial outlay which needed to be agreed to by the spouse. Such consultation



is not always straight forward, because the spouse may raise a lot of worries or even objections. However, eventual consensus is indeed important. One farmer, Mr. Liu Zhentiao, said when he consulted his wife on his plan to cultivate vegetables, his wife objected in the beginning, but he insisted, and a few days later, he realised that in fact his wife had already started preparations for the undertaking, which greatly encouraged him. Mr. Xu Wenlou indicated proudly that, “My wife always unconditionally supports me.” Farmers usually contact family members working outside in the cities for advice, and particularly when members have permanent jobs there (in this case, officially the persons working outside are not members of the rural family any more). It is commonly assumed that citizens may be more informed and can therefore give good advice. In addition consultation regularly takes place between friends. Of course the technical *elite* and expert farmers are a crucial source of information and are regularly consulted (see Table 6.22 for the consultation rankings).

Table 6.22 Consultation with others over new development initiatives

Consulting partners	Mode	No. of cases	Rank
Family members (mostly spouses, and children working outside )	Chat, telephone, discussion, argue, quarrel	9	1
Friends	Chat, home visit, telephone	7	2
Relatives	Home visit	7	2
Technical <i>elite</i> , and experienced Farmers, expert farmers	Chat	7	2
Neighbours, fellow villagers	Chat, community meetings, home visit	3	3
Officials	Visit, telephone	2	4
Co-operating partners	Home visit	1	5

#### *Cost-effectiveness calculation*

An interesting question that arises in respect to my theme is, “When you take a new development initiative, do you ever do any cost-effectiveness calculations?” Nineteen replied that they had certainly done very comprehensive calculations about cost-effectiveness when they had undertaken new development initiatives and the remaining farmers said he had only done very simple calculations comparing approximate outputs and estimated inputs. This suggests that farmers evaluate the economic rationality of their intended new actions based on their own knowledge and any information they could obtain from other sources.

My experience during the research also proves that farmers in general are very good at analysis based on available information. This was evident at the time it was decided that Beijing would hold the 2008 Olympic games. Some farmers told me about their analyses on what this could potentially mean in relation to livelihood improvements for them. Mr. Zhao Shengli projected that his knitting mill business would improve due to the push to develop Beijing in time for the games. Mr. Xu Yinfu also projected that his truck transport business would get better for the same reason. Furthermore, some

farmers are planning seedling nursery development, because they believe there will be high demand for seedlings for environment construction in and around Beijing in the build up to the games.

### *Co-operation in family livelihood development*

Despite the fact that the need for co-operation was often emphasised by farmers, surprisingly only ten said that co-operation had been important in their activities. We then explored with them what kinds of co-operation they considered important. Table 6.23 shows the results. This means in general co-operation goes beyond the simple networking involved in self help. It applies to situations in which people can have shared means to common goals. Some of the listed items specify co-operation in particular fields such as for capital and labour requirements, information exchange and selling products together.

This idea of co-operating is embodied in the practice of various case farmers. For instance, Mr. Zhao Huiyuan contracted several orchards jointly with other villagers. The reason why others agreed to join him in the bid for contracts for land for orchards was because of his profound expertise in fruit tree management. The arrangements made were that some of the co-operating individuals would invest more finance and labour whereas he would take on the responsibility for the technical management of the orchards. Thus his technical expertise was converted into shares that were comparable to financial capital. In terms of the importance of selling products together, Mr. Zhao Zengyuan, believes that when households pool their products together they can bargain for a better price on the market than if they sell as single households. In addition he pointed out that it is always good to have company for selling because you can co-operate in keeping an eye on each other's products.

Of the ten farmers who said that co-operation was not important some did not know what to say about it and others said they had had unsuccessful experiences of co-operating with others. I have listed here some of the reasons given for why farmers believe co-operation is not important: "During co-operation, there is often conflict because of unequal investment in fertiliser and labour inputs such as in pruning." "When you co-operate for a long time, there will be conflict because of differences in labour, technology and capital sharing, as well as personality differences." "Sometimes co-operation is not very good because sharing tools and materials that you have invested in, is not so easy or flexible." "During co-operation, when two parties cannot get along very well, then conflicts arise." "Sometime during co-operation it is difficult to get consensus." "Mutual self-help is ok, but it is difficult to be jointly engaged in field production such as vegetable cultivation, because mutual trust is difficult to build." "There are many shortcomings of co-operation, such as difficulty in getting consensus, difference in the starting points, conflicts, differences in efficiency, and the effects on friendship relationships, and so on." "When co-operating with others, it is very important to have all regulations and rules settled, but to get agreement among the co-operating parties is not an easy job."

The major worry is about conflict, which usually arises over unequal sharing of inputs such as labour and capital. Farmers also worry about the difficulty of getting consensus,

about conflicts that are difficult to resolve, and not liking to be constrained by co-operation rules and regulations.

Table 6.23 Importance of co-operation in family livelihood development

Importance	No. of cases	Rank
Helping and supplementing each other to solve difficulties that one cannot solve alone	8	1
Capital share and help	6	2
Labour support and share	4	3
Information exchange	3	4
Discussion when having difficulties	2	5
Getting good market channel	1	6
Technical support	1	6
Extending social network	1	6
Increasing scale of development actions	1	6
Selling products together	1	6

### *The functions of rural markets*

During the in-depth case studies on the 20 case farmers, many frequently mentioned the importance of rural markets. This was followed up in the survey with the results shown in Table 6.24. The most important function of the market was the generation and dissemination of information, including information about prices. The market has often been critical for new farmer initiatives. As Mr. Liu Zhenkun put it: “Markets are the information centre in rural areas, from which you can get information on just about everything.” Secondly they are needed to obtain daily necessities and for tools and commodity exchange in general. Farmers also describe these markets as being good for economic development and certainly for joyful entertainment. As I documented earlier in the chapter, markets pay an essential role in farmers’ social and cultural life. They facilitate making contacts, and are the meeting place for people from different villages, relatives and friends. Other functions include making friends for later self-help, keeping up with clothing and other fashions and generally getting to know new culture and new things.

Table 6.24 Functions of the rural market

Function	No. of cases	Rank
Information, knowing prices	16	1
Convenience for buying/getting goods and tools	11	2
Commodity exchange	10	3
Selling products	9	4
Good for economic development	5	5
Entertainment with joy	5	5

Facilitation of people's contacts and relations, meeting of villages, relatives and friends	4	6
Making friends for later self-help	1	7
Adjust production to suit new tastes and fashions	1	7
Get to know new culture, new things	1	7

### *The influence of government policy on family livelihood development*

There is no doubt that government policies have a strong influence on rural family livelihoods and development initiatives. A final topic of the survey, then, was to elicit the opinions of farmers as to the presence and impact of government and its policies on their lives. Table 6.25 presents the different items of policy and a summary of the points they made.

Not surprising perhaps is the fact that issues relating to the land contracting and production responsibility system topped the list. This was manifested, on the one hand, through the improvement in livelihoods and environmental resources as a result of farmers being able to decide and plan certain long-term investments in regard to fruit tree and forestry developments. On the other hand, two farmers still did not feel confident about the 30-year land contracts since village cadres running the village committee have sometimes claimed back some of the land in order to redistribute it – a problem also noted for other parts of rural China. A second policy area affecting the lives and options of local farmers is the reform programme associated with the general opening up of China. This has enabled local people to start new initiatives in trade and small-scale commercial enterprise. As one farmer put it, “You can do what you want.” Before the promotion of free market principles, farmers’ development actions were restricted and there was less room for manoeuvre therefore for the kinds of local initiatives that form the core of this thesis. Yet, on the other hand, three farmers complained that the current system of taxation and levies in relation to trading was far too high and insufficiently regulated to bring much in the way of benefits to farmers. Other farmers commented on the need to monitor the implementation of the policy aimed at reducing the burden of taxation and levies by limiting payments to 5% of yearly average income.

Another critical comment from farmers was dissatisfaction over the afforestation campaign (i.e. the Sino-German Afforestation Project) because they needed to plant trees every year because of the low survival rate of the seedlings. Comments on other policies included the following:

- (1) “The ‘Township Director’ experimental field (meaning the experimental field is in the name of Township Director’ *xiang zhang shi yan tian*) in Dule village is good for technology dissemination”;
- (2) “The government Poverty Alleviation Program has supported some families in their household livelihood development”;
- (3) “The strict control on grain trading was a constraint on grain processing enterprises, and farmers involved in grain trading have also been affected”;
- (4) Villagers’ participation in local government needs to be further enhanced”;

- (5) “The policy of encouraging exports has facilitated the creation of more business opportunities”;
- (6) “The fast development of transportation and communication has greatly facilitated local economic development”.

Table 6.25 Influence of government policy on family livelihood development

Policy	Influence	No. of cases	Rank
Land contract and production responsibility system, including mountain land	- Decision made on fruit tree development, improvement of livelihood and environment (10 farmers) - Land contract policy sometimes is not long term secured, the village committee sometime wants the land back (2 farmers)	12	1
Openness and reform	Being able to start new development undertakings, ‘do what you want’	8	2
Tax and levies	The collection is sometimes too flexible by person, market tax is too high	3	3
Reduce farmers’ burden	It has not been fully realised	2	4
The afforestation campaign/the Sino-German Afforestation Project	Planting every year, difficult to survive, next year plant again	2	4
‘Township director’ experimental field in Dule Village	Technology dissemination	1	5
Capital support	Poverty alleviation funds support each family	1	5
Strict control on grain trading	Grain processing is restrained, and farmers’ engagement in grain trading is affected	1	5
Villagers’ governance	Needs to be improved	1	5
Encourage export	More business opportunities created	1	5
Fast development of transportation and communication	Facilitation of local economic development	1	5

This last section on factors that contribute to the emergence and development of farmer initiatives gives a general overview of how local patterns of social and cultural organisation feed into the strategies and kinds of initiatives available in this area of China. The next chapter documents, through several detailed case studies, the historical and social dynamics of these processes.

## CHAPTER 7

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### **SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE PROCESS OF FARMER DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES**

This chapter analyses the career trajectories of five farmers selected from the 20 cases presented in the previous two chapters in order to elucidate the social construction process of farmer initiatives in closer detail. Since many factors function together in the development of initiatives, the cases have been selected to show how different factors are inter-linked. Zhao Wenyong's case has been mainly selected to display how social networks contribute to his various initiatives, Lu Jianxun's case was chosen to show the importance of information, and selected parts from farmers Zhao Huanbang and Zhao Zengyuan are used to show how enlightenment through interactions contributes to the development of initiatives. Finally the case of Liu Zhenkun is presented to demonstrate more generally how many other factors contribute to development initiatives. His case has much to do with connections to community governance and history.

#### **Enlightenment through Social Networks**

The study of the 20 selected case farmers revealed the great importance of social networks in the construction of initiatives. In the context of community development, social networks normally include kin, colleagues (previous or current), friends, fellow villagers, officials (mainly for those local/village cadres), and technical subject-focused farmers (technical *elite*, expert farmers, etc.). In practice, a farmer's social network is composed of a mixture of actors from these different kinds of networks.

#### **Zhao Wenyong: from goat herder to owner**

Sanggan Village. Born 1953. Numerate but virtually illiterate. Married with son and daughter. Has four mu of arable land in seven plots, and contracts 500 mu mountain land. Has 90 goats.

Zhao Wenyong's history gives clear empirical evidence of how a farmer's social network contributes to the entire process of development innovations. Other factors are here briefly mentioned and analysed in order to show how they function together with social networks in this process.

#### *Earning work points*

When Zhao Wenyong was a child, his family was extremely poor. He had four brothers and four sisters and because of his family's circumstances he dropped out of primary school. When he was ten years old, in 1963, he became a herder for the Brigade or Collective (now Village) and by doing so, he was able to earn work points for his family. At the time it was common for children to herd since they could not be members

of the adult labour force. However, they could still be ‘useful’ to the family’s work obligations to the collective, especially when they could not afford to go to school. When Zhao Wenyong was seventeen he was regarded as an adult member of the brigade and could formally and officially earn working points for his family and he was therefore no longer assigned the work of herd boy. Around this particular time the brigade was intensively engaged in the campaign to implement the national ‘co-operative medical service’ policy. He recalled that his brigade was co-operating with a hospital from Beijing, since there were a lot of medicinal herbs in the mountains surrounding the collective. The brigade thus assigned Zhao Wenyong the work of going out to collect these medicinal herbs. They had put together many specimens of medicinal herbs that could be collected and used. Although he was almost illiterate and barely knew how to write down the names of these herbs, he knew all their names and being familiar with them he could readily recognise and collect them. However, the campaign did not last long and Zhao’s work changed again.

#### *Cart driver, developing social networks*

This time the brigade gave him the job of carriage or cart driver from 1973 to 1977. In his own words: “At that time driving the brigade cart was like driving a car today. Very impressive.” His words projected the pride he had taken in the task. His experience of being the cart driver also established a solid foundation for his later career development. He had been selected for the work because he was young and very strong. He stopped cart driving when the tractor became the local method of transport. A cart was then considered backward and thus abandoned as a form of local transport. However, it had been an attractive job, because he could earn 1.5 yuan per day, which was better than earning work points for collective farming. Also as driver of the cart he had opportunities to go to many places. The cart was the main means of transport in the brigade at the time, and used for transporting community products to the outside and buying and bringing back goods that the community needed. The cart was the property of Sanggang Brigade, but was contracted by Pocang Township and was used for the transport work of the township supply and marketing co-operative. Whenever it went out or came back it was always full of produce or goods. For the products that the State purchased under the national unified planning system, such as eggs and medicines, each brigade had to submit produce centrally to the township. The township supply and marketing co-operative would then organize carriages to transport the products to Yixian County capital, bringing back various goods such as cigarettes, liquor, tea, sugar, vinegar, soy sauce, and so on. At that time, carriages would need 4 to 5 days for a return trip from Pocang to Yixian County capital. During that period, accommodation and food were pre-arranged in certain places by the brigade. In addition to Yixian Capital, the township carriage team also went to many other places, such as Mancheng County, and many other townships across Yixian County such as Ganhejin, Lianggang, Dongdugang, Fugang, Qiaohe and Zijinguan.

Zhao Wenyong was a naturally open person and liked to speak to others. He became very familiar with and established good relationships with the people connected to supply and marketing co-operatives in various places. Such experiences built for him a solid foundation for his future small-scale petty trading activities. Zhao said that in this period he got to know many people and also learned what goods were in short supply (under

demand) in rural communities, so he started to transport those goods and resell them. However, such activities were illegal in China at that time and fitted the crime that we might now call speculating or profiteering (*tou ji dao ba*). “I could have been charged as a speculator or profiteer.” Since he was a member of his brigade production team, he was supposed to earn points in farming work. However, if you submitted 1 yuan to the production team, you could be recorded as having earned 15 work points. If you could submit enough money to the team you could convert it into all the work points required to escape agricultural work.

### *Trading of coupons and goats*

At that time, Zhao traded grain and cloth coupons by making use of the social network he had established during his carriage driving days. Goods were generally in short supply in China at that time and for a period goods were rationed and government issued coupons were needed to obtain specific goods. Coupons were exchanged for goods. This was a common practice of the Chinese centrally planned economy. In Zhao’s words, he traded whatever goods were in short supply. At that time, he could earn 3 to 4 cents when he traded 1 Jinn’s worth of grain for grain coupons (equivalent to 0.5 kg), and 5 cents for 1 Chi (equivalent to 1/3 m) for cloth coupons. Slowly, people within a radius of 20 km or so got to know of Zhao Wenyong, and many started to actively approach him and asked whether he had grain or cloth coupons and other goods items to trade. These two items were in very short supply in rural communities at that time. Although such small scale petty trading was supposed to be a crime, it undoubtedly fitted the general supply and demand principles of a market economy. Moreover, in the cities, many citizens had certain surplus coupons, whereas these coupons were in serious short supply for rural farmers. Such kinds of small scale petty trading contributed to the balance between the rural and urban sector. This was also the justification for Zhao Wenyong to continue trading.

In addition, he was also engaged in the small scale trading of goats. Because he had got to know many people and more and more people had heard of him, it was very easy for him to go to and go between all the local production teams and settlements. Later on, this was to become his main trading activity. His trading consisted of showing the one who wanted to sell to the place (usually home) of the one who wanted to buy and thus earned a 7 yuan commission on the transaction for each kid and 15 to 20 yuan for each adult goat. Acting as a kind of intermediary, he became well known in the surrounding area. Although he mainly traded goats, people came to him for other animals, for donkeys, pigs, or mules. He earned about 1,000 yuan per year from these activities, which was an extraordinarily large sum for rural farmers at that time. As he recalled it, he had acted as middleman perhaps more than 1,000 times. He certainly has his own ways and principles for making friends. The goat traders with whom he has had business connections are as far afield as Tanggu district of Tianjin Municipality, and the Counties and Districts of Yixian, Xushui, Ganhejin, Sigezhuang, and Gaobeidian and so on in Hebei Province. Many goat traders came back to Zhao, “I cannot count the times,” he says. A proverb he enjoys repeating is, ‘Geese leave voice when they pass through, people leave reputation (*ren guo liu ming, yan guo liu sheng*).’ This reflects his philosophy in dealings with others. Many Moslem goat traders came back to him, and if he had no goats to sell them, then he would show them where to look for goats. When



he dealt with traders for the first time, he would first discuss with them his commission and get an agreement. It was not difficult he said to get this. Sometimes it might happen that he would owe a debt to others. For instance once he brought 50,000 Yuan to buy goats, and then found there were many more goats that he had money to buy, but if he bought the goats he wanted, he would need 110,000 yuan. However, the seller only asked him to write down a receipt for a loan, and he took home all the goats he wanted. This was because, as he said, people in the local area all knew that he was a creditable man. Five days later, he paid the 60,000 yuan back to the seller. He said when the Moslem traders came to him (his home), he knew the Moslems did not eat some of the food cooked by Han Chinese, so he specially prepared mutton for them. In his words, "Others consider me, so I have to consider others, one can only get others' heart felt trust by offering heart felt honesty....When you have dealings with others you do not have trust for the first and second time, but you need to be confident to trust each other." Zhao said he was very good at judging people from their actions and behaviours. Some people "only talk nice words, such people are not trustful and honest."

### *Suona playing*

Zhao was very good at speaking and small-scale goat trading, but he could also play the *suona* (a local woodwind instrument). This experience was indeed very interesting. In the early 1980s, following national policy, Sanggang Brigade, now called Sanggang Village, started a campaign of land distribution and land contracting. Such a campaign made the quiet community suddenly liven up. In the wake of such a campaign, there were also some conflicts. One household in the village did not want to farm their land, so Zhao Wenyong contracted one of their plots. After the maize harvest, when the maize stalks had not yet been cleared from the land a conflict between Zhao and the household arose. This was in relation to the disposal of the maize stalks in the field. Zhao Wenyong wanted to burn them in order to fertilise the soil for the following year's crop. However, the household quickly cut and cleared the stalks causing conflict. Zhao said, "At the time, goat keeping was less profitable than small-scale trading, small-scale trading was less profitable than glass noodle processing, and glass noodle processing was less profitable than playing the *suona*." The head of household with whom he had the conflict was a *suona* player. He had a group of local musicians who played at local wedding and funeral ceremonies. The business was indeed good. In order to compete with the other household on such business, Zhao Wenyong decided to organise his own group for such local musical service.

His behaviour to some extent illustrates the point that conflict and adversity can often play a stimulating and positive role for individuals and can to some extent facilitate and stimulate development, while at the same time, as here, it can have negative aspects. At the time, Zhao Wenyong's economic situation was good in the village. For the purpose of learning *suona* playing, and further competing with the other family and earning money, he himself invested 5,000 Yuan, and organised a group of about 30 people. He ordered uniforms, and bought needed musical instruments. He had been engaged in such undertaking for about six years and to some extent successfully competed against the others. However, he said, "I had always felt held back in the undertaking, because I had always some kind of anger in my mind. Plus the fact that the business environment was deteriorating and my playing was not very good, so I stopped. But the main reason was

still that I had been very annoyed.” He had invested 5,000 yuan, which brought him a return finally of about 3,000 yuan. Usually his group went out for service with about 10 members and could earn about 300 to 400 yuan each time. The most distant place his group went to was Laiyuan County of Hebei Province. People got to know them mainly through family relatives/kinship network, and invited them for the service.

### *Retailing*

After the general land reform and the adoption of the household production responsibility system, Zhao Wenyoun ran a local retail shop business for about three years. At that time, there was only one retail shop in the village designated by Pocang Township, and the price of daily necessities and other goods was very high. Zhao knew this and since he knew many people in the line of supply and marketing co-operatives from his cart driving days he knew those who were responsible for the distribution of cigarettes, liquor and foodstuff. He was even able to get credit, so under such circumstances, his retail shop was opened quickly. His prices were cheaper than the other shop designated by the Township. For instance the price of a box of a dozen matches was 3 to 4 cents cheaper. Zhao did not consider himself good at farming but felt he knew about trade and felt he could run a shop. However, after three years, he closed the shop. Zhao was almost illiterate and during the period of the shop he continued to trade in goats while his wife took care of the shop. The shop earned money but there were management problems, the main one being that his wife allowed villagers goods on credit and it was never certain when they would repay. In general the financial accounting of the shop was chaotic and eventually he decided to give it up. In his own words, “I was not able to manage.”

Opening the retail shop required a 500-yuan investment. He had 450 yuan, so he obtained 50 yuan credit. The state was encouraging people to get credit at the time, but rural farmers were still not used to the concept of credit. He repaid the 50-yuan loan during the first year. Because he was trusted and people had confidence in his credit worthiness through business dealings he easily got credit from the township credit station, and they even encouraged him to take more. People who knew him from trading in the township also believed that he had money and therefore would easily be able to pay off loans. His family situation at that time was in fact better off in the village but he said if he had had all the money at the time he would not have taken a loan because the interest charge was not low to farmers, which put pressure on him.

The means he used to transport goods from various supply and marketing co-operatives to his shop was his new bicycle with the famous brand name of ‘flying pigeon’ (*fei ge*). It cost him 184 yuan from Yixian county supply and marketing co-operative. There were only three bicycles in the whole of Sanggang village at that time, his being the third. A coupon was needed to buy a bicycle, and such a coupon was difficult to get. Bicycles were in serious short supply, as were many other products in China under the centrally planned economy. He knew the deputy director of the Yixian County supply and marketing co-operative through whom he bought the bicycle. He cycled the 60-km back to the village. The road was not in good condition and furthermore it was a mountain road.

He mainly got goods for his shop from Yixian and Mancheng County capitals and Lianggang Township. At the later stage, he mainly bought goods from Mancheng County as prices were lower, and the County capital was closer to the railway station, thus transportation costs could be lowered. The other important reason was that a staff member who had worked in Yixian supply and marketing co-operative was later moved to the Mancheng marketing co-operative. This person was Zhao's friend. It was coincidental that he had got to know about his change of work. On the first occasion that he rode his new bicycle to Mancheng County capital, he chatted with a peach trader, and in chatting he accidentally learned that his friend had moved to work in Mancheng County. So Zhao went to see him, and from then he always bought for his shop from Mancheng co-operative. If you bought more than five dozen boxes of cigarettes, you could get a distribution price. He bought cigarettes from Mancheng County and then transported them to Yixian, and each time could earn 4 to 5 yuan.

### *Goat raising*

Now Zhao Wenyong keeps more than 90 goats for their wool for which he expects to generate about 700 yuan per year per goat. The initiation of this activity was again due to his social network. When Zhang Wencheng of Yixian had been the director of Pocang Township, he promoted keeping wool goats. He intended that each household in the township would own 4 to 5 goats by making use of loans from the poverty alleviation programme. Information about goat raising was disseminated through the village speakers. The ones who were interested all registered with the village party secretary. Zhao Wenyong had spent much of his life caring and trading goats and hearing that goat wool was profitable he did not hesitate to register. The township transported 40 wool goats to the village, 20 females and 20 males. The goats were distributed amongst the households who had registered by drawing lots. As a result, Zhao Wenyong got female goats. He said, "The wool goat had a very high quality of wool, and was much better than the black goat. One female goat could deliver 5 kids within two years, thus, it had to be good business." During the first year, he himself went to contact Zhang Wencheng, and asked him to help him buy more wool goats, since he planned to raise many. So Zhang Wencheng accompanied Zhao to Fangshan district of Beijing Municipality to buy them. He bought 27 at a price of 465 yuan per goat. Plus transportation and other costs, he in total spent 13,700 yuan. However, two years later, the Township director was replaced, and the Sino-German Afforestation Project was going to be implemented in the Township, and goat raising was supposed to be reduced. Later it was even officially prohibited in the mountain where the goats grazed. Many households sold their goats. At that time, Zhao Wenyong had not yet earned back his original investment of more than 10,000 yuan, and eventually he made a loss of about 5,000 yuan. However, he was still reluctant to sell all the goats which were supposed to be very profitable, so he kept 5 female goats, and brought all five of them to Dalan village of Lianggang Township, where there was a household engaged in large-scale goat raising. Zhao had become acquainted with the head of this household during the time he was a goat intermediary, and he even entered into an adoptive relationship with the household by having the daughter become his adoptive daughter. He made a deal with this friend that he would leave his goats to be taken care by the household, and they would keep all the wool products of the five goats and any lambs would be shared.

One year later, when the new Township Director, Mr. Wang came to Sanggang Village on a visit to the Sino-German Afforestation Project site, Zhao Wenyu was planting trees in the mountain and he actively approached the new director and asked whether he could raise goats on the 500 mu of mountain land that he contracted since the land was not in the area planned for the Sino-German Afforestation Project. Later he got a positive answer to his inquiry from Mr. Wang and he brought back his goats from his friend. The five goats were now seven. In addition, he bought a male goat from the friend. He now has the largest herd of goats in Sanggang village.

In relation to his goat keeping we need to touch a bit more on his contract of the 500 mu of mountain land. The village distributed the barren mountain land that had belonged to the former Collective by public auction in 1999. There was an area of 500 mu of this land that could be contracted for 50 years. The villagers bid for the land and finally there were only five to six villagers bidding, Zhao Wenyu raised the price to 200 yuan and so got the contract. In addition he also got a 700-yuan loan from the poverty alleviation fund. However, it was specified that the contractor had to spend this 700 yuan on planting trees, and if the contractor could not succeed in getting trees to survive in the area, the 500 barren mountain land had to be given back to the Collective. At that time, Zhao Wenyu contracted the mountain he intended it for grazing goats and for getting the loan. But he ended up with nothing after completing the plantation, only a 200 yuan debt. Due to this debt he also thought glass noodle making unprofitable and so he went outside for work. What triggered this was a conversation with someone on a public bus from Dongdugang village, with whom he had become acquainted during his time in the brigade. This person introduced him to work in a brick-making factory in Shanxi Province. He had worked there for 40 days and came back with the 200 yuan. He had been promoted shortly after starting as head of a production group. The boss liked him. Zhao said he could tell fortunes by palm and face reading and he did this for the boss “and the result was good, plus the fact that I am good at talking, so he treated me well.” Later since the weather in Shanxi was too cold, he came back.

### *The expansion of social capital and other horizons*

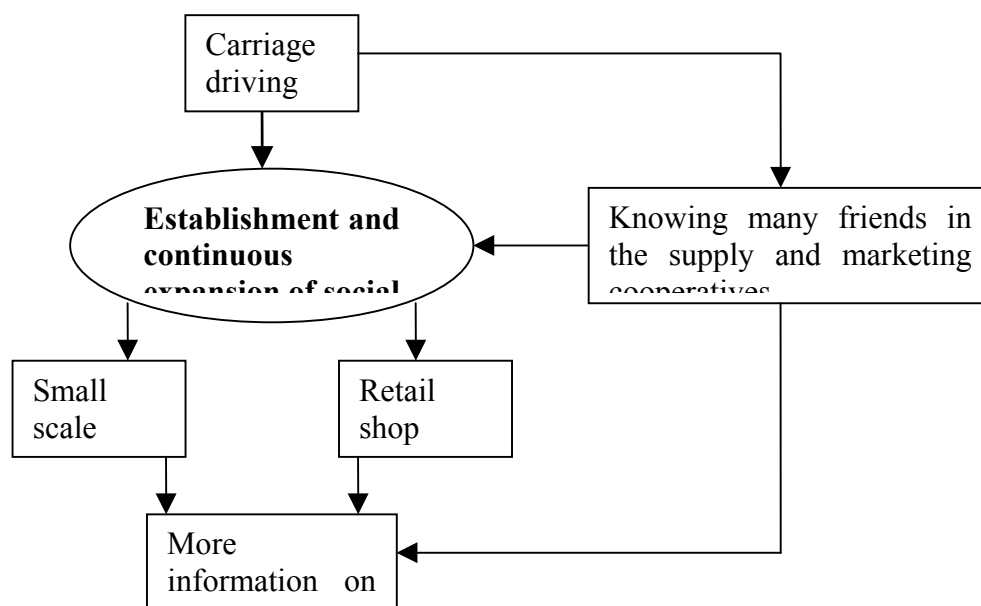
From Figure 7.1 we can see that the development of Zhao Wenyu’s career is a continuous and accumulative process. We find that he was not able to make choices for activities before his cart-driving career, since at that time, his horizons were limited to the community and the community was rather homogeneous and for someone so young, it was a matter of following orders. However, all his undertakings after that were on his own initiative. The factors contributing to and affecting the small-scale trading initiatives were many and combined. His growing familiarity with the surrounding social environment was obviously crucial. The societal structure was characterised by very clear rural-urban social and economic structures of which others seldom had such personal and firsthand experience. Certainly his own personality contributed. Had he not been so open and easygoing he would not have been so close to the people in the supply and marketing co-operatives. Such factors can be considered internal. But many external factors contributed to his choice, such as the abandonment of carting as a means of transport when the tractor came in. Carriage drivers who had been proud of their work were faced with hard choices over their future livelihoods. Some simply went

back to the brigade to farm. But Zhao did not. He had already initiated small scale trading activities and he found this a better option. He had been away from agriculture for a long time and so had little experience of farming, neither had he felt highly dependent on the land. The land was still collectively farmed and he would simply go back to work as a member of a production team without choices, in order to earn the required work points needed to make a living.

Zhao had found an alternative to this requirement by paying the production team in exchange for work points. On the surface this seemed straightforward enough but behind it lay strong social implications. Having the work points meant he was free to concentrate on trading. It also meant that no matter how far he went for his business, he could still be a member of the Sanggang community. ‘Membership of the community’ is crucial because it gives people an identity and a strong sense of belonging. But to make it real, Zhao Wenyong had to ensure and reinforce his position in the community.

Being in charge of community transport allowed him to continuously expand his horizons. We might say that this was not only an expansion of social networks both within and outside the community but also an expansion in terms of ‘mind’ and personal and social identity. Such expansion enabled him at the micro-level to build up

Figure 7.1 Expansion of social capital and other horizons of Zhao Wenyong



many more nodes within the social network. And such nodes were located in different positions of the social network structure. He went outside for more often than other villagers and his contacts and connections in the supply and marketing co-operative sector embedded him in a network around Pocang Township.

From a meso point of view, all the different supply and marketing co-operatives had both close relations and clear divisions and descriptions of tasks, meaning this social

network *per se* had its own structure, following which, there was active information flow. Zhao Wenyou's frequent travel put him in a rather dynamic position and the amount of information that flowed to him was large, and not always one way.

From a macro point of view, the environment of supply and marketing of products was under a strict planned economy, and all supplies were provided on the basis of coupons. This social environment not only effected societal structure, but also the behaviour of those embedded in this social network structure. Zhao's connectedness with and interaction with the various nodes in this social network were in the meantime transformed into social capital. This in fact is the essential aspect at work in the functioning and development of his small-scale trading initiatives. Although some of his actions violated the laws of society at that time, they complied with people's demands, and had thus brought him profit. Hence, he achieved his objectives. In fact his co-workers had established similar social networks during the same period of cart driving though most returned to their villages for agriculture and this weakened the networks and social capital they had built. In comparison, Zhao Wenyou's social network was strengthened and reinforced later by his continued engagement in small scale trading.

#### *From rationing coupons to goats*

From the study of this case, we see Zhao Wenyou's development from petty trading in various coupons to a kind of specialised small-scale semi-professional trading in goats. Goats went back as far as his first experiences of responsibility in childhood. The key reason for this shift was the fundamental changes taking place in society at large. In other words, Zhao Wenyou responded to the implementation of rural reforms and the household production responsibility system and to the opening up of rural markets. Such change led to a change in the items or contents of his small scale trading activities. However, the mechanisms that had sustained his social network of operations remained unchanged. He was known to people within quite large local area (within a 20-kilometre radius), and many goat traders approached or contacted him, even traders from farther afield could also find him when they come to buy goats in Pocang Township. Such a stable and solid business network is obviously not sustained by modern contracts.

What then sustained the existence of this network that became a necessary foundation for his development? Firstly, the business network *per se* has its own net of relationships that as a member he had access to. Secondly, the existence and sustaining of a social network depends on the function of a series of built in trust mechanisms. The mechanism of establishing such trust is not the law, nor a contract. It is the fundamental role played by creditability and reputation and social similarities in the functioning of the network, which are the essential elements. Since Zhao Wenyou had been engaged in small scale trading of different products and goods for some years, he had had time to build a social reputation that was recognised by people in the local society. The scale and physical location of their goat trading might be very different but the context of their business, the social environment under which they operated was quite similar, and so were the problems they confronted. In addition, their social values were similar. Under these circumstances, it was easy for them to come up with mutual understanding and consensus during the process of interacting and making connections. Hence Zhao Wenyou's words, "Others consider me, I have to consider others, one can only get heart

felt trust by offering heart felt honesty.” Without reciprocity and the function of such trust mechanism, such a network could not be sustained over the longer term. This in fact had further affected the strategic decision making of the actors. For instance, those who were not trusted were not incorporated into his social network, since his value system excluded such a person.

As mentioned earlier, wider social change affected farmers’ initiative and decision making. However, when confronted with such social change or external interventions, they may internalise them. When Zhao Wenyong started to keep wool goats, he was confronted with the appearance of the Sino-German Afforestation Project and he could no longer graze his goats in the mountainous area. Other farmers sold their goats, but, Zhao Wenyong found an alternative by asking a friend to keep them for him. This left open the possibility to continue this initiative later. He did this for three reasons he said. First, he knew it could be profitable. Second, he had 500 mu (33.3 ha) of mountain land, and when policy was less strict he could perhaps again goat graze there. Third, he had lots of experience with goats. From this analysis, we can see that no matter how intensive and strong external interventions might be, they cannot completely assimilate the actors that the intervention aims at. On the contrary, the actors’ objections can to some extent block or appropriate and even assimilate the interventions into their own ‘projects’.

When researching the process of farmer development initiatives, the researchers themselves also cannot avoid this process of enrolment. This aspect is further explored later in this chapter. However, what we see is that the implication of some interactions can be very positive and contribute to the process of various kinds of initiatives and others are negative and hinder that process. Zhao Wenyong’s organisation of his group for local musical service resulted from his conflict and desire to get back at his neighbour. However, we might say that this initiative was only half-successful. He successfully created competition for the man’s group but his heart was not fully committed because of the anger that always lurked behind the venture and economically he made a loss.

### **Enlightenment through Information**

Similar to social networks, information plays an important role in the process of farmer development initiatives. All twenty case farmers underlined the importance of information for their development innovations. In the rural context, farmers normally obtain information from their social networks during interactions, visits and chat, from experience exchange in community indigenous technical subject focused arenas, from media (newspaper, magazine, television) and publications (books), from study visits, from local markets and temple fairs, and so on. Certainly the reality is always a mixture of selected information from different sources.

I have chosen Lu Jianxun’s case to illustrate analyse how information works in the process of various development undertakings. Instead of selecting the parts of the case that are only related to information, I have here provided the entire case so as to show how information functions together with many other factors in the process of farmer development initiatives.

### **Lu Jianxun, who prefers reading to *Mah-Jongg***

Sanggang Village. Born 1960. Household includes wife and two children. Contracts 40 mu of mountain land, has 3.5 mu of arable land in eight plots.

#### *Temporary migrant wage labour*

After Lu Jianxun graduated from high school, he went to work in the Fengtai railway station of Beijing. This was suggested by his father from information gathered from an old friend whom he had met one day in Lianggang market, Mr. Zhao Xiushan, party secretary in a nearby Township. During their chat, Zhao told him that the director of Lianggang Township was helping children of old cadres to find jobs. The director happened to be a military mate of Lu Jianxun's father. Later his father went to see him, and with his help Lu got a temporary job in Fengtai railway station in Beijing. One year later, more workers came to work in the railway station, so competition was high and the salary was low so Lu returned to the village at the end of the second year.

We can thus see how information travels within social networks. It is obvious that Lianggang market is located in a very central position. The market can be seen as a kind of physical facility without which some kinds of information would not so easily flow. Going to the market provides an important channel or opportunity for local people to receive and disseminate information. Normally local communities are to some extent physically scattered, and enjoy a small society life. Only on local market days do people from the surrounding communities come together at the market. Thus the local market plays an indispensable role. It not only provides the physical and social infrastructure for people to buy and sell products and commodities and other necessities for daily life, but is the market place that provides the means to obtain, trade and exchange gossip and information. It certainly facilitates the strategic development of initiatives.

After working in Beijing at the railway station, Lu Jianxun worked in Zijingguan Township of Yixian County for a few years. This was again through his father's work and contacts. A previous boss in the county relief bureau contracted the construction of a grain storage station located in Zijingguan Township. The contractor needed someone to do secretarial and documentary work for him. Lu Jianxun's father had been very skilled in Chinese calligraphy, and had worked in this field before retirement and so his boss remembered this and invited Lu Jianxun's father to work for him. One year later, Lu Jianxun was also asked to work on the construction site. In the beginning he was assigned some work labouring, and later as a security guard. In his words, "When things went missing on the construction site, the contractor became very cautious, so he wanted to find an intimate person to take care of things." This work was not physically heavy at all. After the completion of the construction, Lu Jianxun came back to his community again.

Again we see the importance of trust Building such trust was due to the previous relationship. The contractor and Lu Jianxun's father knew each other before in a boss/subordinate relationship, under which the fulfilment of their rights and commitments had ensured the existence of trust. From the contractor's side, he trusted



Lu father, and again offered him a job and was also willing therefore to trust the son. Trust is knowing a commitment will be fulfilled. Not to fulfil a commitment is to lose face and to receive blame and, furthermore, to pay a greater price - losing an important node of the social network and an important resource too. To assign Lu Jianxun as the security guard is the representation of a typical Chinese way of appointing people by favouritism. When there is no social contract to sustain the operation and running of rural communities, the existence and use of socially built trust is highly justified. People are used to offer insurance for their actions and behaviours by risking their reputation instead of resorting to legal contracts. Therefore, when people's social networks have been established, there are more social resources and perhaps thus more social capital. The two are not independent of each other. When people make decisions for taking development initiatives they use social resources built through this mechanism of trust, and people are very careful therefore to protect the trusts they have built.

### *Rabbit ventures*

Lu has liked rabbits since his childhood. He started rabbit raising when he was in junior high school. His engagement with rabbit raising can be phrased in three stages. The first was when he was in junior high school. Seeing others stimulated his interest, though at the time his aim was purely for personal interests, not for money. It was very cheap to buy young rabbits at that time, only 0.5 yuan per rabbit, and his family was comparatively better off, hence, together with his elder sister he bought two rabbits from his village and started raising them. Later this grew to more than 30 rabbits, some were consumed by his family, and some were sold. However, one day all the rabbits got a disease and quickly died. This taught Lu Jianxun that "he could not succeed without technical knowledge/ He had to buy books" and he started to learn. He said that he became more interested after all the rabbits died and he had bought the books. He started to think it over. "I had not raised rabbits for a year. But even when I was in school, I sometimes opened the book to read."

One year later, when he felt that he was more experienced and had more knowledge, he bought rabbits and started again. This time the rabbits grew well, but he again discontinued. This was due to getting the job in Fengtai railway station and other family members felt rabbit raising was too troublesome. He sold some, ate some and gave some away. He stopped because he did not make sufficiently large profit from it. He was still regarded as a child doing it mainly out of interest, so his family did not see it as money earning and they did not favour the activity. This was the second stage of Lu Jianxun's rabbit raising undertaking.

The third stage started from 1981 after he married, and continued for about 10 years until 1990. During that time, the price of rabbit was 1.8 Yuan per kg. In the beginning he raised the local rabbit species, and this time he aimed to make a profit. However, the local species was less disease-resistant and grew slowly. He raised them for about four years until he was able to obtain better species. From 1984, he started to raise two other species, called 'Big White Ear' and 'Belgium'. One day, while in Pocang market he met Xu Guoqiang, a teacher of Pocang township farmers' school, who had been a close classmate of his. Since Xu Guoqiang often went to local villages to sell pesticides, he knew Lu Jianxun had been engaged in rabbit raising and they chatted about this. Xu

told him Baoshi village had a new rabbit species called ‘*Big White Ear*’, that grew very fast. He asked Xu to get more firm information for him and then he would go to buy. Lu said “I appreciate science and technology, rather than politics. I do not like to play *Mah-Jongg*, although I know how to play. When people play *Mah-Jongg*, sometimes they do not even have time to eat for a whole day. I like to play table tennis, to read books, especially technical books and to watch television programs on CCTV 1 (news channel) and 7 (agriculture channel).” A few days later, Lu went to Baoshi Village and bought two of the new rabbits. This soon grew to more than 60 ‘*Big White Ear*’ rabbits. Finally he again sold out and gave about 20 to his fellow villagers. According to him, this time he had obtained maximum economic profit from raising rabbits. Later again through Xu Guoqiang, he bought the ‘*Belgium*’ variety from Baoshi Village. This time it was Xu Guoqiang who brought the information to Lu Jianxun.

Personal interest seems to play an important role in the selection of development initiatives. It also has an effect on the willingness to persevere and on rebuilding confidence in an undertaking after failures. Internal factors of this kind such as, hobbies, education and so on sometimes heavily affect decision making. It was very obvious that Lu Jianxun’s engagement in rabbit raising for the first two stages was mainly for interest rather than profit. His personal interest was not only the start but also the end point. Satisfaction of interest may be understood as the achievement of one’s objective. When confronted with certain difficulties, then interest will motivate the desire of knowledge through study. Such an internal motive can be very strong. However, when he was engaged in rabbit raising for the third time, it was not for interest any more, but for profit. It was just shortly after he got married. In rural communities, the male would certainly assume more responsibility for taking care of his family after marriage, and though not always possible, young men would then want to stay in the community rather than go out. Livelihood strategies had to be adjusted to this new role, of husband and father as well as son, and even to being head of the family household. In the wake of such a change, there are other social value and norms that constrain behaviour and action and more factors to consider when making a decision. Lu Jianxun found, however, that there were local ways of getting information. They relied on oral dissemination, which formed a kind of ‘cable’ communication that was obviously dependent on the travelling ‘routes’ of the disseminator, the more the ‘routes’, the more interface points of encounters and the larger coverage of information dissemination. Lu Jianxun mainly sold his rabbits in local markets, and rabbit traders also came to the village to buy. When I asked him how he knew that he could sell his rabbits at the local market, he said he did not know in the beginning, but when visiting local markets he discovered that people from Yixian County Cold Storage Plant came to the markets to buy rabbits. He added that the market is essential to the rural community, and can activate the rural economy.

Thus the local fair and rural market is important for a farmer and the community’s internal development. But we should not overlook its importance for the community’s external economic development. Normally channels for receiving outside information are very limited as are opportunities to interact with the outside. Under the system of a centrally planned economy, going to market and the rural markets *per se* are a kind of stimulation and activation of a market sense. This was certainly the case for Lu Jianxun.

While raising rabbits Lu Jianxun continued to read and once when his 'Big White Ear' rabbits mated with the local species, his rabbits caught a kind of skin disease. Lu Jianxun eventually succeeded in curing his rabbits through his reading. As to his fellow villagers, he said, "We do not see each other if we bow our heads, but we do whenever raise them." (a local saying meaning villagers see each other quite often, *di tou bu jian tai tou jian*). If fellow villagers brought their local rabbit species to cross with his rabbits, he could hardly refuse. But villagers could not raise rabbits very well, they never read books, and never introduced improvements or innovations, and thus did little to prevent disease. Lu Jianxun never specifically went to buy books but would do so while doing other business in the Yixian capital or when visiting his sister who lived in Gaobeidian City. Although he no longer raises rabbits, many villagers who do, still like to contact him. In 2001, he did a training course for his village on rabbit raising, introducing topics such as species, hybridization, feeding, disease prevention and management. He even prepared detailed handouts for the participants.

Rabbit raising may seem an individual choice but all such choices have ramifications in a close knit community. Anonymity is not possible. If one member of the community is more advanced than others in some area then this will certainly be affected by the community environment. Where the integration of production of the community is higher, meaning comparatively more homogeneous, then differentiation will be comparatively smaller and vice versa. Where people's relationships are still largely kinship and geo-connected, the vanguard individual will certainly be affected by those who are less advanced and the impact is not always positive. Such negative impact can destroy initiative. And from this point of view, the small scale nature of household production and business in the wake of the application of the household production responsibility system and the establishment and development of a marketing economy in rural China results in certain shortcomings. This can sometimes even affect the development of the entire community as well as the rationality of farmer decision making.

Rabbit raising helped Lu Jianxun to accumulate knowledge, and had established a solid foundation for his future development. In 1987, Hebei Province started generally to check the land sites of farmers' houses, because there had been many local conflicts over house sites. Therefore Pocang Township needed an educated and knowledgeable person to be a temporary land management officer. In fact, it was not really for land management only recording all the events that occurred during the general survey and conversations amongst people, thus, a *de facto* recorder. Pocang Township asked the village to recommend someone and the party secretary proposed Lu Jianxun, because "he had some knowledge, and was good at calligraphy." The allowance was 2.5 Yuan per day, and later rose to 3 Yuan. When he accepted, he was still raising rabbits. When asked why he had accepted he said that the work was more stable in terms of earning and that rabbit raising was getting less profitable and the species was also deteriorating and the market could not be secured. Thus, such a decision was mainly due to economic motives. His work in the township ended one year later when the task was completed.

*A venture into youtiao making*

Back in the village, Lu Jianxun's wife suggested that they start making *youtiao* (a popular fried food). His family had no older members who could care for the family. They had to do the farming and he could therefore not leave for work outside. His father-in-law knew how to make *youtiao* so he decided to have a try. Although they had never practised, they had seen it made. After deliberating and reaching consensus, they immediately started operations. In the beginning business was not very good, mainly due to his poor technical skills resulting in *youtiao* not being tasty enough. His *youtiao* making could also be seen phrased in three stages. In the beginning, due to his low technical capacity, the food was not marketed easily. Therefore, Lu had to go to many villages to sell, and had to go as far afield as 15 km. One year later, due to the improvement of the food quality, he did not need to go further than 10 km to sell. Now he sells his food within 5 km. He has developed technical capacity and always has a sufficient supply. "I have been very honest, I frequently go to many villages, so villagers all know me. They prefer to buy my food rather than the same food made by others in their villages." When I asked in addition to the enlightenment by his wife, what other factors had contributed, he said, if in the beginning he had not known at all how *youtiao* was made he would not have started. From generation to implementation took a very short time and undoubtedly his local knowledge and the family experience minimized the risks.

#### *Running a fashion clothes venture*

From 1999 to 2000, Lu Jianxun and his wife were engaged in making branded fashion clothes. Lu Jianxun's elder sister lives in Gaobeidian city where almost every household was engaged in clothes making. All the materials were bought from Baigou market in Hebei Province, where trading was very vigorous, and the place had been given the nickname of 'little Hongkong'. The variety of cloth on the market was extraordinarily large but the quality was often not good and there were many fakes. All the cloth was bought from that market, thus, it was critical to be able to judge the quality of the cloth, and this was only done by sight. Lu Jianxun's brother-in-law was very good at judging by sight and feel, better than any one else in his village. Therefore, it was rather easy for Lu Jianxun to undertake clothes making, and he did not need to worry about the quality of the materials bought, because the purchase of the cloth materials and the marketing of the clothes were all taken care of by his brother-in-law. His task was to organise the processing. Lu Jianxun and his wife normally cut out the clothes according to pre-set design patterns at home, then they distributed them to other farmer/tailor households in his and nearby villages to sew. After completion, Lu Jianxun collected the sewn clothes and sent them back to his elder sister's place for final processing. At the time, there was a public bus from Sanggang Village to Beijing and one could arrange with the driver to deliver to some pre-arranged recipients, thus making delivery secure. Lu Jianxun made a lot of use of this bus by getting materials from Gaobeidian and sending back the preliminarily made clothes to be received by his sister. He did not need to travel with his goods on the bus. Later due to the low profit generated from the operation of this bus route, it was stopped, which caused great inconvenience to local villagers. Profit from clothes making also started to decline and so Lu Jianxun temporarily stopped his clothes making enterprise.

The households doing ‘outwork’ for Lu were from Sanggang, Shuikou, Yuangang, Nandugang and Shangwei villages. Most were from his own village. The two from Shuikou, 10 km away village were a relative whom he could not refuse and an acquaintance of the relative. The sewer from Yuangang village was a female whom he had got to know when he went to the village to sell *youtiao*. He contacted her before starting the venture. Four households were from Nandugang village, among whom was a very skilled sewer, again known from selling *youtiao*. Another was a friend who had offered to help Lu build his house. When he heard of the opportunity to earn money he contacted Lu and brought two other households in. The household from Shangwei village was another relative. His initiative provided a kind of benefit sharing (or opportunity sharing) amongst nodes in his social network. *Youtiao* making and marketing had largely contributed to the building up and extension of his social network. Kinship networks also played a role. “Many villagers from other villages asked me to offer work to them”, he said, “But I had to take care of relatives first, because you can hardly refuse them.”

It is obvious that trust also here played a role and he thus had no worries concerning the cloth quality, tailoring or marketing, but the distance between his operation and his cloth and outlet market made him dependent on the bus. When the bus folded so did his clothes making operation. It highlights the vulnerability for rural people. But effort needs reward and therefore trust and social networks cannot sustain a business that can bring no reward. And there came a point when it was no longer in Lu’s interests to continue.

### *Prospects in mountain land*

Lu Jianxun also contracted 40 mu of barren mountainous land. In 1999, the village put up for auction the collective barren mountain land. It was thought that two days were needed for the auction, one for the southern land and one for the north. Lu Jianxun was not interested in the land to the south of the village, thus he did not attend the first day. However, villagers’ participation in the auction was quite active and they completed all the land distribution during the first day, thus, Lu Jianxun missed his chance. He went to talk to Xu Changquan, the village party secretary, who suggested that they jointly contract the land for which Xu had successfully bid. So the two households contracted the area together which they then had to afforest. Since Changquan was always very busy, Lu’s household planted many more trees than Changquan’s. The households had still not yet divided the area. As Lu explained, “All the barren mountain land was contracted and if you had not contracted land, you would have no place even to collect firewood. Moreover, if all the others manage the land well then it will bring a lot of income in the future and you would have to beg”. So like many farmers – and contrary to popular belief, not all his initiatives had short-term objectives in mind. This mountain land is closely related to everyday family activities and all families have customarily had access to this shared facility. Firstly, firewood for family consumption is collected from the mountain. Thus the competition for this land was not only for profit motives. Without this land their room for action is limited. Secondly, the contract of mountain land *per se* is a competition process and implies future competition for it may become very profitable and villagers know this.

Lu Jianxun continues to be interested in rabbit raising but until he can find a species that has a good quality skin this activity can add little to his livelihood needs. Although he has experience in keeping and breeding rabbits, at this moment he does not know where to go for information on where to get better stock. He has heard that dried fruit products might have potential in the future, thus, he wants to plant walnut and chestnut trees. The soil quality of the mountain land that he shares is good. Some villagers had mined vermiculite there and so most of the rocks had been removed and the site was now suitable for planting. He said that when the land started to generate income, he would definitely separate from Xu Changquan, and manage his share of the area on his own. Xu Changquan as village party secretary does not have much time to manage his share and so it is not so appropriate to divide the area now in any case. We can see that sharing this land is a kind of cooperation, but it is also a way of solving community conflict. It was the village announcement that two days would be devoted to the sale that led to the situation. Some farmers whose interests had been harmed had simply given up, and some had gone to complain to the village party secretary and so fight for their interests. Under the circumstances, the party secretary had little other option for solving the conflict but the operation and management has not been conducted jointly, and the rights and commitment have been obviously unbalanced so as Lu said, in the future when economic returns begin, they will separate.

### **Enlightenment through Interactions**

Farmers are not isolated but rather well connected with all kinds of actors and institutions with whom villagers enjoy interacting as well as with each other in the community indigenous arenas and in the local markets. Farmers may be enlightened by others in this way and even enrolled in their projects. This kind of enlightenment and enrolment plays an important role in some kinds of farmer initiatives.

Here I have selected parts of Zhao Huanbang's and Zhao Zengyuan's case to illustrate how such enlightenment functions in their various development undertakings, and to analyse other interlinking factors.

### **Zhao Huanbang: he quits his official job and goes back to farming**

Nandugang Village. Born 1928. Household includes wife and two adult sons. Contracts 75 mu of mountain land, has 4.5 mu of arable land in eight plots.

Before 1961, Zhao Huanbang was doing well politically. He was deputy party secretary of Taidi Township from 1956 to 1958, deputy party secretary of Lianggang Township from 1959 to 1960, and then party secretary of Jienan Township in 1961.

In February 1961, he participated in a cotton meeting in the County and by chance shared a room with Li Jinchun, deputy party secretary of Shanbei Township. They had had some previous contact and were therefore to some extent familiar with each other. The several days' meeting enhanced their friendship, during which time they discovered they had much in common and their evening chats became more intimate. Once Li Jinchun suddenly complained that it was impossible to continue in his position. "What's the use of being a deputy party secretary? The income is so little and I have parents and children at home who I cannot adequately support. Why don't we go back home."

Huanbang seemed to hear a voice deep in his heart that he had never heard before. “Yes, why should I have to follow such a career? Why cannot I change to another concept and way of life?” His family situation was not as bad as some others and his salary was a little higher than Jinchun’s, but his overall situation was not promising. He earned only 45.5 Yuan per month. “With this money I can buy only 29 kg of radish in the County capital market. I have just had a son and my house is very dilapidated. Will there be a way out like this?” Such thoughts repeatedly flashed across his mind keeping him awake for several nights. However, at that time people were indeed proud of being in a government position, especially the party secretary of a Township, the first decision maker in the Township. Such a position was highly esteemed by local people and many of Huanbang’s relatives felt honoured to have him in the position. In addition, receiving a stable salary from the government was also the dream of many local people at that time. Thus, making a decision to quit his position needed courage. He was struggling with himself, since on the one hand he wanted to pursue new life alternatives, but on the other, he was certainly worried about losing the lifestyle he was used to. He had been hesitating between giving up and making a compromise.

The year 1962 came and Huanbang was still committed to his job but now paid more attention to aspects that might relate to new decision making. For instance, in the past when he had seen how rural life was improving, his only thought was how rural work could be improved to advance progress, now such things seemed to have a new significance and implications. The gap had enhanced his wish to make a change. Gradually he felt it more difficult to accept his situation. Eventually Huanbang made the decision. He felt as he had when he was 19, when he would just go ahead and take actions without hesitation, and nobody could stop him. However, this time he had to bear a lot of pressure and to overcome a lot more interference. His resignation letter was not approved by the higher authority. He wrote five times before finally his application was approved. During that process, his boss talked to him many times in order to change his mind, but all such persuasion did not work with him.

Quitting his official job and going back to agricultural activities was an important milestone in Huanbang’s life career. Without the spark of enlightenment that came through his intimate interactions with Jinchun, Huanbang would probably never have touched upon the idea of quitting the job, since his job was esteemed and the dream of most local people and he had taken all this for granted. The decision was not taken immediately but while it incubated he looked around him with new eyes and assessed the trade-off in making such a decision. Eventually he carefully made the decision. The job brought perks. For example, his son could also get an official job (a policy at that time in China), and ‘live on state grains’. Thus, in making such a serious decision, he was definitely not only thinking of his own political career, but also the future of his son. However, the immediate family pressures and the attraction of a new life style prioritized over the various kinds of future ‘probable’ benefits.

### **Zhao Zengyuan, who wants solid food rather than porridge**

Yuangang Village. Born 1950. Household includes wife, an adult son and an adult daughter. Contracts 14.5 mu of mountain land, has 3.6 mu of arable land in three plots.

### *Money for peanuts*

At the end of the 1970s, a few years after Zhao Zengyuan married, he constructed a new house and had his first child. His expectations far exceeded his income. In his words, “Consuming salt and oil for the lamp, wearing clothes and shoes all cost money”. The political environment at that time was still collective farming. The brigade system had not collapsed yet, and most of the farming was still centrally organized and arranged by brigade cadres. For instance, hard work could only earn the equivalent of 0.5 to 0.6 yuan a day in work points. Grain for family consumption was distributed by the brigade. According to that standard of distribution, rural families could not be well fed. Zengyuan said, “I did not like always eating porridge, I wanted to eat some solid food (rice or steamed bread). I wanted to earn some money to exchange for grains.” Some others in the village also had a similar idea. They and Zhao Zengyuan had similar ages and were classmates in primary school and they liked to chat with each other in the street when they were free. Since they were confronted with similar life difficulties, one day during their chat, one of them suggested, “When leisure time comes round this winter, why don’t we go out and find some small scale trading to do?” There was not much of a response from them. However, Zengyuan started to repeatedly think about that idea. He realized that there had been a lot of peanut production in his and nearby villages, and he was therefore thinking whether he could do some small-scale peanut trading.

His wife recalled, “Nobody in the village had done so before, they were all extremely worried about such things. However, Zengyuan had been in military service and had more outside experience. I still remember when he first discussed it with me, “Let me go out, and earn some money.” I told him he was not familiar with the way, and nobody would go with him and he told me not to worry, that he would ask my brother to go with him, so they could take care of each other, and they would only do a limited amount of peanut trading so there would be no problem. Finally I agreed with tears in my eyes. At that time, my daughter was only one year old. That first time he was away for seven days and I was worried all the time.” Like this, for the first time Zengyuan went out with his brother in law, and used a barrow and collected 100 kg of peanuts. They walked to Zijingguan railway station 65 km away, and then transported the peanuts to Shanxi Province. Zengyuan had been in Shanxi before and had also heard that Shanxi Province did not produce peanuts, thus he concluded that he might get a good price there. This proved to be true. There were few peanuts in the market there and due to the difficulty of commodity exchange at that time, they obtained a very good price during the first two days, and finally they had some leftover, which was exchanged for millet. They later sold the millet too. Roughly they had earned about 20 to 30 yuan for the first time, and this made them both very excited. Having such a successful experience, many young people in the village were attracted, and those who had not dared to step forward in the beginning, all started trading peanuts from the next year.

Age mates, due to the many things they have in common in a small village, easily form into a group and they share common values and norms and friendship relations, so information readily spreads among them. They usually assemble in free time in the community indigenous arenas, and when one comes up with an idea the pros and cons



are well debated. It is not important for the entire group to agree, and whatever the response the group will feel more supported when implementing ideas. Certain responses lead to reflection and self searching regarding taking initiatives. In this case, interaction between the four young farmers who had been classmates stimulated Zengyuan and contributed to his first venture into small-scale trading.

Action continuously leads to the process of monitoring and self examination that leads to the internalisation of information. At the end of the 1970s, poverty was the general social background. Striving for a livelihood was prioritized on the needs for basic living and security. Many farmers wished to go beyond this but stopped though such ideas were not beyond traditional and cultural norms. The general norm of the entire community was to 'live and work in peace and contentment' (*an ju le ye*), which did not promote social movements nor business and trading operations. Most found it easier to follow the mainstream behaviour when growing up in such a community, and were nurtured in a conservative culture in which parents and older people were the absolute authoritative actors. Zengyuan's military career and experience made a difference. He was familiar with social movements. His rural norms and values had been brought up against urban norms and values. In addition, all his military mates and other he met while away likely had different views and ideas from those of Yuangang Village. In this way Zengyuan's views matured. Moreover, the military *per se* is another kind of social structure. A person normally unconsciously masters the general norms embedded in his/her living environment, so as to maintain his/her identity and establish his/her life strategies. Therefore, we can say that joining the military had already given Zengyuan experience of adapting to new values and norms and this was reflected in his seemingly more adventurous willingness to take the initiative to change his life world.

Obviously, for his initiative, family trust again played a role. When Zengyuan planned to trade peanuts, his wife's concern was for his safety because he was stepping outside of known relationships. His wife believed the trading business would be successful because she trusted her husband rather than because of any rational cost benefit analysis. Such trust provided Zengyuan with emotional support. Due to this taken for granted trust and expectation from family members, Zengyuan was free to orient his action more towards rationality and caution. His compromise to take fewer peanuts on the trip was a concession to trust but it served at the same time to considerably reduce the risk.

#### *From peanuts to more generalised small-scale trade: a risky trip*

From this first time trading venture, Zengyuan engaged in many types of petty trading. By 1989, policy was quite open and Zengyuan went to many places in China. During interaction with petty traders in a Laishui County market he got to know about wool trading. One of them calculated that profit from collecting wool from Shanxi Province would be about 20 Yuan per kg, however, collecting wool from the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region could reach 100 yuan per kg. Zengyuan was excited about the information he had heard. During the evening, he met a trader in a local inn who had come to collect wool, and they chatted congenially. This man proposed that they should go together to buy wool in Inner Mongolia and gave Zengyuan a time to meet him in the Beijing western railway station. Zengyuan went to the station at the arranged time and

spent an entire day looking among the thousands of heads, but could not find the man. Not wishing to give up he stayed overnight in a hotel at the station hoping to find him the next day. That evening he learned that wool from Haila'er city of Heilongjiang Province was of high quality, and when failing to find his friend the next day and not wanting to go back home without anything, he decided to travel to Haila'er city.

Haila'er borders Russia, and Zengyuan found it a snow-white, unfamiliar world. He felt the 3,000 yuan loan under his belt and looked for an inn. He spent from noon when the train had arrived until the evening without finding accommodation. Haila'er was a small boarder city with a large floating population. Accommodation at an inn required an ID card or official letter. This was the first time that Zengyuan had been to such a far away place without thorough planning and he had brought nothing with him to prove his identity. He wandered the streets aimlessly and was worrying about having no way out when he heard a familiar Hebei accent from a group of people in the street. They were indeed from Hebei Province and had come to work in Xing'anling area for lumbering, and were waiting for a train to transport timber. Zengyuan told them his difficulty and they told their innkeeper that he was with them and so he finally had a place to stay. Staying in a remote local inn in winter seemed to have special meaning to Zengyuan. He felt that if he went further, he would be confronted with an unfathomable world. However, he also felt he had come too far to simply give up and go back. He tried to encourage himself. Staying at the inn, Zengyuan met a young man who said he was also a trader. Originally Zengyuan only wanted information on where he could buy wool at a cheap price, but he was persuaded by the fellow's warm behaviour to go with him. He told Zengyuan that in his home village sheep were all over the mountains and gullies, and that he could buy wool there. He asked Zengyuan how much money he had brought with him. Zengyuan's military experience had taught him to be vigilant, and he told the young man he had been a scout in a spy company (military) and had not brought much money with him.

Since Zengyuan knew no-one and had no other information, he went with the young man on the train and then by bus to the man's village. The last 15 kilometres had to be travelled by foot on mountain paths and he saw that the young man had lied to him. There were no sheep, neither was there a good road. The villagers raised horses and donkeys and they were all very tall and behaved boorishly. The first night, Zengyuan bought food and a bottle of liquor and invited the young man and the owner of the house to drink with him. He did this not only to compensate them for his bed, but also to get the house owner's support. After a while, the young man went out, and Zengyuan explained his situation to the house owner. The house owner was bold and uninhibited after drinking Zengyuan's liquor, and said, "Don't worry, I have a firelock with me." Zengyuan began to realise the price he might have to pay for taking a risk and he planned to go back home. It was snowing heavily and was windy and the village had no postal or telephone connection. So he could only write a letter describing his situation and indicating the full address there, and he asked the house owner to mail it for him. The house owner was indeed very loyal to him and rode a horse in the snowy and windy weather to a post office 15 km away to mail the letter. On the third day, the young man invited Zengyuan to eat at the home of an older cousin. While they ate, the cousin winked at Zengyuan and they went outside together. The cousin told Zengyuan that he needed to be careful and not to be cheated by his cousin. Zengyuan told him he had

already realised as much. Some days had already passed and Zengyuan had not been able to buy wool. Later he was told that other local traders had already collected the wool. A showdown was inevitable and he argued with the young man: “Let us make a calculation. I have taken care of all the food and accommodation costs for these days. In addition, I will pay 100 Yuan to you again, then we will have cleared everything between us.” The man received the money without hesitation and Zengyuan, highly relieved, left that same day and walked the 15 km back to take the bus and train home. During his many years of trading, he thought this had been the most risky experience he had undertaken and from then on he was wiser about the risks associated with trading and that information was extremely important.

### **Enlightenment through Other Factors**

In addition to the three factors already analysed, there are many other factors that have been identified as critical to developing initiatives. As already mentioned these include trust; reputation, respect and creditability, hobbies, belief, curiosity about the outside world, financial and other pressures; experience; calculation of risk; visits and study visits to successful cases, enlightenment by seeing the practice of others and consultation etc.

During the stage of implementation of initiatives, self-help and co-operation with others for scarce resources; technology innovation; knowledge from books, magazines, training and study visits; skills and technical capability; and favourable policy government policies may all be important.

The following case allows us to look at some other factors that can contribute to developing initiatives.

#### **Liu Zhenkun: a strategic village cadre**

Nandugang Village. Born 1953. Household includes wife, a daughter, a son and a daughter-in-law. Contracts 70 mu of mountain land, has 7 mu of arable land in eight plots.

Unlike the other cases, which were of ordinary farmers, Liu Zhenkun is a village cadre, and was party secretary of Nandugang Village. The case therefore also provides some historical background in relation to community management and governance.

#### *Early years: experiencing bitterness*

Liu Zhenkun was born into a very poor farming family. Although they were decent honest people and never created trouble they were often bullied and humiliated by others. “In the production team (commune days) there were more than ten households. However, all the heavy and tiresome work was assigned to my parents, work that earned the lowest work points. At the end of one particular year, the production team was settling the final account, and asked my parents for 200 Yuan to balance the deficit in my family’s work points. This amount was an enormous figure and my parents could never have found such an amount, but the head of the production group was very

insistent and came to my home one day. My poor father could only hide in a corner and had no choice but covered his head with his arms. We children were scared and were crying...” When recalling all such past events and memory, Zhenkun could not prevent himself getting excited. In childhood he had experienced the bitterness of being poor. From that time he had made up his mind that when he grew up he had to be better off and not allow others’ to bully and humiliate him. He went to school when he was eight. From grade two his performance was always ahead of others and he was first in his class. His teachers liked him and often gave him pens and notebooks. Sometimes they gave him extra tuition and encouraged him to pursue more challenging objectives. School provided Zhenkun with a warmth he had not previously known. In 1964, the campaign of the ‘four eliminations’ started, and many previous local cadres were forced to leave their positions. At that time, Zhenkun’s uncle was an activist of the campaign that rebelled against the cadres. He had a bad temper and defended the weak and helpless, and attacked many previous local cadres who had bullied ordinary farmers when they had been in power. Being heavily influenced by his uncle, young Liu Zhenkun also joined the ‘rebellion group’. However, the scenario did not last long and with the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the ‘red regime’ that had been overthrown by the ‘rebellion group’ got their power back and Zhenkun was given the label of class traitor. The political movement took precedence over everything. This ‘class’ identity implied that his future life would be full of frustration and obstruction. He met one setback after another and due to his ‘class’ identity he could not be awarded the title of ‘Distinguished Student’ (*san hao xue sheng*) for which he had been elected, and he was not allowed to enter high school. His application to join the youth league that had been approved was then suspended and so on. At that time, Liu Zhenkun was still very young, but he had already made his own judgement about society but had no other choice but to wear a blank expression.

#### *Constraints and frustrations: class struggle*

When Zhenkun was 16 and had graduated from junior high school he could think of no alternative but to work harder and harder in the production team. He was young and strong and earned 5 work points for the first day he came back to the production team. In comparison, others in the same age group and even older than him could earn only three or four work points a day. Poverty had oppressed him from childhood and so to earn more work points, from the second year, he particularly chose the heavy and dirty work that others did not like to do, such as collecting donkey feed, carrying manure to field, and so on. At that time he could collect 200 to 250 kg of donkey feed (grass) per day, a feat that was unimaginable to many others at that time.

Time passed, accompanied by Liu Zhenkun’s sweat. Three years later, when Zhenkun was 19, a platoon of workers in Zijingkuan Township wanted a reporter from Zhenkun’s village. Many people did not want to go because they had been told that a reporter’s life was hard and they had to sleep in the sheep pen. Liu Zhenkun did not care about this and had been looking for an opportunity to see the outside world. He did not expect any opportunities from staying in the production team. He therefore asked to be allowed to go and the head of the production team readily agreed for it solved his problem of whom to choose. The choice brought him great returns. The rumours about the hard work and poor conditions were untrue. The food was much better than at home and the

work was rather easy. He only needed to write some short reports to introduce meritorious deeds. Since he was smart and could act promptly, both the company and the battalion commanders liked him very much and he was soon promoted as reporter for the battalion. Since most of those in the battalion were older than Zhenkun they took special care of him. He stayed in a residential place, ate in the collective dining hall and was given the privilege of sometimes choosing the menu he preferred. When recalling those days Zhenkun's face was full of relaxed smiles.

When young people in his village reached 20, they were able to join the military. He saw this as a way to change his restricted village life. The reporter's job was good but it was short term so when he heard they were recruiting in the village he immediately asked the company commander to let him have some time off. He passed his health test and was accepted. However, at this point the 'class' problem was raised again and the local 'red class' cadres in power did not agree. His uncle was extremely annoyed and wanted to argue and cause trouble for the cadres but Zhenkun calmed him down. He believed that one day farmers would be released and so until then he went back to the labour company again.

When Zhenkun was 21 he had worked in the company for three years. News was received in the village that Yixian County planned to set up a chemical factory, and that the factory would select educated and capable young people from the company to work there. This was another great opportunity for Zhenkun. However, the local 'red class' cadres were worried that if Zhenkun was chosen, the future might not be good for them. Therefore, they issued a certification file with the official village stamp, and asked a young person from the village to go to the company to request that Zhenkun return to the village. The company commander could only say to Zhenkun that he had to go back since they could not provoke those in power. Zhenkun seemed already resigned after all such frustrations, without hesitation he took with him some tens of kilograms of millet given to him by the company and went back to his village.

After returning he was appointed as head of the village militia organisation. He mobilised young people in the village and organised many kinds of exercises and entertainment activities such as singing and dancing. His smooth and ordinary life during that period had made Zhenkun almost forget all the unhappy memories of the past. It was during this time that he met his wife, Zhao Guiyan, who changed his fate and life. Guiyan was the head of village women's union as well as head of village youth league at that time. She lived in Beigou hamlet and she came from a big and influential family. Many members of her extended family had skills in house construction, carpentry, glass noodle processing and so on. Although her family was not in power, they had never had problems and their reputation and influence in the community was relatively strong. Due to their work relationship, Zhenkun and Guiyan became familiar with each other. Zhenkun wanted to join the youth league and Guiyan was the comrade who introduced him. After such frequent contact, they fell in love. However, would Guiyan's family agree to such a marriage? At that time, Zhenkun's family was still very poor, he had many sisters and brothers, his father was an old man whose personality was weak, which was why he was always bullied and humiliated by others. Moreover, the village cadres were extremely worried that Zhenkun might rebel again with the support of Guiyan's family. So they tried to make trouble between Zhenkun and

Guiyan. The village party secretary and head of the production team, together with an uncle of Guiyan tried for a whole evening to persuade her to change her mind. Her uncle threatened “If you do not separate from Zhenkun, we will not allow you to go to the main hamlet (Zhenkun’s hamlet), and you will have to stay at home all the time.” The party secretary threatened her with dismissal from her current position but promised to let her join the party and to give her a good job if she gave him up.

When Zhenkun heard others talking about these conditions he thought there was no future for him and that he would have to remain a bachelor all his life. He was indeed highly frustrated and depressed. But Guiyan had her own ideas and judgement and having made her decision could not be dissuaded. Her family therefore had no alternative but to agree. However they made three preconditions. Firstly, before formal marriage, Zhenkun would not be allowed to visit Guiyan’s family. Secondly, Zhenkun was not allowed to make trouble for the cadres in power. Thirdly, before Guiyan’s family had removed their anger, they were not allowed to visit Zhenkun’s family together. Thus their love finally defeated the prejudice resulting from class struggle and wealth-poverty disparity. Although there were preconditions, both Zhenkun and Guiyan were satisfied. Afterwards, the party secretary did not dismiss Guiyan from her position as he had threatened, and the preconditions were not strictly followed. Guiyan was genial and devoted, and often came to Zhenkun’s dilapidated house and helped Zhenkun’s family. Before the engagement, according to local custom the boy’s family should buy things for the girl’s family but Zhenkun’s family was too poor for that. Zhenkun’s parents often bickered with each other about this and when Guiyan knew the situation, she comforted and encouraged Zhenkun’s parents saying she would not ask anything from Zhenkun’s family. In reality, she often bought things for them.

### *Things start to improve*

When Zhenkun was 23, he planned to marry. Guiyan’s father requested Zhenkun’s family to buy a sewing machine for Guiyan as her dowry, or give 140 Yuan to Guiyan’s family to buy one. After a lot of negotiation, it was reduced to 100 Yuan, but his family was still not able to find the money and in the end Zhenkun had to ask Guiyan if she had the money. She had and so finally they were able to marry. “My wedding was on the same day as Zhang Haiyong’s in my village. He rode a big donkey and his wedding ceremony was indeed ostentatious and extravagant. In comparison, I rode a small donkey and looked shabby and miserable.” When Zhenkun recalled this event, he felt very sad.

Shortly after the marriage, Zhenkun was appointed head of the production team. This arrangement was closely related to his marriage. Firstly, Guiyan’s family was influential in the local community, and the local cadres had to take this into account. Secondly, he had fulfilled the second condition and had caused no trouble for the cadres who therefore had no reason to continue to oppress him. In 1978, Zhenkun’s mother thought that the whole family living together was too great a burden and suggested that the family split up. He and Guiyan received two small dilapidated rooms, four bowls, two small earthenware basins, two small earthenware tanks, twenty kg of wheat and twenty kg of maize, which indicates how miserable life was for them. Guiyan’s mother came to

see Guiyan on one occasion and brought leftovers from glass noodle processing to feed to the pigs. She asked Guiyan, "Do you have grain?" Guiyan did not want to show how poor they were and said that they had. After her mother left, the hungry couple ate the remains that had been brought for the pigs. Zhenkun felt sorry and unfair to his kind wife and repeatedly told her, "I must get better and better, so that you can visit your parents with great honour in the future."

Like one cannot wrap fire in paper, Guiyan's parents realised the miserable life that Zhenkun and Guiyan were experiencing and felt all previous misunderstanding should be harmonised. They had no major grudge against Zhenkun and under these circumstances they decided to train Zhenkun into the special skills of glass noodle processing. Zhenkun rose at two o'clock every morning to go to Beigou hamlet to practise with Guiyan's parents. He came back to his home at daylight to go to the fields.

He engaged in glass noodle processing for about five to six years, and every year, he could earn around 1,000 Yuan. Then in 1978, with the change in national policy, life in rural villages slowly improved. In 1981, the rural contract policy began and in 1982 the village distributed arable land to each household. At that time, every member in the village was allocated 0.5 mu of irrigated land and 0.6 mu of dry land. It was mainly cropped with the staples of maize and wheat. As many other farmers in China after land distribution, Zhenkun was enthusiastic and motivated. He and his wife worked very hard, and although their life was still not easy, they made progress. During those years, in addition to the hard work that Zhenkun was used to, he started to actively and purposely develop his social networks, since the more people he knew, the more opportunities he would have to potentially earn money. The rural economy had been activated, people no longer had to worry that sideline industries or engagements would be regarded as the 'tail end of capitalism.' Zhenkun was not very certain how to develop his social network. But he was a naturally generous and direct person, and was good at talking and his contacts and friends increased. In 1981, recommended by village cadres he became a boiler worker for the military in Hexi, and got to know the commander of Shanxi military sub area, Zeng Yunya. After a period of contact Zhenkun often invited him to have meals at his home.

After working in the boiler room for an entire winter, Zhenkun decided to return home and start cement tile producing. Enlightenment for this project came from a younger cousin, the son of the sister of Zhenkun's mother, Yuan Hongming. Hongming had been for work to Beijing, and found that cement tiles, produced in Laishui and Dingxing County of Hebei province, were a profitable business. So when he returned he discussed with Zhenkun the possibility of starting such an enterprise together. Zhenkun made a rough calculation. One package of cement costing 3.5 to 4 yuan could produce 60 cement tiles. One barrow of sand cost 3 yuan and was enough to produce about 2,000 tiles. They would need to employ four workers at about 30 yuan per month per labourer. Assuming that 1,000 tiles could be produced per day, and the price of a tile was about 0.15 to 0.2 Yuan, then they could gain a gross income of about 5,000 yuan a month. After deducting costs of about 2,500 Yuan the profit was 2,500 per month. What a profit! After such deliberate consideration and calculation, they started immediately and continued for the next five years. They co-operated for the first three years. However, in

1984, cement increased to 11 yuan per package, while the price of cement tiles increased only from 0.15 - 0.32 Yuan. In the meantime, other types of tile affected the market for cement tiles and the business became more and more difficult. Yuan Hongming felt that tile producing required too much effort for too little return and so he returned to Beijing to work as a carpenter again. However, Zhenkun continued for a further two years and gave up only when there was no longer anything to gain, in 1986.

In 1986, Zhenkun was still engaged in farming and during the off-peak season, at the recommendation of his fellow villagers, he went to Baoding City to engage in small-scale trading of vegetables and fruits. This was mainly due to the fact that the family at the time had no other source of income. Moreover, "there was not much to do at home, I saw many villagers from Sanggang village did small-scale trading there. I was very attracted. It happened that my classmate, Sang Shusen, was willing to help to introduce me there, so I went, and I did this for two entire winters." The business for the first year was not very good, "Others could earn more than 2,000 Yuan, and I could only earn about 1,000 Yuan. I was too honest and did not know trading very well." When Zhenkun saw the gap between his earnings and those of others, he thought a lot, "One could only live better and better by accumulating knowledge and enriching experience. If one only stayed in the village without knowing the development and market outside, how could we survive? I had to adapt myself to society's development." In order to make good business, Zhenkun thought he had to learn more about the operation of trading, and furthermore, improve his public relations skills. The ones who sold the most were good at this. Through practice his skills improved and during the second year he knew well the channels for getting market information and for buying items to trade and was now able to earn during the winter months 2,000 to 3,000 Yuan. But it was a hard way to earn a living.

It was indeed hard. Six to seven persons crowded in a room jointly rented, and time was always very tight. They rose at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning to make ready by grouping the different items and putting them into the tricycle, and then departing at 4 o'clock. At 4:30 they must already be in the market to compete for a stand. The early morning market normally ended after 6 o'clock, then they would buy some food such as *youtiao* or steamed stuffed bun to eat. At 7 o'clock, they had to go to the distribution market again to buy things, and be back in the market before 9 o'clock to make things ready again, since citizens usually got off work after 11 o'clock when they would normally buy vegetables. This would continue until 2 o'clock in the afternoon when citizens started their office work again and then they would take a hurried lunch and a nap. When citizens got out from work again at 5:30 to 6 o'clock in the afternoon, that was the peak time for vegetable trading. After that they had to catch the evening market, and sometimes they continued until 11 o'clock in the evening. Zhenkun reasoned that if others could stand it, so could he, but the money earned was not much better than could be earned at home. From the television he learnt that many villages were developing forestry and fruit trees, and some areas that had been reformed early had made great progress. Moreover, the contract environment in his village was good and he felt he would be better off developing forestry at home, where he would not need to get up early and work into the night, and where the income would be more stable. He was optimistic about the future development of rural communities.



## *Rehabilitation*

Thus in 1988, when others were still going to trade in Baoding market, Zhenkun decided to stay at home. That year the party secretary, Zhao Yunshan, had asked Zhenkun to do something for the village, i.e. to be head of a production team. Zhenkun had refused and said he had his reasons. He thought Yunshan was too young and unsure of himself. And he was unlikely to bring any real change. The village affairs were in disorder and nobody was able to manage well. The complications had started from 1986. The village collective land had been distributed for four years and only two forestry farms remained. Zhenkun's father managed one and Liu Zhentong the other. The village committee was unable to continue paying their stipends and was thus discussing selling the two farms. By doing this, the village could clear all its debts, and still have some savings. Sang Dengshan, the then village party secretary bought the forestry farms, but after felling the timber and selling out, the villagers reacted heavily. All expressed strong objections, so Sang Dengshan had to return the forestry farms back to the village collective. In that case, the village again had to take on the management fees, which they continued to owe to Zhenkun's father and Liu Zhentong. Liu Zhentong was certainly not happy with the situation and would not give the forestry farm back to the village until the village had paid him all the outstanding fees. After that a series of conflicts took place over the village collective forestry farm managed by Liu Zhentong bringing the village administration and management to a standstill.

In 1989, the township officials asked Zhenkun's brother-in-law, Zhao Zengfu, to lead the village management. However, Zhao Zengfu was not able to shake off the aftermath of the conflicts over the malpractice over the collective forestry farm. In the autumn of 1989, Zhao Zengfu asked Zhenkun to take responsibility for collecting the electricity fees for the village. Again due to mismanagement over a long period, the village had a deficit of 25,000 yuan. Zhao Zengfu thought that as Zhenkun was capable and also a relative he would ask him to do the job, though in fact he did not expect much from him. Zhenkun deliberated about the electricity affair. Electricity cost 1.2 Yuan per KW at that time, which was not low at all. The deficit was due to three major factors. First, some people stole electricity. Second, some village cadres and their relatives did not pay the electricity fee and three, the collected fees were mismanaged. Some were even spent by the electrician responsible for collecting them. After this analysis he thought he could solve the problems and agreed to take on the task. He had two preconditions. One, he would work independently without interference from the village authority and second, he would submit to the village fees of 0.415 Yuan per KW, according to the standard stipulated by the township electricity management station. If there were a deficit, he would pay the deficit, and if there were a surplus, then this would be his income. Zhao certainly agreed with the conditions. But being a relative, he asked Zhenkun if he was sure he could afford a deficit? They had charged 1.2 Yuan per KW and were still unable to pay the township electricity station the amount they asked. At only 0.5 Yuan per KW, how could he do it. Zhenkun said, "Don't worry about that, you only need to agree with my conditions."

Zhenkun devoted his entire energy to the success of his undertaking. He had the idea of proving to villagers whether the electricity fee could be completely collected or not. He wanted to know where the deficit had gone. Was it because villagers were not willing to

pay or were village cadres incapable? He agreed to sign a contract with the village committee to collect fees for three years. At the moment of signing, Zhao again repeated that he could sign if he did not mind having a loss, but if he did he could not complain to Zhao in the future. Zhenkun planned to conduct this undertaking well. He believed it would not be too difficult to collect the fees, since after all, villagers should appreciate that the price had been reduced from 1.2 Yuan per KW to 0.5 Yuan per KW. The most urgent problem was to prevent stealing, particularly by some of the village cadres and their relatives. Four days after signing, he punished the son of the head of a production team by fining him 60 Yuan. He commented, "Those who violated regulations began to worry about the implications when they could see you were extremely serious." Then Zhenkun discovered an older man in Nanzhuang hamlet was stealing electricity and when he had sufficient proof, he wanted to punish him with a fine of 50 Yuan. However, the older man refused to accept and went to see the village cadres. The cadres told Zhenkun that the man was to be pitied and could he not let the man off on this occasion. Zhenkun was prepared for this and replied, "Yes, cadres are the decision-makers and if you ask me not to punish him, I will not do so." They were dumbfounded. Zhenkun said, "No, I will not. However, according to your logic, stealing electricity is because he is poor, therefore, I will not only let him off this time but also give him 100 Yuan." Zhenkun continued, "But I have a precondition. There are many households who are indeed poor in our village. I suggest that we do not collect the various taxes and levies from them, and moreover, I will have to intercede for them, so you cadres have to search for many development projects for them, so as to help them build a happy life." The cadres eventually understand the hints from Zhenkun's speech, and said, "Fine. We will not interfere, Zhenkun, please do as you think." Afterwards, Zhenkun fined the man 20 Yuan, and patiently explained that electricity involved costs. If they did not pay the fees then the power station would not be able to work, and then there would be no electricity to use. Being poor was not a justification for stealing electricity. Zhenkun's eloquence enabled him to tackle such an issue in a very appropriate manner, by combining punishment with education. Zhenkun not only helped the village to solve a major problem, but he earned a considerable amount of money. More importantly, through his management of the village electricity affair he built a reputation amongst villagers of being a good manager, which created a solid foundation for his future community management career.

### *Things improve*

In 1992, Zhao Hanwen replaced Zhao Zengfu as village party secretary. However, he did not keep the villagers confidence for long. Zhenkun felt that Zhao Hanwen lost their confidence because he lacked an objective understanding and analysis of local problems. Village cadres had to understand villagers and analyse situations. The new cadres were still unable to solve the problems over the collective forestry farm. The situation had deteriorated. A lot of collective property had been robbed and underground elements were involved and a 'serious fight' had occurred.

In March 1993, Hanwen quit and the Township stepped in to re-establish village authority and decided to position Zhang Haiyong as village party secretary and then left him to organise the village administration and management team. However, he was planning to quit, because some villagers were indeed unreasonable and rude. He was

worried that he might not be able to handle affairs. The Township government tried hard to convince him to continue, and the deputy Township party secretary, Shi Wenqi, recommended that Zhenkun be included in the village authority. The success of Zhenkun's engagement in the collection of electricity fee had not only made him well known to the ordinary farmers but Township officials had also heard of his ability. Therefore, Shi Wenqi's recommendation was not so surprising. But Zhenkun was surprised when Zhang Haiyong came in person to Zhenkun's home to invite him to join the village committee. He was also touched because they had not spoken to each other for a long time because of 'class' differences. They had been opponents during the Cultural Revolution. But despite this, Zhenkun did not wish to be promoted to village cadre. The village was very disordered and it would be hard for anybody to manage. Moreover, from his childhood to his marriage, village cadres had treated him very unfairly and being from a 'poor farmer' class, he had not been interested in being promoted in public management. So Zhang Haiyong had no alternative but to report the truth to the Township.

After receiving the report, the Township party secretary, Zhang Guodong came to see Zhenkun. Zhenkun had benefited a lot from him and many of the approaches to dealing with local issues had come from him. During the time was at Zhenkun's home, Zhenkun expressed his complaints. Guodong did not react, just listened. However, as he was about to leave, he said: "Zhenkun, I am going to leave and go back to the township. Before I leave, I want to say a few words to you. Today, you have complained for the whole day, and I have listened to your complaints all day. I know you have your own characteristics, but I do not know whether you have adequate ability or not, neither do I know whether you can do better than others. Others have not done well, if you can do better, you can certainly make complaints. However, if you are not able to do better than others, should you complain to those others, or to yourself? I give you three days to think things over and then tell me whether you will accept or not." At that moment, Zhenkun had nothing to say. How correct he was in what he had said! Three days later, Guodong came again and asked, "Will you accept or not?" Zhenkun affirmed, "Yes, I accept. I will have a trial of three months, after that, if I am capable, I will continue, if not, I will make no more complaints." Like this, Zhenkun was appointed as the Director of Nandugang Village Committee.

### *Success in a political career*

As a Chinese idiom says, a new official takes three strict measures in the beginning (*xin guan shang ren san bao huo*). The same applied to Zhenkun. The village committee had no office, and he was indeed not so sure he could perform well. But he felt the urgent thing was to collect the thoughts and ideas of all villagers, so as to increase the cohesion of the village. He organised a meeting of all the heads of the production teams and asked them to organise village meetings to analyse the village situation and get to know villagers' wishes. Such meetings also provided opportunities for the villagers to get to know the new administration and management team, and to understand village cadres' commitment and determination. Zhenkun felt the cadres should establish confidence and an authoritative reputation. He wanted to set up strict rules and regulation in relation to village administration and management. "The state had laws and the

grassroots level should also have regulations.” Obviously, to win reputation they had to start with the core problem, the forestry farm affair. After serious discussion, the village committee decided to issue public announcements in red papers in the village. The first read ‘Grazing is prohibited in the two Nandugang forestry farms from the date of the issue of this announcement. The one who violates the rule will be punished according to the number of animals.’ Many villagers ignored the announcement in the beginning, and went on grazing as usual. So one day Zhenkun told the forest guards that whoever violated the rule, he or she had to be punished. The same day a grazer was caught and the guard asked him to pay a fine, which he ignored. He went to Zhenkun who quickly organised several persons to enter the forest and take away his goats. Seeing this action, the grazer got worried, and immediately came to Zhenkun for a compromise. Zhenkun said, “As I always said, evil will not triumph over the virtuous (*xie bu ya zheng*). The villagers were all looking at me wondering whether I dared to do such a thing or not. Those who violated regulations did worry if you were extremely serious.”

Zhenkun also realised the importance of improving the ability of village cadres. He stressed efficiency of village administration and management and tried to lead by example, being on time and setting a good example with his own conduct. In the meantime he wanted to prevent village cadres from corruption by mutual monitoring. After seeing such a series of actions villagers were convinced that this time Zhenkun was really determined to get good village management. He thought that local cadres should not pursue private ends such as money and benefits. He wanted to make a success of it for the sake of the Township party secretary, Guodong. When believing they could succeed he and his fellow cadres put belief into actions and became enthusiastic and motivated. Gradually villagers’ views changed. In 1994, the village not only cleared all taxes and levies owed for the previous three years, but also paid all debts owed to individual villagers. Village infrastructure improved enormously. First, a village bridge (on the road from the village to Yixian capital) was constructed, for which the Township provided all the materials and the villagers gave the labour. Secondly, the village electricity grid system was renovated. When recalling such achievements, Zhenkun was very animated and proud of what he had done.

In 1995, due to his misconduct in a loan-related matter, Zhang Haiyong was criticised by villagers. So the Township authority decided to promote Zhenkun as village party secretary, the first decision maker in the village. Zhenkun had been village party secretary now for seven years. No one had ever been in the position for such a long period in the history of Nandugang Village. He had many ideas, and more challenging objectives. He observed that the villagers in Nandugang were dispersed in two southern hamlets and two northern hamlets and that between the south and the north, economic development and household income sharply differed. So Zhenkun started to analyse the causes and tried to find counter measures. Later he realised that what had hindered the economic development of the entire village as well as the communication between the southern and northern hamlets was the Caohe River which divided the village into two areas. Moreover, when there was heavy rain, students from the southern hamlets were unable to attend school for about a month, since the village school is located in Zhucun hamlet north of the river. In order to tackle this problem they need a bridge. Zhenkun gave each member of the team responsibility for certain tasks of mobilising villagers

and arranging for the implementation of construction while he concentrated on applying for funds from the various bureaux and agencies of the county concerned. At that time, not all cadres knew how to apply for available project funds and Zhenkun was no exception in the beginning. However what helped him to succeed could be traced back to 1993.

In 1993, the village was renovating the electricity grid system, changing the electricity meters from the walls of farmers' houses to the electricity poles, to prevent stealing. To make the change, the village had to invite the County Electricity Bureau to check the function of the meters. Zhenkun was the director of the village committee at the time and Haiyong was the village party secretary. They brought a basket of the electricity meters to a County control station themselves. The technicians considered the metres too dirty, and were unwilling to do a check. So Zhenkun and Haiyong used a rag to wipe them clean ending up themselves quite dirty. The head of the station said their boss was to be congratulated for finding such responsible workers. Zhenkun and Haiyong smiled and said: "We are the bosses." The head was very surprised and said as there were such serious people, then he would recommend them to look for some help to completely renovate the electricity wires and poles in their village. Zhenkun and Haiyong asked where to look for such help and he said they should ask the director of the County Electricity Bureau. He believed the director's daughter-in-law was from their village. "You use your legs (to go and see him) and he will use his mouth (to agree)." When they returned, Zhenkun and Haiyong concentrated on that recommendation and although they did not succeed in getting the project supported, they got to know many officers in many county bureaux and agencies, which established a solid foundation for future work. The idea of looking for support for the construction of the bridge had a lot to do with this previous experience.

Zhenkun first went to see the director of the County Water Conservation Bureau, Liu Deyu, whom he knew. Through him he got to know the director of the County Planning Commission, Zhao Yuxi, and learned that he was from Pocang Township, and this made things easier. They agreed to support the project with 20,000 Yuan. Zhenkun said, "The decision makers of the different bureaux and agencies were familiar with each other, but not with me." However, through their recommendations, one by one, he gradually got to know them, such as the transportation bureau, forestry bureau, agricultural bureau, poverty alleviation office, and so on. After such efforts, he was indeed successful and obtained about 100,000 Yuan for the construction of the bridge in the village. He estimated that the funds were nearly sufficient, and while he had been applying to the relevant County bureaux and agencies, other members of the village management team had actively done a lot in terms of mobilising village labour. Zhenkun proudly said, "1995 was the most glorious year. Everybody on the village committee was good at collective management. The villagers were very united. As a result, it only took 90 days from the commencement of the construction to completion. And also the materials such as cement and steel only cost 100,000 Yuan in total, which was far below the 250,000 Yuan budgeted by the County Transportation Bureau."

The newly constructed bridge not only brought great convenience to villagers' life, but also resulted in larger social effects. Due to the wide effects from the construction of the bridge, Nandugang Village was awarded the title of 'Advanced Village' and 'Model

Village'. There were 365 villages in Yixian County, amongst which only 35 were Model Villages. And Nandugang was one of them. Zhenkun was very proud of this award. Model Village, as the name stood for, was supposed to have demonstration effects and therefore many bureaux of the County, many Townships and party secretaries often came to Nandugang for study visits. They (Zhenkun and his management team) also often went to see the achievements of other villages to compare them with theirs and to see how they could improve. "Such study visits enabled us to broaden our views and realise that our village still had a lot of aspects that were behind others," he said. He had many ideas. He felt they would not be able to get rich by depending only on grain production and that afforestation might be an alternative. "Several factors contributed to my great interests in afforestation. First, I was influenced by County policy. Many County meetings had stressed that the Plains area should mainly focus on industrial development and tertiary services, whereas mountainous areas should focus more on forestry and fruit tree development, livestock and medicinal plants. In 1996, the County required that within five years the number of fruit trees in the western mountain area should reach 100 trees per person. Second, we had a large mountain area, and a lot of steep and infertile idle land. Forestry and fruit tree development could be prosperous. The price of timber and fruit was good and storage and transport of dry fruits was not difficult. Third, I learnt from television that chestnuts produced in Tangshan municipality of Hebei Province were mainly exported to Japan and prices could reach 50 yuan per kilogram. I thought chestnut trees were easy to manage, required little pesticide and were very drought resistant. The soil in my village was also suitable for planting chestnut trees. Fourthly, through study visits, I found that some villages were highly developed in forestry and fruit trees compared to my village, and so the idea was generated in my mind."

In order to implement this plan, favourable conditions had to be created. Therefore, in December 1997, under the chairmanship of the village committee and the heads of the production teams, the village collective took back all the previously distributed mountainous land and put it up for auction by dividing it into different lots that could be bid for. As a result, more than 75% of households in the village (from all the four hamlets) contracted mountain land. Zhenkun also contracted about 50 mu. He already had plans for the development of this land and has since planted more than 10,000 poplar trees on this and some other idle land that he later contracted. According to his estimates, in about ten year's time he should get about 50 yuan net for each poplar tree. The total net return seems to him an extraordinary amount. Zhenkun therefore expected that his son would help him in such an engagement. However, he seems not so excited about the project and prefers to work in a vehicle technology school in Shijiazhuang where he earns only about 800 Yuan per month (+/- 90 US\$). This has sometimes created a certain amount of conflict between them.

To further develop the forestry and fruit trees, the village committee decided to construct an irrigation canal, for which the village still had to apply for support. Again through his social network he was able to make the links necessary to succeed in getting support from the concerned County bureaux and agencies.

In 1997 and 1998, the major achievement of the village was the construction of the village primary school. The previous building was in very poor condition and in danger

of collapse, so the County education bureau closed the school. A few people from nearby villages stole desks and stools from the school and under such circumstances, the village committee decided to construct a new primary school, and shifted the location from the east corner to the central hamlet of the village. Zhang Guodong, the previous Township party secretary who was very close to Zhenkun had been moved to the post of Director of the County education bureau, and he allocated 20,000 yuan to support the construction of the school. The County planning commission also agreed to give 10,000 Yuan. Some funds were also raised from levies. In this way, the funds were secured and the construction was later completed on time.

When the 2000 arrived, Zhenkun had been in the position and had worked devotedly for an entire five years. He suddenly felt tired. Some cadres of the village authority had different views on some aspects of village administration and management and villagers were too egalitarian. To make a breakthrough was not so easy. Therefore, he had the idea to quit. However, when he reported his idea to the Township, they immediately rejected his idea and the Township party secretary, came to Zhenkun's home on several occasions to convince him. The idea therefore died in its infancy.

If he accepted to do things, he wanted to do them better. This has always been Zhenkun's style. In 2001, under Zhenkun's insistence, Nandugang village installed cable TV, which was a great deed in the local area. He thought it would be a way for villagers to improve their technical skills and learn more about the law. In addition he felt that having their own station would bring villagers closer. Making announcements would be easier than using loudspeakers as previously had been the case and which is normal for many villages in China. Village cultural and entertainment life would also be enriched. Therefore he was determined to install it, even though some villagers disapproved, he was sure they would appreciate his decision in the future.

#### *Looking back on his career*

Zhenkun's career has to certain extent been complex and can be seen in three stages. Before his marriage, for 'class' related reasons, he had little opportunity to make a career and was constantly frustrated in his undertakings. The second stage is from his marriage to 1989, when he started to be responsible for collecting the village electricity fee, due to the influence and good reputation of his wife's family. The third stage shows his career progressing very smoothly, and his family's prosperity growing to become one of the more prosperous in the village.

From 1964 to 1977, Zhenkun's career clearly reflected the political environment of the time. The decision to join the rebel group was due to his uncle's influence but also propelled by his own experiences of his family's poverty and the humiliations suffered by his father. It left him with negative feelings towards local cadres from an early age and he readily joined a group that tried to rebel against the system. He paid a heavy price for many years. His marriage with a respected family would alter this for him, a fact that the cadres were well aware of. It is the reason why they tried to use their authority to prevent the marriage. They failed but nevertheless were able to tame him by obliging him to make compromises. Such compromises however enlarged Zhenkun's room for manoeuvre in the community.

His early life experiences also led to a determination to earn money and get out of poverty, even to become better than others. Therefore he devoted great energy to achieving at school and later by working hard at whatever opportunities were presented to him. His shabby and miserable wedding and his straitened life situation after marriage strengthened his desire to take initiatives in household livelihood development. His wife's support greatly encouraged him in his economic initiatives. He was determined that she would "be able to visit her family with great honour in the future." His marriage also brought resources in terms of technical skills and he made best use of these.

In 1981, he was highly motivated by the land distribution laws and the opening up of rural markets and trading opportunities. The stigma of 'tail end of capitalism' type activities was slowly disappearing and more and more opportunities for earning money were opening up. Zhenkun's attitudes towards authority were also changing.

In 1988, when other small-scale farmer traders repeated their trading actions, Zhenkun took a completely different way. The factors that had contributed to the development of his new initiatives were threefold. First, the media was of great influence on knowledge and attitudes. Zhenkun learnt from television that many villages had already made great progress and this changed his ideas on the possibilities for the development of rural communities. This was reinforced by the political climate, which made it possible to contract land. Thirdly, his experience of petty trading in Baoding had been profitable but required too much effort. This made him focus more on the new opportunities opening up at village level for the pursuit of economic returns and long-term development objectives.

Being commissioned to collect electricity fee for the village was an opportunity for Zhenkun to make a milestone in his development career. It gave him an opportunity to build a reputation in the community. With this and the reputation already built at the Pocang Township level he now had a foundation for his future career of political engagement. There were important and significant others who were part of this development such as Zhang Guodong. Such significant others can be considered a kind of stimulus to an actor's development, though it had been Zhenkun's own ability that had made Guodong confident about promoting his political career.

During his position as director of the village committee, Zhenkun was under great pressure. His desire not to disappoint Guodong led him to undertake the measures needed to bring order to the chaos then prevailing in the Village. He showed that pressures can also be transformed into a kind of dynamic and this led him to fully commit himself to the work.

After he was in the position of the director of the village committee, the event of 'checking the electric meters' in 1993 led him to more ambitious initiatives. He had broadened his political contacts, which created a solid social foundation for their implementation. Later Zhenkun was promoted to village party secretary and first decision maker of the Village because of his good work performance. Each success not only brought personal reward but also enhanced and strengthened his social network.



The construction of the bridge made the Nandugang a model village in the County, and this had further broadened the contacts and associations of the village with the outside. Study visits showed that there was great potential in forestry and fruit tree development in the future. The mountain land was the only collective property remaining to the village and as village party secretary he organised this to be auctioned off. Individuals would in the future gain from this and he could also fulfil the County requirement to promote the development of these mountain areas. Zhenkun decided to take the initiative of forestry and fruit tree development on the land he himself contracted.

It has also to be noted that his position brought more financial gain than the four yuan per day stipend he received. His position had invisible assets. Due to his working relations, he became familiar with many powerful bureaux and agencies in the County. Without their help he would not have been able to obtain a certificate for Xu Zaoquan's engagement in mine business in the village to purchase explosives and neither would he have obtained income and commission fees by joining shares in the ironstone mine and calcite mine. In terms of invisible assets, one must also include respect, trust, reputation and self-realisation of usefulness.

The above three detailed cases and selected parts of the other two cases elucidate the empirical processes of the development of multifarious farmer initiatives. Within such processes, many factors are interlinked and mutually influence each other, and function jointly to contribute to the strategic generation of ideas, the consolidation of social relations, and the continuous shaping of these initiatives through social action. These factors include social networks, information, and interaction. Through the functioning of these critical factors, farmers become enlightened, and thus many kinds of development initiatives emerge. Hence, farmer development initiatives are processes of farmer's enlightenment. The analysis of the empirical processes of various kinds of farmer's development initiative leads to the drawing of conclusions relating to the initiatives *per se* as well as to the identification of certain critical factors. These conclusions are discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 8

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### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This chapter brings me back to the research questions formulated at the beginning: Why have certain rural actors developed particular initiatives whilst others have not? How are farmers' initiatives incubated and shaped in their community and household practice?

#### **Why Difference – the Cause of Change**

From a general macro point of view, rural communities are heterogeneous, that is, they present differences in respect to physical, social, economic, cultural and organisational aspects. From a micro point of view too, they are internally heterogeneous. Observations on Chinese rural communities likewise indicate patterns of internal social stratification that divide the village population into different actor groups. These groups have been variously labelled the social and political *elite*, the innovative, expert, or better off farmers, farmer cadres, poor farmers, and so forth. Although social origin and family background can have a strong impact on life careers, differences emerge in the extent to which farmers take various kinds of initiatives in managing their resources and take opportunities to reshape and improve their livelihoods. All rural actors possess some potential for initiating change and by doing so they may affect the life chances of other people. It is in this sense that we can talk about the ubiquity of agency. But why then do some farmers undertake development initiatives, whilst others do not? Or why are some farmers successful in realising their potential innovative agency, while others are not?

With such questions in mind, I selected twenty farmers with one or more development initiatives, developed by realising one or more kinds of potential innovative agency as cases for further study. Their initiatives were in agricultural activities, vegetable cultivation, forestry and fruit tree planting, livestock raising, outside temporary wage labour, local production enterprises, small-scale mining, petty trading, local tertiary services, animal slaughter, transport, contracting work on local commission for infrastructure development, and in community village administration. After identifying the innovative farmers, their life histories and careers were examined in relation to their household and community development. This gave an opportunity to study why and how the multifarious farmer initiatives were developed, generated and ongoingly shaped.

It is commonly assumed that physical and human capital will play an important role in the development of a career. It seems obvious that these are the critical components. However, they are underpinned by an assortment of other social and organising elements.

In the research community, as in many other rural communities in China, arable land is evenly distributed to each household according to the number of family members. This means that each farmer has roughly the same amount of farmland for his or her subsistence needs. In addition, the distribution takes into account the different quality of land, so that each family has equal access to farmland plots of good and not such good quality land in terms of physical conditions and soil fertility, irrigation and other kinds of facilities. Of the middle quality land area, the community keeps in reserve 5% for future minor adjustments in response to the increase or decrease of household members. This again ensures that households have an equal share of farmland. The mountain land was evenly distributed to households in the early 1980s but was taken back into collective ownership in the 1990s following depletion of tree stocks without replanting by some families. The land was divided into plots that were then contracted out by community auction. Thus around 80% of households in the community have mountain land of around 20.2 mu. The community shares equally the utilisation of other kinds of natural, physical and social resources such as water and irrigation facilities, transport, school, health dispensary and so on. Government credit stations exist but farmers can now rarely obtain credit from them. Informal credit is active. In summary, farmers in the research community share similar physical capital. Differentiation must therefore come from activities other than arable farming.

With reference to human capital, again there is little difference in the formal educational levels between the 20 selected farmers and the community average, which is just below the completion of junior high school. In addition to formal education, farmers have equal access to the training and community learning organised by certain County or Township technical agencies, though in recent years these have barely functioned. Thus comparing the selected case farmers with other farmers in the research community who have not taken significant development initiatives, I conclude that there are no major differences between them in terms of human capital, or physical and educational and other local facilities that they possess or have access to.

We need therefore to consider a wider range of elements. As the twenty in depth case studies reveal these elements include social networks, information, enlightenment from interactions, trust, reputation, respect, creditability, experience, consultation with others, self-help and co-operation, favourable government policy, interests and hobbies, beliefs, curiosity about the outside world, pressure, and so on. One might sum these factors up as coming under the umbrella of, or as belonging to the sphere of social capital.

Of course I do not underestimate the importance of physical and human capital in the implementation of different development initiatives. However, it is easy to understand that when a farmer is well equipped with good physical and human capital he or she is not necessarily able to generate strategic development ideas, and consolidate the ideas into plans for action. In comparison, when a farmer has adequate social capital, such as well established and extended social networks, information continuously received and updated, active interaction with others and with the wider society, and has trust and credibility, then he or she is more able to generate new creative and strategic ideas to put into initiatives. Social capital is thus the mobiliser.

### **How Social Capital Works – the Processes of Initiatives**

From a micro point of view, this research has shown that the development initiative process is not simple. It is a dynamic process associated with many factors, but the most critical factor has been shown to belong to the sphere of social capital. As mentioned, these include social networks, information from various sources, enlightenment from interactions, trust, respect, reputation, interest, belief, curiosity, experience, consultation with others, self-help and co-operation, favourable policies, cost-effectiveness calculations, technology innovation, knowledge, skills and technical capability, and so on. Moreover the initiative process and social capital are developed under particular social conditions. This is a dynamic and recursively-evolving circle. The operation of social networks is based on certain mechanisms of trust, values and norms. During interaction, particular values and norms will be employed consciously or otherwise to sustain the existence and operation of particular social networks, giving actors openings for obtaining social and other resources from their networks. Moreover, it is the interweaving and interplay of the various factors that create social capital and this therefore cannot be reduced to a simple formula of kinship, cultural beliefs, normative frameworks, particular institutions and organisations etc.

The research has revealed that social capital is a composite factor and interwoven with other factors that jointly contribute to the initiative process. Any one farmer's initiative will have been generated, consolidated and implemented by some of these factors functioning together. No single factor can work in isolation and lead to the entire process of a certain kind of initiative. For instance, an initiative in small-scale trading can be generated due to the enlightenment from interaction with other actors, usually those within the social network of the farmer. Through their own and through the social networks of others in the network, farmers are able to obtain relevant information and mobilise needed resources. After an idea is generated, then a farmer may need to consult close family or relatives so as to consolidate the idea into a plan for action. Consultation will be based on kinship trust. During the implementation stage, the farmer may need to integrate previous experience and to co-operate with other farmers and again kin or geo-related trust will be an element. Additional information and knowledge can also be obtained from the media, (study) visits, local markets and temple fairs, and so on. All these factors function in a co-operative manner and jointly contribute to the process of a small-scale trading initiative. That is, they are all integral to the process. On the other hand, the generation of ideas does not automatically and necessarily lead to the commencement of consolidation into action, nor to the implementation of initiatives. These three stages do not necessarily take place spontaneously or consecutively. In between there may be many conditions relating to other factors that need to be fulfilled.

### **Human Agency**

Different initiatives often represent the different milestones in a farmer's career. These milestones are often the breakthrough points in the farmer's development. Such points have been referred to as 'springboards' to further progress. Each development initiative involves strategic decision making with significant implications in terms of choice and interaction mechanisms. The process of development initiatives is a dynamic one, which mainly stems from human agency and the changing societal environment. The farmer's own agency is the primary motive leading to strategies for action, and the changing

societal environmental is the essential aspect resulting in the continuous adjustment of strategy, during the process of which the strategy becomes increasingly structured.

## **Social Networks**

Social networks are a critical factor in the development of an initiative. They interlock with many of the other factors. The major kinds of networks in the research community were described in terms of the three connections of blood, geo-space, and profession, in other words kinship, friendship, and fellow villager networks and occupation-related networks. Such networks are the fibres of social capital that can bring considerable economic and political advantage or benefit to actors.

Networks are continuously being shaped and reshaped. Firstly, when a social network is established, the accompanying social norms, rights and commitments will be simultaneously created to sustain the running of the network. Here 'norms' are not kinds of written regulations or contracts, but are about practical fairness and mutual benefit. If the rights and commitment system cannot be secured, the social network will not function. Usually the actors will need to take measures to sustain their social networks as well as to obtain social resources from them. In practice, while fulfilling their other commitments, individuals within a social network may deviate from the requirement of social norms, which will result in their permanent or temporary exclusion from the network. Secondly, within a social network, there exists a kind of instrumental discrepancy pattern. Unless built on some kind of trust, most social networks will gradually weaken, loosen, split, or disappear due to the lack of instrumentally repeated action. Certainly when beginning a new activity or entering a new social environment, new social networks will be naturally and at times strategically and instrumentally built. This was witnessed in the case of many initiatives. For instance, when a farmer is involved in fruit tree cultivation, expert farmers in the community and nearby communities may be the important actors in the farmer's social network, or subject or profession-related social network. When the farmer shifts his/her engagement into petty trading, his/her former social network will be gradually weakened due to less instrumental operation, and then trading partners will become the more important actors in their social network. Hence, a social network is a dynamic and changing element. The mechanisms that sustain the different nodes in a social network are norms, commitment and a kind of relationship of trust and dependence on each other. Networks also change in the wake of societal change, and can be weakened or vanish due to non-operation for a long time, but can also be enhanced and expanded due to intensive operation.

'The more people you are familiar with the easier you can get things done', so a Chinese saying goes. And whether a social network is extensive, small, strong or weak will directly affect the resource flow within the network in both quantity and quality. On the other hand, a social network has the function of self-multiplication similar to that of natural biological multiplication. When two actors come together, there is the possibility that the nodes in one actor's social network will connect with the nodes in the other actor's network, thus broadening the networks of both. Information, which is then filtered and assessed through previous experience and existing knowledge, will then flow and be disseminated through such bridging points. The larger the bridgehead the

better the flow and accumulation of information through interactions at the interface between different actors' life worlds and the various nodes in the network, which in the meantime get transformed into social capital.

The distribution and possession of resources are the critical factors that affect the position and decision making of those involved in interactions within a network. Therefore, when we study social networks the flow and possession of resources within the network is a subject for analysis. The development and enhancement of a social network necessarily involves interaction among individual actors in the network, through which they achieve their objectives and satisfy their needs. If such a kind of mutually beneficial and win-win situation can be sustained, the individual actors will continue interacting. If this cannot be sustained to a certain extent, interactions amongst those in the network or parts of it will be reduced or ended. Such a mutually beneficial and win-win mechanism is a generally recognised and accepted indicator, or becomes a taken-for-granted indicator developed during the process of interaction and co-operation.

As an important social event, marriage greatly contributed to the establishment and expansion of kin based networks, the most basic social networks in rural communities. Marriage will often bring many changes to an actor's life environment and content. Historically and today, the strong influence of a powerful family or lineage in rural communities is evident, as well as the significant implication of marriage in an actor's career development. From a sociological point of view, marriage is not only an action or decision that purely relates to the couple, but importantly, has a wider social impact. Marriage to a certain extent will lead to a redistribution of resources (both physical and social) between families and more generally in local communities.

Farmers engaged in the same occupation (such as fruit tree cultivation, livestock raising) or belonging to the technical *elite* or expert farmers often group into indigenous technical subject related networks. Within such networks, frequent interactions take place aimed at experience exchange and information sharing, which greatly facilitates indigenous community learning and the accumulation of an individual actors' knowledge and experience, the enhancement of their technical capacity and the building of trust. In addition, such technical subject-related social networks often go beyond the boundaries of one community, perhaps involving several nearby communities and beyond, thus facilitating the articulation of local communities and the refreshing of information in each community.

The special position of an actor as leader in a community may provide many opportunities and resources. As one said, being the village party secretary is real wealth and a kind of invisible asset, since through official work, one often has more opportunity to encounter information from the outside and to develop a broader social network. He or she becomes a broker or gatekeeper with privileged access to outside networks of people and knowledge. Also as an invisible asset, is the respect, trust and self-realisation of usefulness that goes with the position.

Finally, the study brings out the significance of local markets in relation to social networks. Local markets provide a physical arena and opportunities for farmers and

other actors to meet and interaction in various ways. As a result, the local market can facilitate the establishment of particular networks and enhance or extend those already established.

## **Information**

Information plays a critical role in decision making and the development of initiatives. During the research, some farmers said that through making efforts they had the possibility to acquire a certain amount of funding, however, without information, they would have not known where or how to invest the funds. Currently the channels through which information is gathered are indeed diverse. The main sources of information come from social networks, especially of outside friends and relatives, from interaction during chats and visits, from information and experience exchange in community indigenous arenas, from the community technical *elite* and expert farmers, from the media and books, study visits and training courses, rural markets and temple fairs, and from technical agencies and research institutes, and so on. As mentioned above, information, social networks, interaction and trust are interlocked.

During recent years media services have been developing rapidly and television coverage has been greatly extended. Some television programs are indeed welcomed by farmers, such as the mostly agricultural programs on CCTV 7. Moreover, the fact that farmers get to know in this way a lot about events happening outside, has brought implications for the life contents and life style of local people.

In this research, almost all the case farmers indicated the importance of going to local markets or temple fairs. The local market is not only the physical facility for exchanging and transacting commodities, but also importantly, it is the place where information concentrates the most intensively in rural areas. It is thus a sort of 'information exchange centre' for local inhabitants. Many farmers obtain the information that serves as the basis for decision-making from local markets. Farmers seek needed information at the market, and also disseminate their own there, creating a two-way flow. Without the local market some kinds of information would simply not flow. By going to rural market or temple fairs, farmers not only broaden their ideas and views, but also can search for and find better development opportunities. Many farmers pay great attention to the rural market, and intentionally and actively utilise the roles they play. Local communities are usually to some extent physically scattered, and enjoy a small society kind of life. Only on market or temple fair days, do local people from surrounding communities come together. It takes only a few people from a community to attend to ensure that information is collected and disseminated throughout the home communities.

While the importance of going to local fairs and rural markets to a farmer and a rural community's development is substantial, we should also recognise the importance of the rural market to a community's external economic development. Normally a rural community's interaction with the outside is limited. Under the traditional system of a centrally planned economy, going to rural markets and rural markets *per se* was a kind of stimulation and activation of market awareness. Outside traders also benefit from local markets. There has emerged a circle which has enhanced the role of rural markets,

i.e. farmers going to rural markets, obtaining information and marketing products – outside traders noticing the existence of and paying more attention to rural markets.

Experience provides knowledge also, especially while doing migrant work. There are many examples of this in the thesis. Farmer's thinking is oriented to the long term and geared therefore to searching for other and longer-term development aims. Much of this may be incidental but sometimes an actor's engagement is specifically for information gathering of a particular kind. For instance, one actor was very active in applying to be the village bookkeeper, since he thought he could obtain more information and other social resources in this way, and certainly could extend his social network. However, when his expectations were not fulfilled and that much of the daily work brought little information or other resources, he quit.

Judgement concerning the reliability of information is important for undertaking initiatives. Information received from family members or relatives is usually seen as reliable because of kinship trust. Likewise information obtained from expert farmers with good technical reputations. Moreover, the farmer's own experience and skills will directly affect the efficiency and effectiveness of information gathering, which largely still relies on oral channels in rural communities - a kind of 'cable' communication. The information gathered is sometimes dependent on the travelling 'routes' of the disseminator, and the more the 'routes', the more the potential bridging points at the encounters along the routes, and the larger coverage of information. The internalisation of information is essential to the generation of development initiatives. By this I mean the digesting and attuning of information to past experience and assessing its trustworthiness. Knowing the reliability of the source and the nature of the network relationships through which it comes are mechanisms for internalising information. Through mutual transactions, through encounters in the market and with other networks and through reflection of one's own and the conduct of others one is continuously conducting an exercise of internalisation. It is a part of taking initiatives and includes the process that generates the motives and dynamics for action.

### **Encounters - Interface - Interactions**

Farmers in rural communities are not isolated. They frequently encounter other social actors at the nodes or interfaces in and between networks that themselves are being shaped and reshaped through interaction. It is at these points of encounter – interface – interaction that others can influence action which in turn is internalised and integrated into the actor's daily life and actions. This is also a process of enrolment. Enrolment also has a socio-political and discursive meaning. People are drawn into others 'projects' (enterprises etc.). The research highlights how many initiatives were generated and further developed through enrolling and being enrolled by others during an enlightenment process through interaction in various social networks and arenas.

In practice, farmers' interactive learning should be facilitated and supported. In some rural communities, farmers and the technical *elite* do organise their own training courses. And as in this research, development intervention can help rural communities to set up community libraries and organise farmers' visits to rural experienced farmers' practices, so as to promote indigenous interactions and learning.



Peer group networks, linked through geographical location, occupation and age, are important. Such groups can be regarded as informal organisations, sustained by common norms and friendship relations. Ideas and information can be quickly disseminated through them. Interactions often spontaneously take place in a rather free manner in community indigenous arenas, the common places for people to meet and when peers suggest ideas the ensuing debate may encourage or dissuade friends from implementing ideas. From such debate certain enlightenment may emerge whereby the actor can further analyse and reflect upon development undertakings. Similarly the attitude of family members, especially of a spouse, can sometimes play the key role in developing and implementing an initiative. The extent of the influence by family members depends on their position and experience but consultation with family members is usually a precursor to action.

Finally, conflict in the community can also play a role in development dynamics and initiatives. Conflict can be regarded as a natural process that will inevitably be a part of community dynamics and where conflict can be resolved it can be transformed into a stimulus for change and the development of initiatives.

### **Trust**

This research has revealed the importance of trust to the development of initiatives, especially kinship trust and family trust, and reputation, respect and creditability. Trust is closely associated with the working of social networks. It is trust that is the mechanism built into social networks that sustains their continuous operation, not the law or contracts in rural communities. People are used to offering insurance for their actions and behaviours by staking their reputation and personalities on it. It is a form of social resource or capital built upon personal knowledge built through geo-spatial and other relationships described throughout the study. When people make decisions to undertake initiatives trust will always be a consideration in its implementation and outcome. People take care to protect their reputations and the trust they have built in their relationships.

Currently in rural areas, trust is mostly built on kinship and geo-connected relations including geo-connected occupational /professional connections. But in the wake of the advancement of community development and the opening up of rural communities, social networks based on such trust mechanisms are changing too. People are beginning to establish and sustain their initiatives through modern intermediaries and contracts in order to secure the resources needed to achieve their objectives.

An actor with a good reputation implies that they will also have a certain authority within networks. Such actors are important to the continuity and operation of the network, making it easier for them and others to mobilise resources, and achieve success in loan applications for example. Special knowledge, skills and technical capability help to build trust, reputation and creditability in rural communities.

### **Knowledge, Experience and Skills**

Knowledge is the critical ingredient to the entire process of farmer development initiatives. Knowledge and experience influence decision-making, as this is often the basis for assessing the credibility of information. Here experience includes both the direct and indirect kind gathered from others or from books and magazines etc. Both direct and indirect experience is a reference for decision making. For the initiators in this study, experience also includes the social networks established in other social environments during migrant labour or in periods of military service that can be resuscitated and utilised when needed. In rural communities, many farmers have such experiences and networks, and the data shows their importance for later careers. These experiences broaden their views and ideas. Such experience is usually a good opportunity for an actor to become acquainted with other areas of the country and it brings them in contact with other cultural norms and values, including urban values that are likely to be different from rural customs and values. All such experience opens up different kinds of concepts and information than those met in the home community, thus adding to the actor's maturity and gives the actor knowledge of a variety of social structures and institutions. One normally takes for granted the general norms embedded in one's living environment, but encountering other values and norms broadens the understanding of one's own physical and social surroundings and thus helps to shape and maintain identity. We can say in effect that working outside or joining the military reflects a kind of initiative that shapes the actor's life world.

Much knowledge comes from practice. The research indicated that in reality farmers' learning by participating in training courses during their leisure time was very limited. This is not only due to the quality or quantity of training opportunities provided, but also due to the fact that farmers are not enthusiastic about participating in training. In addition, many training courses are conducted in very traditional ways, using one way teaching rather than two-way communication. There is a lack of genuine participation between trainers and trainees, and farmers tend to learn more from fellow farmers and the community technical *elite*, in an indigenous manner. On the other hand, farmers' views and attitudes towards this aspect is changing too. Joining education and training courses helps farmers to establish a kind of 'expert' status in the community. Moreover, participating in outside training courses while not so significant for the individual, may have significant implications for the community's development, enabling exchange and interaction between the community and the outside world. Where participants include the community cadres in training in relation to new policies and law this should contribute to community administration and management. The Chinese traditional mechanisms that have sustained the operation of rural communities are the rulings of men (and women), meaning the force used to sustain social order has not been the law, but the historical tradition of 'people relations' and etiquette. However, in the wake of the weakening of such ties in rural society as well as the strengthening of independent management (villagers' self-governance), many problems related to administration and management have emerged.

Some farmer hold to the Chinese saying that 'when a tree is moved from one place to another it will die, but when people move they get more life' (*shu nuo si, ren nuo huo*), in other words they will benefit from experience. Participating in study visits gives a farmer the opportunity to compare his own situation with those of others. Development practitioners are recommended to provide farmers opportunities for outside study visits,

and information through media and training courses for farmers to fill gaps in their knowledge and thus help them to generate new kinds of development initiatives that go beyond current and closed life circles. Lay farmers like to follow the principle that 'seeing is believing' (*yan jian wei shi*) and when expert farmers try something first and it works, other farmers will take it up. Many examples in the cases also demonstrated the value for farmers in following the successful initiatives of others. This reduces the risk factor for those who are less adventurous or knowledgeable. In this respect, the cultivation sites of the technical *elite* and expert farmers are kinds of intermediary stations for rural technology extension and accumulation.

### **Interests, Belief, Curiosity, and Pressure**

The data reveal that factors such as pressure, hunger, looking for improvement, interest, curiosity about the outside world, etc. serve as primary, original and natural motives for actors in the process of their development initiatives.

Many have long historical memories of hard times in their communities. These influence present behaviour and although they may circumscribe choices taken where political implications are involved, as we have seen this can be a powerful motive to seek better life chances,.. As one farmer said, "Being poor oppressed me from childhood...when I grew up, I had to be better off, and would not allow others to bully and humiliate me." These life pressures moulded his internalised beliefs and values and had great influence on his future behaviour. He developed strong and urgent objectives to 'earn money' and become 'better than others' and devoted great efforts and commitment to learning and work. Education and personal interests play an important role in initiatives and can contribute to confidence building after failure. Sometimes development undertakings are repeated due to interest satisfaction and the desire for knowledge rather than profit.

Without stimulation the sameness of the social environment can give rise to feelings of 'no alternatives and boredom'. This too can be a powerful stimulus for young people to explore opportunities outside and to look for opportunities at home. During recent years many farmers have experience as migrant workers. The reasons are manifold. Among them is the improvement of farmers' living standards and improved efficiency of agricultural production. As a result, there has been a surfeit of agricultural labour, especially among the young. Normally young people have received comparatively better formal education than their parents, and have also received more new ideas and information. Therefore, when they are unable to continue in education after junior high school level they normally like to move outside their own communities to make a living, partly out of a sense of curiosity and adventure and partly because it is no longer so essential for them to stay in the community to engage in farming. This has created a condition under which young people are encouraged to look for opportunities outside. And this is now not as difficult as in the past. Farmers can now also get to know what is happening outside because with the considerable improvement of the living conditions of farmers since the rural reforms, television and other media related equipment is present in many households. Movies and media have brought to them completely new lifestyles outside their communities, which are very attractive to young people.

## **Self-help and Mutual Co-operation**

In developing initiatives, many farmer actors have engaged in certain modes of self-help and co-operation with others in their social networks, mainly for obtaining scarce resources such as labour, monetary capital, information, knowledge and skills, and so on. Although farmer organisations with formal regulations are rare in rural communities in China, there are many kinds of informal organisations for self-help. This often aims at learning from other's strong points to offset what one lacks oneself. But farmers are selective in choosing co-operating partners since such arrangements can be unstable and affected by external changes, which might affect the economic benefits of the different parties, leading parties to withdraw. Instead of strict rules or contracts, such arrangements have their own internal norms, controls and balance mechanisms to sustain them and ensure continuity of operation. Trust is the most important of these mechanisms, particularly kinship trust. If benefit sharing is not well balanced between actors, compromises may be necessary and this can lead to conflict and the termination of co-operation. Many of the farmers in the community are involved in such arrangements and jointly share contracts on forest areas for example or join resources to initiate enterprise activities. Such arrangements are usually based on existing social networks. In many cases, the co-operating partners are relatives or neighbouring farmers and thus based on reputation and kinship or geo-connected trust. Co-operation in rural Chinese communities is important since the economic means of operation in households is indeed small scale. Mutual self-help is therefore based on a certain parity of social and economical conditions, where households confront similar problems. Many of these problems can only be solved by collective or group action. However, co-operation normally only takes place for the production stage, whereas there is rare co-operation for the stages of pre-production and post-production, such as marketing.

## **Rationality and Long-term Orientation**

Before engaging in certain development undertakings, most farmers in the study look at risk and cost-effectiveness. Some do this in a rather formal and explicit manner in terms of mathematical and written forms, but they are also done in less explicit ways without giving clear expression to their reasoning. My research has shown that farmers' choices are based on factors other than those defined in purely economic or profit maximisation terms, but by a kind of bounded rationality that takes into account all relevant factors and circumstances. However, from the economists' point of view, the modes of co-operation not only affect production efficiency, but also directly affect production profit. In reality, farmers are not fully aware of such correlations, but they do have their own standards. They think that earning money is certainly important for improving their living standards and it is a significant factor in their decision making. However, sustaining relations with other actors in their social networks is equally important since nobody can be certain as to when they will be confronted with difficulty and thus need the help of others in the future. Contrary to popular belief farmers not only have short-term objectives in mind when planning initiatives, with other aims besides the economic. For instance, most farmers are aware that the only present return from mountain land, is to collect firewood. Benefits will certainly only be long term.

## **Favourable Policy**

The new policy changes and the consequent opening up of rural China have impacted upon and shaped the opportunities for farmer initiatives. This has not always been positive since the power of central policy can cut off certain choices. When actions conflict with state policy, and no intermediary strategy can be found to reconcile the situation, then it is the individual actor's interests that will normally be sacrificed. Such policy changes in China have brought radical change to current community arrangements. This will inevitably imply a redistribution of the current pattern of benefit sharing. Such intervention can be a good opportunity for some group of actors, and can mean a loss to others, giving rise to competition.

Of course although in this thesis I have argued that the endogenous, 'born from within' paradigm is central to change and development, this is not to deny that outside intervention sometimes plays an important role in facilitating change in communities. Government policy has opened up new challenges as well as new opportunities for farmers. Similarly outside project or planned intervention can bring benefits to communities that are poorly articulated with the wider society. However, any outside intervention can only make a significant contribution to community development after it has been filtered through community culture and values, or in Long's words, 'having been enrolled in the community's own project'. Thus, endogenous community development works better where there is some external articulation and facilitation.

## **Research Innovations**

To conclude, I would like to review briefly what I see as possible innovations in this research itself. The innovations are threefold. First the research explicitly positioned the researcher as one of the multiplicity of actors operating in the community. Second, the research documents the full process by which the researcher enters the scene and negotiates his own role, and third it represents a new departure in research on community development in China.

Traditionally, the assumption has been that the researcher should take a neutral position, so as to view issues and things objectively in order to obtain 'objective' information. So-called objective research methods, amongst which, positivist methodology have been developed and perhaps over explored and applied. While this may be appropriate for research in most of the natural sciences, in sociological research, particularly in rural development research, in order to understand community dynamics and the development process, the researcher must enter into the particular life worlds of community members and groups. This means interacting with community organisers and administrators (village cadres), technicians, better-off farmers and poor farmers, male and female farmers, children and so on and in so doing will necessarily influence the process and results of research. During the interaction process with all such actors, the researcher can hardly isolate him/herself and look at these actors as though from outside of the circle. Not all actors co-operate with the researcher simply to satisfy the needs of the research process. Reciprocity must often be a condition for such research but this will often lead to conflicts of interest since actor groups have divergent interests and imagined life worlds from those of the researcher and among themselves. When the

researcher interacts with various community actors, the contents of that interaction will certainly touch upon the fields of conflict even though one can always try to avoid sensitive issues. However, the price of doing so is that it is more difficult to develop trust and close the distance between researcher and the 'subjects' of research. It puts restrictions on interpersonal communication, which is an important element in rural development research, since such communication is important for understanding local dynamics. Therefore, during this entire research process it was not my intention to behave as a neutral and socially objective outsider. Instead I sought to position myself as an actor like any other community actor, with emotions, likes and dislikes, ideas and opinions, and judgements. When interacting and discussing certain subjects, I gave my own opinions and judgements, which might have influenced and been spread later to others in the community. In other words, I always interacted with the other actors based upon my own construction of reality. In turn, my understandings and judgements on certain issues were often changed or adjusted after direct face to face interactions with particular actors. During the research process, I tried as far as it was possible for an outsider to do, to build relationships with all local actors on a basis of equality as peers, neighbours, and friends, with mutual respect. Only by doing this, could I understand the dynamics of local actors' life-worlds.

Similarly in traditional research where positivism is the dominant methodology, most research documentation, records or secondary sources, is similarly 'objective' and rarely deals with the life worlds of those researched. Even when purely quantitative, data do not always reflect reality, nor record how the researcher or compiler of the records acts in their construction. The rise of hermeneutics was specifically oriented towards these problems of understanding and interpretation on the part of the researcher involved in the construction of people's realities. In this research, then, in addition to the documentation of my findings, understandings, views, analyses and conclusions on the subject of farmer development initiatives, I have fully recorded the entire process of how I conducted the research in an attempt to make the research itself transparent to readers both now and in the future. Such a full recording of the research process was not aimed only at providing readers with a clear picture of the research methodologies used but also to show how interaction with community members enlightened my own understandings and conclusions during they research journey. By interacting in both formal and indigenous arenas using participative methods I came to a better understanding of the different domains of community and household livelihoods. By doing this, I became to a degree socially and culturally integrated and socialised into the community's every day reality.

The specific participatory methods used allowed an entrance and a preliminary understanding of the construction of community profiles. However, equally and more important for enlightenment were the follow up research methods used based the questionnaire survey, interviews, case studies which gave both quantitative and qualitative findings.

Last but not least, locating this process-based research in the context of a Chinese community has special implications for development sociology in China. Firstly, rarely are mainstream or new concepts (such as process research) derived from or tested in the Chinese context. Secondly, the specific Chinese historical and socio-cultural context,

and its ideological content, is conducive not only to filling the vacuum of rural development sociology in China, but also to redressing possible distortions of certain brands of contemporary rural development theory more generally. I still clearly remember my supervisor, Prof. Norman Long, saying to me on the way the Beijing Capital Airport in late 1998, "China is in the process of dramatic transformation. It would indeed be a pity if this dynamic process of social change was not to be recorded by sociologists." Since then I have strengthened my resolve to further process-oriented research in respect to Chinese rural communities and their changing social worlds. In this research the focus has been on making more transparent the nature and reality of the changing nature of rural villages in my research area and elucidating the processes by which local farmers develop their own capacities and agency for carrying out new livelihood initiatives.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 Households by wealth ranking of Sanggang Village

Household name	Rank		HH size	Comments
	Category	Overall		
Xu De'an	1	1	5	Enterprise boss
Xu Zaoquan	1	2	2	Calcite mine enterprise owner
Xue Zhiqing	2	3	4	Doing business in the township, one child in primary school, one in high school
Xu Junquan	2	4	4	Work outside, a retail shop, good income, one child in junior high school
Xu Yunzhi	2	5	2	Fixed income, her husband has pension, retired school headmaster
Xue Lechun	2	6	3	Work outside
Xu Guifang	3	7	4	Members work outside
Zhao Shuting	3	8	4	Driver in Beijing with good income, one child in primary school, one in high school
Xu Zhiqiang	3	9	4	Retail shop
Zhao Guomin	3	10	4	Work outside, two children in high school
Xu Quanli	3	11	3	Two work outside, one child in school
Zhao Qingguo	3	12	2	Good agricultural income, few expenses
Xu Shunli	3	13	4	Business in Baoding, one child in primary school
Sang Denglai	3	14	2	Fixed monthly allowance for being injured in war, his wife also has business, few expenses
Xu Guiquan	3	15	4	Income from work outside, two children in school
Zhao Wenyu	3	16	4	Income from goat raising, one child in junior high school
Xu Runqin	3	17	4	Few family burdens
Xu Yongwen	3	18	4	Work outside, few expenses
Xu Chunsheng	3	19	4	Work outside, one child in primary school, one in high school
Xu Changquan	3	20	4	Village party secretary with fixed income, has debt from building his house, few expenses
Xu Chenzhi	3	21	2	Few expenses
Xu Zhigang	3	22	1	Salary as primary school teacher
Liang Jinting	3	23	4	Family business, two work outside, less spending
Xu Guochun	3	24	3	Local cake making, few expenses
Liu Jinghua	3	25	1	Does not live in community, but with her children in city
Xu Zhengguo	3	26	3	Income secured, few expenses
Zhao Yongxue	3	27	4	Food processing, one child in school



Xu Yongli	4	28	4	Job in county, fixed salary, two pre-school age children
Xu Runquan	4	29	4	Business in Baoding, two children in primary school
Zhao Wenqi	4	30	4	Work outside, few expenses
Xu Hongchun	4	31	4	Business, work outside
Xu Shisheng	4	32	4	Work outside, few expenses, one child in primary school
Zhao Guoding	4	33	4	Business, one child in high school, one in junior high school
Xu Shimin	4	34	4	Income from agriculture, raise rabbits, one child in school
Zhao Jingli	4	35	4	Work outside, few expenses
Wang Jingtian	4	36	4	Fixed income, few expenses
Sang Wenle	4	37	4	Income from working outside, one child in primary school
Sang Dengyun	4	38	2	Divorced, work outside, one child in school
Zhao Tonggai	4	39	4	Income from working outside, one aged parent, one child in school
Xu Yanting	4	40	3	Income from agriculture and working outside, few expenses
Sang Guoqi	4	41	2	Average income from working outside, no child, few expenses
Xu Yuncong	4	42	1	Few expenses
Wang Hexiang	4	43	3	Fixed income as driver, one child in school
Xu Yushe	4	44	2	Fixed monthly allowance for being injured in war, few expenses
Xu Xingchun	4	45	3	Income from working outside, few expenses
Xu Yanchen	4	46	4	Work outside, his wife is the head of village women's union
Sang Wenli	4	47	1	Work outside, only himself
Zhao Buxing	4	48	3	Fixed monthly allowance for being injured in war, few expenses
Sang Guimin	4	49	4	Yearly income of 2,000 yuan, few expenses
Xu Demin	4	50	4	Two work outside, few expenses
Xu Jianren	4	51	4	Small business, few expenses
Sang Guowen	4	52	4	Income from working outside, no child in school yet, few expenses
Xu Rongxun	4	53	2	Two working outside, few expenses
Zhao Donghai	4	54	4	Income from working outside, one child in school
Zhao Shuli	5	55	2	Income mainly from agriculture, few expenses
Xu Guiwen	5	56	4	Small business, one child in primary school, average expenses
Sang Guojing	5	57	3	Work in government, has income
Xu Xinquan	5	58	3	Mainly agricultural income, plant grape, one child in school, above average expenses
Xu Shunzhen	5	59	2	Small business, one aged parent, one child
Xu Runzao	5	60	4	Small business, one work outside, one child in junior high school

Sang Guo'an	5	61	4	Work outside
Xu Guochen	5	62	4	Work outside, one child in school
Zhao Yonglu	5	63	4	Business, one child in junior high school, one child in high school, above average expenses
Xu Xiting	5	64	4	Work outside, one child in junior high school
Xu Hanmin	5	65	3	Income from working outside
Xu Qingchun	5	66	4	One does business, one working outside, one child in primary school, one child needs to build a house for marriage, above average expenses
Sang Denghong	5	67	2	Work outside, wife is sick, one child in primary school
Xu Yanxun	5	68	4	Income from transport, few expenses
Sang Quanzhang	5	69	4	Village doctor with income, but more spending, one child in college, one in high school
Xu Xialing	5	70	2	An old couple with government allowance
Zhao Fengyi	5	71	2	Old couple, he can play a local musical instrument for funeral, with income
Xu Jiuguo	5	72	1	Work outside, few expenses
Xu Leting	5	73	3	Agricultural income, few expenses
Zhao Laiting	5	74	3	Agricultural income, few expenses
Zhang Yuxing	5	75	4	Work outside
Xu Xiling	5	76	3	Selling locally made cake
Xu Zhenli	5	77	3	Agricultural income, few expenses
Sang Guiling	5	78	4	Business, one child in junior high school, one in high school, above average expenses
Xu Runze	5	79	2	Mainly agricultural income
Zhao Qingyuan	5	80	2	Old couple, mainly agricultural income
Zhang Suozhu	5	81	2	Vet, one child in primary school
Xu Zuoting	5	82	1	Work outside
Zhao Dongshan	5	83	3	Sell noodles, few expenses
Xu Fukui	5	84	4	Business in oil extraction, two children in primary school
Zhao Aimin	5	85	3	Work outside, one child in primary school, few expenses
Zhao Fangping	5	86	4	Income from working outside, one child
Xu Zhenling	5	87	4	Sufficient labor for agriculture
Xu Runhe	5	88	3	Small business, one child in primary school, few expenses
Xu Yongchen	5	89	3	Less income, sometimes health problem, one child in primary school, above average expenses
Xu Lixun	5	90	1	Play local musical instrument for funeral with income
Jia Hezhen	5	91	4	Income from working outside
Zhao Xingbei	5	92	5	Work outside, one child in junior high school, average expenses
Zhao Laizheng	5	93	4	Income from working outside, one child in primary school, few expenses
Sang Jingcai	5	94	8	Income from working outside and from fruit trees, few expenses
Xu Lianxun	5	95	3	Income from working outside, one child in primary school

Xu Guiping	5	96	6	Mainly agricultural income, two children in junior high school
Chen Yufu	5	97	6	Retail shop, with aged parents, above average expenses
Xu Guichuan	5	98	4	Income from working outside, one child in primary school, few expenses
Xu Zhiyong	5	99	4	Income of processing enterprise, one child in high school, one in primary school, above average expenses
Xu Zhenwen	5	100	2	Income from working outside, aged mother
Sang Bingqian	5	101	3	Business, one child in primary school
Xu Quanfu	5	102	5	Income from working outside, wife is handicapped
Xu Zhenxing	5	103	4	Income from working outside, few expenses
Xu Zhenqi	6	104	3	Income from working outside
Jia Suozhu	6	105	4	Income from goats raising
Zhang Xueqing	6	106	3	Income from working outside, one child in primary school
Xu Huzhang	6	107	2	Old couple without fixed income, less spending
Xu Jianzao	6	108	5	Business in Baoding, one child in college, one in high school, more spending
Xu Junmin	6	109	6	Small business, less spending
Xu Guoqing	6	110	4	Income from goats raising
Xu Jianjun	6	111	4	Income as a driver, one child in college, one in junior high school, more spending
Xu Jiugui	6	112	2	Less income, less spending, one child in school
Xu Guichun	6	113	2	Old couple, less income, less spending
Sang Dengpei	6	114	5	Income from working outside, 30 goats, but poor health
Xu Shutian	6	115	2	Raise 20 goats, less spending
Zhao Guihai	6	116	4	Income from working outside, no child in school
Sang Dengshen	6	117	3	Mainly agricultural income, raise some goats, but two died
Xu Xingsheng	6	118	6	Mainly agricultural income, with aged parents, one child in high school, one in junior high school, more spending
Zhao Aijun	6	119	3	Income from working outside, children not yet in school
Zhao Shuchun	6	120	4	Less income, two children in school
Xu Yubin	6	121	4	Mainly agricultural income, two children in school
Xu Gengsen	6	122	3	One working outside
Xu Pengtai	6	123	5	Mainly agricultural income, one child in school
Zhao Chunhe	6	124	3	Income from working outside, one child in primary school, less spending
Jia Futian	6	125	1	Agriculture and goats raising, average income
Sang Guoshun	6	126	3	Income from goats raising
Cui Shutian	6	127	1	Old person, supported by his son
Xu Yunquan	6	128	3	Mainly agricultural income, less spending
Zhang Yuxian	6	129	3	Play local musical instrument for funeral with income, average income and less spending
Xu Zhangjun	6	130	4	Car accident last year, is still in hospital, more spending, others share the medical expenses
Xu	6	131	3	Income from working outside, less spending

Chunsheng				
Xu junqi	6	132	4	Mainly agricultural income, more spending, one child in college in Inner Mongolia
Xu Chungang	6	133	4	Engaged in processing enterprise, average income, one working outside, less spending
Xu Guichen	6	134	3	Income from working outside and from agriculture, less spending
Xu Dongsheng	6	135	4	Income from working outside, less spending
Lu Jianxun	6	136	4	Small business, one child in college, one in primary school, more spending
Xu Hongzhu	6	137	4	Modest income from agriculture, one child in primary school
Sang Lixing	6	138	3	Income from working outside, one child in primary school, less spending
Xu Zhiwu	6	139	4	Income from working outside
Sang Dengyin	6	140	2	Allowance for being injured in war, less spending
Xu Shuseng	7	141	4	Agricultural income, one child in primary school
Xu Guo'an	7	142	5	Income from working outside, one child in junior school, one in primary school, more spending
Xu Jiuyou	7	143	1	Mainly agricultural income
Xu Yasheng	7	144	4	Only agricultural income, one child in primary school, less spending
Xu Kemin	7	145	2	Two working outside, less expenditure
Zhao Guosheng	7	146	5	Income from working outside, one child in school
Xu Xingmin	7	147	3	Some income from goats raising, one child in school
Xu Zhengmin	7	148	4	Some income from goats raising, less spending
Sang Lai	7	149	4	Fixed income, one child in school, more spending
Sang Xiulan	7	150	4	No enough income from fruit trees, no husband
Zhao Siqi	7	151	3	Two aged members, with one child
Zhao Dongsheng	7	152	3	Mainly agricultural income, not much
Zhao Jingzhou	7	153	6	Some income from working outside, one child in primary school, not too much spending
Zhao Shuzhong	7	154	3	Less income
Zhang Changchun	7	155	3	Play local musical instrument for funeral with income, able person
Xu Haisan	7	156	2	Old couple, mainly agricultural income
Zhao Shutian	7	157	4	Electricity worker, one child in junior high school, one in primary school, more spending
Sang You	7	158	3	Small business, less spending, one child in primary school
Xu Zhengting	7	159	2	Less income, not too much spending
Xu Lixun	7	160	3	Average income, less spending
Xu Jiuxiao	7	161	5	Some income from working outside, sufficient labors
Xu Jiuting	7	162	6	Pig raising, investment in fruit trees, but no output yet, not too much spending, one child in primary school

Jia Wensheng	8	163	3	Only agricultural income, on child in school
Xu Xing'an	8	164	3	Income from working outside, small business, less spending
Xu Changding	8	165	4	Small business, less income, two children in primary school, one handicapped child
Xu Zeling	8	166	3	Small business, less spending
Xu Dating	8	167	2	Old couple, no labor force, allowance for being injured in war
Zhao Junjie	8	168	5	Mainly limited agricultural income, three children in primary school
Xu Wansheng	8	169	2	Old couple, no other income
Sang Dengqiu	8	170	3	Less income, wife is handicapped
Xu Rungang	8	171	2	Old couple, often sick, no other income
Xu Runzhong	8	172	2	Old couple, no labor
Gao Xiuying	8	173	1	Aged one, no labor force
Du Binghen	8	174	1	Aged one, no income
Xu Minze	8	175	2	Old couple, a little allowance for being injured in war
Zhao Aihong	8	176	2	Mother and daughter, less income
Xu Runbo	8	177	5	Originally ranked in category 10, however, people think his problem is the heavy debt, only temporary, sufficient labors, should get better
Xu Qianxiang	9	178	1	Aged one, little fixed allowance
Zhao Zhanxiang	9	179	2	Old couple
Xu Zhimin	9	180	2	Mother and son, a little income from working outside, aged member
Sang Guozeng	9	181	3	No other income but cropping, one child in school
Xu Fengmin	9	182	4	Children and wife are handicapped
Xu Yunhai	10	183	1	On other income
Zhang Yumin	10	184	3	Little cropping income
Wang Yuzhuo	10	185	1	Aged one, on other income
Xu Pengzhou	10	186	3	Wife is deaf, son handicapped, no labor force
Zhao Shutian	10	187	1	Aged one
Sang Dianyuan	10	188	2	Old couple, no care from their children
Sang Denghai	10	189	3	Wife handicapped, little income
Xu Pengchuan	10	190	1	Aged one

## Appendix 2 Overview of multifarious development initiatives and related critical factors of the 20 case farmers

Name	Development initiative	Critical factor
Zhao Huanbang	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– leaving the village and search for new alternative</li> <li>– engagement in agriculture (farming) by quitting government position</li> <li>– business operation of local materials (red stone) processing and marketing</li> <li>– forestry development (by large scale contract, planting economic trees and medicinal plants)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– influence by others (previous colleagues) during interactions</li> <li>– previous experience</li> <li>– extended social network</li> <li>– information (from previous colleagues, media, visit)</li> </ul>
Zhao Hanwen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– outside temporary wage labor for coal mining</li> <li>– livestock raising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– pressure</li> <li>– information from chatting with friends in community indigenous arena</li> <li>– social network</li> <li>– trust</li> <li>– knowledge, experience from past practices</li> </ul>
Xu Wenlou	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– outside temporary wage labor for coal mining</li> <li>– involvement in the management of relative's enterprise</li> <li>– economic tree development by contracting mountain land</li> <li>– rabbit raising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– information from chatting with villagers in community indigenous arena</li> <li>– information from market</li> <li>– social network/kinship network, colleagues network</li> <li>– trust and kinship trust</li> <li>– knowledge and previous experience</li> <li>– technology innovation</li> <li>– cost-effectiveness calculation</li> </ul>
Liu Zhentiao	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– small scale trading (vegetables)</li> <li>– vegetable development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– kinship network</li> <li>– information from market</li> <li>– information from outside relatives</li> <li>– knowledge and experience from books, training and study visits</li> <li>– technology innovation</li> </ul>
Liu Zhenkun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– outside temporary wage labor for coal mining</li> <li>– local enterprise (cement tile producing)</li> <li>– local tasks/mission contract (collecting electricity fee)</li> <li>– community infrastructure development</li> <li>– community leader/ village administration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– pressure</li> <li>– social network (village fellows, classmates, colleagues, leaders, and so on)</li> <li>– belief</li> <li>– consult with relatives</li> <li>– cost-effectiveness calculation</li> <li>– information from media</li> <li>– reputation, respect and trust</li> <li>– enlightenment from interaction with others (county electric workers)</li> <li>– favorable policy</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- forestry development (by large scale contract, planting economic trees and timber forests)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- study visits</li> <li>- knowledge/experience</li> </ul>
Zhao Wenyou	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- small scale trading of goats</li> <li>- goat raising</li> <li>- retail shop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- social network</li> <li>- creditability, trust and reputation</li> <li>- experience</li> </ul>
Xu Xinquan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- glass noodles processing</li> <li>- vegetable cultivation</li> <li>- grape cultivation</li> <li>- goat raising</li> <li>- lean swine raising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- enlightenment of a neighbor through chatting in community indigenous arena</li> <li>- information from outside relatives, and from media</li> <li>- low risk based on rational analysis</li> <li>- social network establishment</li> <li>- self-help and cooperation</li> <li>- consult with community technical <i>elite</i>, visit to an experienced grape grower.</li> </ul>
Lu Jianxun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- outside temporary wage labor</li> <li>- rabbit raising</li> <li>- clothes making</li> <li>- youtiao making enterprise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- social network</li> <li>- information from local market</li> <li>- information from classmate, outside relatives</li> <li>- knowledge from books</li> <li>- interests</li> <li>- experience</li> <li>- influence by family member (wife)</li> <li>- kinship help</li> </ul>
Zhao Laisheng	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- contract orchard</li> <li>- fruit tree development</li> <li>- bee keeping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- personal interest</li> <li>- knowledge and experience from various training courses, books</li> <li>- information from outside relative's visit</li> <li>- cooperation through classmate network</li> <li>- enlightened by an outside when encounter in local market</li> <li>- technical subject focused social network</li> </ul>
Li Hui	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- outside temporary wage labor</li> <li>- forestry development</li> <li>- small scale trading of ice-sucker</li> <li>- rabbit hutches producing enterprise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- kinship network</li> <li>- information from outside relative</li> <li>- cost-effectiveness calculation</li> <li>- influence by family member (husband)</li> <li>- information from social network (colleague worker)</li> <li>- skills and experience</li> <li>- learning from experience exchange with village fellows</li> </ul>
Zhao Zengyuan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- small scale trading (peanuts, leather products, watermelon, wool, grasshopper, sweet potato)</li> <li>- fruit tree development (plum, and other fruit trees)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- cost-effectiveness calculation</li> <li>- influence/enlightenment during chatting with classmates</li> <li>- consultation with family member (wife)</li> <li>- family trust and support (from wife)</li> <li>- his experience and knowledge</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- social network</li> <li>- information gathered from outside relatives</li> <li>- information from local market</li> </ul>
Zhao Huiyuan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- small scale trading (peanut, Chinese prickly ash, spice products)</li> <li>- fruit tree development (orchards)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- pressure</li> <li>- enlightened by interaction with family member (wife)</li> <li>- information from outside relative</li> <li>- social network</li> <li>- cooperation for scarce resources</li> </ul>
Zhang Yuxing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- fruit tree development</li> <li>- rabbit raising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- past experience</li> <li>- cost-effective calculation</li> <li>- social network.</li> </ul>
Yuan Shaopeng	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- small scale trading (peanut, sweet potato)</li> <li>- fruit tree development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- influenced by neighbors</li> <li>- social network (neighbors)</li> <li>- information exchange in community indigenous subject focused arena</li> <li>- cost-effectiveness analysis</li> <li>- cooperation (with neighbors)</li> <li>- visit to successful cases</li> </ul>
Yuan Ronghai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- outside temporary wage labor</li> <li>- forestry development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- social network</li> <li>- past experience</li> <li>- curiosity on outside world</li> </ul>
Xu Jinlan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- forestry development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- information and knowledge from outside villages, from books and magazines, from his study visits to various places.</li> <li>- Technology innovations</li> <li>- Reputation and trust</li> <li>- Social networks, particularly technical subject focused network</li> <li>- Enlightening by seeing</li> <li>- Trust and support from family members</li> </ul>
Zhao Shengli	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- local mine business (vermiculite)</li> <li>- electric equipment/appliance repair shop</li> <li>- outside temporary wage labor</li> <li>- knitting mill</li> <li>- community leader/village administration</li> <li>- local restaurant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- strong kinship network</li> <li>- skills and experience</li> <li>- information from friend and relative</li> <li>- study visit</li> <li>- encourage by others (township officials)</li> <li>- social network (friends, classmates)</li> <li>- reputation and trust</li> <li>- information from newspaper, magazines, television and study visits</li> </ul>
Xu Jinfa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- outside temporary wage labor</li> <li>- construction headman</li> <li>- contract brick making factory</li> <li>- slaughterer</li> <li>- irrigation service for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- social network (kinship, villagers, friends)</li> <li>- information from market and local temple fair and market analysis</li> <li>- information from visits, magazines, newspapers, television and friends</li> <li>- influence by other's practice by seeing</li> <li>- consult others (friends, villagers)</li> </ul>



	villagers – oil extraction enterprise – local mine (vermiculite and sepiolite) – transport business – coal processing – scorpion raising	
Chen Gengshen	– local mine (vermiculite and sepiolite) – transport business – outside temporary wage labor – scorpion raising	– information from friends, relatives and (study) visits – social network (friends, villagers, kinship) – consultation with friends – experience, knowledge and technical capability – favorable policy
Xu Yinfu	– outside temporary wage labor – transport business (truck) – management of village credit station	– kinship network – enlightened by friends/villagers – cooperation with friends/villagers – capability – information from friends – information from books, magazines, newspapers and television – study visit

### Appendix 3 Questionnaire

Date of interview:                      Name of the village:                      Name of the household head:  
Household size:                      Labor force:                      Telephone number:

#### 1. Household basic situation

List family members and their activities/locations in each month of a year

Name	Age	Relationship to the head	Education	Work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

Arable land:                      among which, irrigated:                      non-irrigated:  
Number of plots:  
Mountain land:                      among which, forestry land:                      barren land:                      Other:  
Main tree species in the mountain land:

#### 2. Cropping (2001)

Crop/vegetable	Area (mu)	Yield (kg/mu)	Production (kg)	Marketed (kg/mu)	Price (yuan/kg)	Inputs (item/cost)

### 3. Livestock raising (2001)

Livestock	Number	Purpose	Where to market	Price (yuan/kg)	Income (yuan)	Inputs (item/cost)

### 4. Forestry and fruit trees (2001)

Tree	Area/no. of trees	Growing years	Where to market	Price	Income (yuan)	Inputs (item/cost)

### 5. Non-agricultural undertakings (2001)

Item (exclude labor work)					
Income (yuan)					

Name			
Duration of labor work in a year			
Type of work? Location? from when?			
Yearly income (yuan)			

### 6. Energy

Type of energy sources, and rank by consumption

### 7. Family income (2001)

Item					
Amount (yuan)					

Per capita income:

### 8. Family expenditure (2001)

Item					
Amount (yuan)					

### 9. Gender division of family decision making

Activity	cropping	Livestock raising	Children education	Purchase of durable	Daily expenditure	Marketing of products		
Male								
female								

### 10. House and family durable items.

### 11. What kind of culture and entertainment activities have you participated? When? Where?

12. Key events in the family during recent years.
13. Main constraints of household livelihood development.
14. What is your purpose of earning money?
15. Describe the major relative relationship of family members inside and outside of the village.
16. Whom do you contact with in your life? What are the contents of contact? By which way? Please draw a social network diagram of the family with outside institutions and individuals.
17. Some farmers have taken some kinds of new development initiatives, such as livestock raising, fruit tree development, contract of large scale barren mountain, medicinal plant development, processing enterprises, mines, transport business, trading business, searching for temporary wage labor work outside, so on and so forth. What could be the factors you think that have made farmers generate those kinds of ideas? Please give examples. When farmers implement the ideas/plans, which factors can influence (facilitate or restrain) the implementation? Please give examples.
18. Whom do you normally chat with in your life? Place, contents and mode? Is chatting important in your life? What is the role of chatting in your new undertakings of development initiatives? Please give example.
19. What kinds of social network do you think are there in rural society? Which one do you think is the most important to family livelihood development? Why? Please give example. Which social network is the one that you like to contact with its members? Why? Please give example.
20. What are the sources of your information? By which way? How is the credibility of information from each source? Why? Please give example.
21. What is the function of a farmer's reputation? How can a farmer build up good reputation in rural societies? Please give example.
22. Is others' trust on you important? In which way? Why? How can you win trust from others? Please give example.
23. Is your past experience important to your family livelihood development? What are the important experiences? And what are the manifestations of the importance of the listed experiences? Please give example.
24. Does your educational background influence your new development undertakings? What are the influences? Please give example.
25. When you take a new development initiative, are you influenced by others? Who? By which way? Please give example.
26. When you take a new development initiative, do you consult others? Whom do you consult? By which way? Please give example.

27. When you take a new development initiative, have you ever done cost-effectiveness calculation? Please give example.

28. Have you ever cooperated with others? Is the cooperation with others important? What is the importance? Why? Please give example.

29. What are the difficulties when you are confronted with, you ask help from others? What are the contents of help? Whom do you ask? Please give example.

30. Have you ever borrowed money from others? When? Purpose? What are the arrangements? Have you ever lent money to others? When? Purpose? What are the arrangements?

31. What are the functions of rural market? Please give example.

32. Which government policy do you think has influenced your family livelihood development?

33. Other aspects that the interviewee wishes to express.

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## SUMMARY

This research concerns development initiatives in rural communities. I define a farmer initiative as the impetus that sufficiently and necessarily drives a farmer (or group of farmers) to formulate a realistic strategic plan, and to implement it in an attempt to create space for manoeuvre and to pursue change through changing social conditions. Farmer initiatives emerge from farmers' experiences, knowledge, events, social networks, and from interactions among themselves, a wider network of actors and the broader socio-economic environment. In other words, farmers develop particular initiatives through the interaction of these factors. Thus farmer initiatives are also processes of enlightenment. Here enlightenment is an emergent property. In the Chinese context it not only refers to being inspired by ideas from others, but more importantly, by experience and interaction with others, with events, and so on.

Theoretically, rural social change is fundamentally the outcome of rural initiatives and must thereby be closely linked to them. The process of social construction involved in rural initiatives requires an interpretation of the 'logic' or rationale of processes of social encounter, intersection, interface and interaction that often remain only implicit in sociological studies. This approach repudiates exogenous views of development characteristic of modernisation theory, dependency theory and planned intervention models and focuses instead on endogenous development. One way of doing this is to enter explicitly into the vital terrain of farmer initiatives. Placed within the Chinese rural context, a sociological study of this kind is endowed with special significance. This is for two reasons. First, rarely are mainstream concepts of rural development sociology derived from or tested in the Chinese context. Second, the Chinese historical and socio-cultural context and its ideological content offers at this present juncture an opportunity not only to fill the vacuum of rural development sociology in China, but also, more generally, to redress possible distortions associated with certain brands of development theory.

In conformity with the understanding of the dialectics of internal and external factors, the generation of strategic ideas, and the debate about the nature of human agency and 'ordering' processes in social life, I mainly adopt an actor-oriented and interface approach in my analysis. Adopting such an approach to the study of the development of

rural initiatives implies a focus on the dynamic interactions between actors as well as on the internal and external factors/variables implicated in these processes. My methodological starting point is not with pre-set models or recipes that define a set of techniques simply to be applied in the field. The research distances itself from the idea of applying simple positivist methods of research made up of a 'tool box' of techniques to be used for data collection, hypothesis testing and the isolation of the determinants of social behaviour. Instead, it adopts an open-ended, ethnographic approach aimed at unravelling the complexities of meaning and social action, through the development of a conceptual framework that accords priority to the understanding of everyday life situations.

The thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter two provides a critical review of the theoretical 'state of the art' on issues related to the research outlined in the first chapter. Chapter three records the entire process of selecting and entering the research community. This started the long process of getting to know the community and building the community profile. The readers are presented with a process that highlights the specific context of rural China, its recent history, traditions, ideology, culture, and institutions. The everyday encounters in organised arenas (i.e. those using participatory methods) and in more indigenous arenas (such as 'sitting in street') form the basis for an understanding of the domains of community organisation and household livelihoods. They also, together with the account of interactions with village officials and leaders, draw attention to the significance of differentiated life worlds. They helped us to become socially and culturally socialised into the community. These experiences provide the foundation for the analysis of village social organisation and the dynamics of rural initiatives explored in the village profiles in Chapter four and Chapter five.

Chapter four falls into two parts. Part I begins with a general picture of village administrative organization followed by a general profile of each of the four researched villages. Most of this material was collected through discussion and interviews with key administrative cadres and from information obtained from records kept by the bookkeepers of the party offices and augmented by the research team's general observations. Part II explores the village profiles further through the use of a number of participatory methods and interactions with villagers in their everyday lives. The profiles furnish the reader with a full picture and penetrative analysis of a Chinese rural community and they thus provide the necessary background and contexts for exploring the nature and implications of farmer development initiatives. Importantly, the chapter displays the whole process of constructing the community profile, providing information on rural actors' life worlds and community dynamics. In this way the chapter allows readers to view the research community as a living picture.

Having become socially accepted into the community and having constructed profiles of the four villages of the study, I was in a position to understand better the complex social, economic and cultural environment in which local actors organise their life worlds. My research therefore moved on to its second stage and to the central theme of the study - farmer development initiatives. As I argued in Chapter five, all people have agency to act, to respond, to cope with life, and to solve problems, and different social actors will act, respond, cope and solve their problems differently and to a greater or lesser degree. In the context of rural household and community development, individuals will use their agency to engage in the pursuit of various undertakings or

initiatives for achieving their own goals. I call this *development agency*. Thus all rural actors may express the intention to better their livelihood situations, but (especially in the rural context examined) this can only be pursued effectively by starting something new. It is for this reason that I stress the importance of *innovative agency*. The core of my research was aimed at analysing how different farmer development initiatives were socially constructed. This required the study of careers of innovative actors in relation to household and community development. The selection of appropriate cases for study became critical. Eventually I ended up with twenty cases that allowed me to explore in more detail the careers of the selected farmers in relation to their household and community development. The various undertakings throughout a farmer's career were analysed, in particular how their initiatives started and were socially shaped and eventually implemented. All twenty vignettes of the case farmers are included in Chapter five.

The main types of farmer initiatives were related to outside wage labour, raising of livestock, scorpions and bee-keeping, development of various local enterprises, forestry development, small-scale trading, fruit tree development, local mining, tertiary services, transport, community administration and management tasks, vegetable cultivation, orchard development, and involvement in outside construction and factory projects. The critical factors contributing to the process of various farmer initiatives include trust, social networks, information derived from networks, past experiences, media and publications, calculations of cost-effectiveness, enlightenment from interaction with family members and the networks of outsiders, study visits, information from the market, visits to successful cases, the influence of family and social network members and others, consultation with others, self-help and co-operation, reputation (respect, creditability), interests, beliefs, curiosity *vis-à-vis* the outside world, technology innovation, knowledge from publications and training, study visits, skills and technical capability, enlightenment from observation and favourable policy. Many of these are interrelated and some in fact can be grouped into broader categories.

Having selected the cases of farmer initiatives for detailed analysis, I designed a questionnaire survey consisting of two parts. The first focuses on general household demographic information, land and other resources, cropping, livestock raising, forestry and fruit trees, non-agricultural undertakings, household income and expenditure, and so forth. The second part was composed of open-ended questions aimed at eliciting farmers' views about critical factors and at filling in the social context of their lives. My aim was to provide a general overview of the characteristics of the twenty farmers chosen as case studies in their social and cultural context, followed by a discussion of the critical factors that contribute to the emergence and development of farmer initiatives. The in-depth analysis of this questionnaire survey is presented in Chapter six.

Chapter seven shows the empirical process of how various farmer development initiatives are constructed, analysing the career trajectories of five farmers selected from the 20 cases so that readers are able to conceptualise the real life environments in which these farmer initiatives develop. Within the processes many factors are inter-linked and mutually influence each other, and function jointly to contribute to the strategic generation of ideas, the consolidation of social relations, and the continuous shaping of

these initiatives through social action. These factors include social networks, information, and interaction, and so on. Through the functioning of these critical factors, farmers become enlightened, and thus many kinds of development initiatives emerge. Hence, farmer development initiatives are also processes of enlightenment. The analysis of the various kinds of farmer's development initiative leads to conclusions relating to the initiatives *per se* as well as to the identification of certain critical factors.

The last chapter brings us back to the research questions formulated at the beginning of the thesis. Since there are no major differences between farmers in the research community in terms of human capital, or physical and educational and other local facilities, differentiation between farmers must come from activities other than arable farming. We need therefore to consider a wider range of elements. As the twenty in depth case studies reveal these elements included social networks, information, enlightenment from interactions, trust, reputation, respect, creditability, experience, consultation with others, self-help and co-operation, favourable government policy, interests and hobbies, beliefs, curiosity about the outside world, pressure, and so on. One might sum these factors up as falling under the umbrella of, or as belonging to the sphere of social capital. Of course I do not wish to underestimate the importance of physical and human capital in the implementation of different development initiatives. However, being well equipped with good physical and human capital does not necessarily imply a capacity to generate strategic development ideas and to consolidate the ideas into plans for action. In comparison, adequate *social* capital in the form of established and extended social networks, information that is continuously received and updated, active interaction with others and with the wider society, and the possession of trust and credibility, will provide the means to generate new creative and strategic ideas to put into initiatives. Social capital is thus the mobiliser.

These processes of initiatives and social capital are developed under particular social conditions. This is a dynamic and recursively-evolving circle. The operation of social networks is based on certain mechanisms of trust, and on values and norms. During interaction, particular values and norms will be employed consciously or otherwise to sustain the existence and operation of particular social networks, giving actors openings for obtaining social and other resources from their networks. Moreover, it is the interweaving and interplay of the various factors that create social capital and this therefore cannot be reduced to a simple formula of kinship, cultural beliefs, normative frameworks, particular institutions and organisations etc.

This research reveals therefore that social capital is a composite factor and interwoven with other factors that jointly contribute to the initiative process. Any one farmer's initiative will have been generated, consolidated and implemented by some of these factors functioning together. No single factor can work in isolation and lead to the entire process of a certain kind of initiative. For instance, an initiative in small-scale trading may be generated through enlightenment from interaction with others, usually those within the farmer's social network. Then through their own and through the social networks of others in the network, farmers are able to obtain relevant information and mobilise needed resources. After an idea is generated, then a farmer may need to consult close family or relatives so as to consolidate the idea into a plan for action. Consultation will be based on kinship trust. During the implementation stage, the farmer may need to

integrate previous experience and to co-operate with other farmers and again kin or geo-related trust will be an element. Additional information and knowledge can also be obtained from the media, (study) visits, local markets and temple fairs, and so on. All these factors function in a co-operative manner and jointly contribute to the process of a small-scale trading initiative. That is, they are all integral to the process. On the other hand, the generation of ideas does not automatically and necessarily lead to the commencement of consolidation into action, nor to the implementation of initiatives. These three stages do not necessarily take place spontaneously or consecutively. In between there may be many conditions relating to other factors that need to be fulfilled.

Different initiatives often represent the different milestones in a farmer's career. These milestones are often the breakthrough points in the farmer's development. Such points have been referred to as 'springboards' to further progress. Each development initiative involves strategic decision making with significant implications in terms of choice and interaction mechanisms. The process of development initiatives is a dynamic one, which mainly stems from human agency and the changing societal environment. The farmer's own agency is the primary motive leading to strategies for action, and the changing societal environment is the essential aspect resulting in the continuous adjustment of strategy, during the process of which the strategy becomes increasingly structured.

The innovations of this research are threefold. First the research explicitly positions the researcher as one of the multiplicity of actors operating in the community. Second, the research fully documents the process by which the researcher enters the scene and negotiates his own role, and third it represents a new departure in research on community development in China.

## SAMENVATTING

Dit onderzoek betreft ontwikkelingsinitiatieven in rurale gemeenschappen. Ik definieer een boereninitiatief als een prikkel die een boer (of groep van boeren) voldoende motiveert om een realistisch strategisch plan te formuleren en het ten uitvoer te brengen, in de poging om ruimte te scheppen om te manoeuvreren en te streven naar verandering door veranderende sociale voorwaarden. Boereninitiatieven komen voort uit de ervaringen, kennis en sociale netwerken van boeren, uit gebeurtenissen, uit interacties tussen boeren, en uit een wijder netwerk van actoren en de bredere sociaal-economische omgeving. Anders gezegd, boeren ontwikkelen bepaalde initiatieven door de interactie van bovengenoemde factoren. Boereninitiatieven zijn dus ook processen van verlichting. Verlichting is een eigenschap die ontstaat. In de Chinese context verwijst dit niet alleen naar inspiratie door ideeën van anderen, maar vooral ook naar inspiratie door ervaring en interactie met anderen, met gebeurtenissen, enzovoorts.

Volgens de theorie is rurale sociale verandering in de grond het resultaat van rurale initiatieven, en moet daarom nauw met hen zijn verbonden. Het proces van de sociale constructie van rurale initiatieven vereist een interpretatie van de logica van processen van sociale ontmoeting, doorkruising, ‘interface’ en interactie. In de meeste sociologische studies is deze interpretatie slecht impliciet aanwezig. Deze benadering verwerpt de externe kijk op ontwikkeling die zo kenmerkend is voor de moderniseringstheorie, de afhankelijkheidstheorie, en modellen van geplande interventie. In plaats daarvan concentreert zij zich op inheemse ontwikkeling. Een methode daarvoor is om expliciet het terrein van boereninitiatieven binnen te treden. In de context van het Chinese platteland heeft een sociologische studie van deze aard een bijzondere betekenis. Daarvoor bestaan twee redenen. Ten eerste zijn begrippen in de hoofdrichting van de rurale sociologie zelden ontstaan of beproefd in de Chinese context. Ten tweede biedt de Chinese historische en sociaal-culturele context en haar ideologische inhoud op het huidige kruispunt de gelegenheid om niet alleen de hiaat in de Chinese rurale ontwikkelingssociologie te dichten, maar ook om mogelijke verdraaiingen die verbonden zijn met bepaalde soorten van ontwikkelingstheorie recht te zetten.

In overeenstemming met het begrip van de dialectiek van interne en externe factoren, van het voortbrengen van strategische ideeën, en van het debat over de aard van menselijk handelen en van ordeningsprocessen in het sociale leven, gebruik ik voornamelijk een actor-gerichte en ‘interface’ benadering in mijn analyse. Het gebruik van een dergelijke benadering voor de studie van de ontwikkeling van rurale initiatieven vooronderstelt een concentratie op de dynamische interacties tussen actoren en op de interne en externe factoren en variabelen betrokken in dit proces. Mijn methodologisch uitgangspunt is niet bij vooropgezette modellen of recepten, die een set van technieken aanreiken die eenvoudig kunnen worden toegepast in het veld. Dit onderzoek neemt afstand van de bedoeling om eenvoudige positivistische onderzoeksmethoden, die bestaan uit een gereedschapskist met technieken, toe te passen om gegevens te verzamelen, hypothesen te toetsen, en determinanten van sociaal gedrag te isoleren. In plaats daarvan gebruikt het een etnografische benadering met een open einde, met het doel om de complexiteit van betekenis en sociaal handelen te ontwarren door het

ontwikkelen van een begrippenkader dat voorrang verleent aan het begrijpen van situaties in het leven van alledag.

Het proefschrift bevat acht hoofdstukken. Hoofdstuk twee geeft een kritisch overzicht van de 'state of the art' ten aanzien van theorievorming over kwesties die betrekking hebben op het onderzoek dat in hoofdstuk een wordt geschetst. Hoofdstuk drie verslaat het gehele proces van de selectie en het betreden van de onderzochte gemeenschap. Daarmee begon het lange proces van kennismaking met de gemeenschap en van de opbouw van haar profiel. Een proces dat de specifieke context van het Chinese platteland uitlicht, met haar recente geschiedenis, tradities, ideologie, cultuur en instituties, wordt aan de lezer gepresenteerd. De alledaagse ontmoetingen in georganiseerde arena's (namelijk degene die participatieve methoden gebruiken) en in meer inheemse arena's (bijvoorbeeld 'op straat') vormen de basis voor het begrijpen van de organisatie van de gemeenschap en van de bestaanswijzen van huishoudens. Zij vestigen ook de aandacht op de betekenis van onderscheiden leefwerelden. Zij hielpen ons om sociaal en cultureel gesocialiseerd te raken in de gemeenschap. Deze ervaringen verschaffen de basis voor de analyse van de sociale dorpsorganisatie en van de dynamiek van rurale initiatieven, die in de dorpsprofielen in hoofdstukken vier en vijf worden verkend.

Hoofdstuk vier valt in twee delen uiteen. Deel I begint met een algemeen beeld van de administratieve dorpsorganisatie, gevolgd door een algemeen profiel van elk van de vier onderzoeksdorpen. Het grootste gedeelte van dit materiaal is verzameld door middel van gesprekken en interviews met sleutelfiguren in het administratieve kader, verkregen uit verslagen welke door boekhouders van partijkantoren worden bijgehouden, en verder door een aantal participatieve methoden en interacties met dorpelingen in hun dagelijks leven. Deel II verkend de dorpsprofielen verder door het gebruik van participatieve methoden en interacties met dorpelingen in hun dagelijks leven. Deze profielen geven de lezer een totaalbeeld en een doordringende analyse van een Chinese plattelandsgemeenschap. Zij verschaffen dus de noodzakelijke achtergrond en de verbanden om de aard en de verwickelingen van ontwikkelingsinitiatieven van boeren te verkennen. Belangrijk is dat dit hoofdstuk het hele proces van de constructie van het gemeenschapsprofiel ten toon spreidt, en informatie verschaft over de leefwerelden en de gemeenschapsdynamiek van rurale actoren. Hierdoor laat dit hoofdstuk een levend beeld van de onderzochte gemeenschap zien.

Nadat ik sociaal was aanvaard door de gemeenschap en profielen had geconstrueerd van de vier onderzoeksdorpen, was ik in staat om de complexe sociale, economische en culturele omgeving waarin de lokale actoren hun leefwerelden organiseren beter te begrijpen. Mijn onderzoek ging daarom over naar zijn tweede fase en naar het centrale onderwerp van deze studie, namelijk ontwikkelingsinitiatieven van boeren. Zoals ik in hoofdstuk vijf betoog, hebben alle mensen 'agency' (agentschap) om te handelen, te reageren, het leven het hoofd te bieden en problemen op te lossen, en verschillende sociale actoren zullen dit op verschillende wijze en in meerdere of mindere mate doen. In de context van rurale huishoudens- en gemeenschapsontwikkeling zullen individuen hun 'agency' gebruiken om verscheidene ondernemingen of initiatieven na te streven om hun eigen doelen te bereiken. Ik noem dit *development agency* (ontwikkelingswerking). Alle rurale actoren kunnen dus het voornemen uitdrukken om



hun bestaanswijze te verbeteren, maar dit kan (vooral in de onderzochte rurale context) alleen door iets nieuws te beginnen op efficiënte wijze worden nagestreefd. Daarom benadruk ik het belang van *innovative agency* (vernieuwende werking). De kern van mijn onderzoek was gericht op het analyseren van hoe verschillende ontwikkelingsinitiatieven van boeren sociaal zijn geconstrueerd. Hiervoor was het nodig om de loopbaan van vernieuwende actoren in relatie met huishoudens- en gemeenschapsontwikkeling te bestuderen. De selectie van geschikte gevallen om te bestuderen werd kritiek. Uiteindelijk had ik twintig gevallen, die mij in staat stelden om de loopbaan van de uitgekozen boeren in relatie met de ontwikkeling van hun huishoudens en gemeenschappen te bestuderen. De verschillende ondernemingen van het begin tot het einde van de loopbaan van de boer werden ontleed, in het bijzonder hoe hun initiatieven begonnen, sociaal gevormd werden, en uiteindelijk werden uitgevoerd. Alle schetsen van al deze twintig boeregevallen zijn opgenomen in hoofdstuk vijf.

De belangrijkste soorten boereninitiatieven hielden verband met loonarbeid van buiten, veehouderij, schorpioenen en imkerij, de ontwikkeling van verscheidene lokale ondernemingen, bosbouwontwikkeling, lokale mijnbouw, tertiaire diensten, transport, gemeenschapsadministratie en beheerstaken, groenteteelt, boomgaardontwikkeling, en betrokkenheid bij externe bouw- en fabrieksprojecten. De kritieke factoren die bijdroegen aan het proces van verschillende boereninitiatieven omvatten vertrouwen, sociale netwerken, informatie verkregen uit netwerken, ervaringen uit het verleden, media en publicaties, berekeningen van kostenefficiëntie, verheldering vanuit de interactie met familieleden en netwerken van buitenstaanders, studiebezoeken, informatie van de markt, bezoeken aan succesgevallen, de invloed van familie, leden van het sociale netwerk, en anderen, overleg met anderen, zelfhulp en samenwerking, reputatie (respect en kredietwaardigheid), belangen, overtuigingen, nieuwsgierigheid ten opzichte van de buitenwereld, technologische vernieuwing, kennis vanuit publicaties en opleiding, vaardigheden en technische bekwaamheden, verlichting vanuit waarneming, en gunstig beleid. Vele van deze factoren houden verband met elkaar, en sommige kunnen in bredere categorieën worden samengevoegd.

Nadat ik de gevallen van boereninitiatieven voor nadere analyse had geselecteerd, ontwierp ik een vragenlijst, die uit twee delen bestond. Het eerste concentreerde zich op algemene gegevens van het huishouden: demografische informatie, land en andere middelen, akkerbouw, veehouderij, bosbouw en fruitteelt, niet-agrarische ondernemingen, inkomen en uitgaven van het huishouden, enzovoort. Het tweede deel bestond uit open vragen die het doel hadden om de kijk van boeren op kritische factoren aan het licht te brengen en om de sociale context van hun levens in te vullen. Mijn doel was om een algemeen overzicht te verschaffen van de eigenschappen van de twintig boeren die waren gekozen voor de gevalsstudies, in het kader van hun sociale en culturele context, gevolgd door een bespreking van de kritische factoren die bijdragen tot de opkomst en ontwikkeling van boereninitiatieven. Een diepgaande analyse van dit vraagonderzoek wordt in hoofdstuk zes gepresenteerd.

Hoofdstuk zeven toont het empirische proces van hoe verscheidene ontwikkelingsinitiatieven van boeren worden geconstrueerd, door een analyse van de loopbaan van vijf boeren die zijn uitgekozen uit de twintig gevallen, zodat de lezers de

werkelijke levensomstandigheden waarin deze boereninitiatieven tot ontwikkeling komen kunnen bevatten. Vele factoren in deze processen houden verband met elkaar, beïnvloeden elkaar, en werken samen om bij te dragen aan de strategische ontwikkeling van ideeën, de versteviging van sociale relaties, en de voortdurende vorming van deze initiatieven door sociaal handelen. Deze factoren omvatten sociale netwerken, informatie, interactie, enzovoort. Door de werking van deze kritische factoren worden boeren verlicht, zodat vele soorten van ontwikkelingsinitiatieven opkomen. Ontwikkelingsinitiatieven van boeren zijn dus ook verlichtingsprocessen. De analyse van de verschillende soorten ontwikkelingsinitiatieven van boeren leidt tot conclusies die zowel betrekking hebben op de initiatieven als zodanig als ook op het herkennen van bepaalde kritieke factoren.

Het laatste hoofdstuk brengt ons terug naar de onderzoeksvragen die aan het begin van het proefschrift zijn geformuleerd. Omdat noch het menselijke kapitaal van de boeren in de onderzochte gemeenschap, noch de fysieke, onderwijs- en andere lokale faciliteiten veel verschillen, moet de differentiatie tussen boeren voortkomen uit activiteiten buiten de akkerbouw. Wij moeten daarom een wijdere reeks van elementen beschouwen. Zoals de twintig diepgravende gevalstudies aantonen, omvatten deze elementen sociale netwerken, informatie, verheldering vanuit interacties, vertrouwen, reputatie, respect, kredietwaardigheid, ervaring, overleg met anderen, zelfhulp en samenwerking, gunstig overheidsbeleid, belangen en liefhebberijen, overtuigingen, nieuwsgierigheid aangaande de buitenwereld, druk, enzovoort. Deze factoren kunnen worden gevat onder de paraplu of de sfeer van sociaal kapitaal. Natuurlijk wil ik het belang van fysiek en menselijk kapitaal voor de uitvoering van verschillende ontwikkelingsinitiatieven niet verwaarlozen. Maar goed uitrust te zijn met fysiek en menselijk kapitaal houdt niet noodzakelijkerwijs de vaardigheid in om strategische ontwikkelingsinitiatieven te voort te brengen en de ideeën tot actieplannen te verstevigen. Vergeleken daarmee zal voldoende *sociaal* kapitaal in de vorm van gevestigde en uitgebreide sociale netwerken, informatie die voortdurend wordt ontvangen en vernieuwd, bedrijvige interactie met anderen en met de wijdere samenleving, en het bezit van vertrouwen en geloofwaardigheid de middelen verschaffen om nieuwe creatieve en strategische ideeën te ontwikkelen en in initiatieven om te zetten. Sociaal kapitaal is dus de drijvende kracht.

Deze processen van initiatieven en sociaal kapitaal worden ontwikkeld onder bepaalde sociale omstandigheden. Dit is een dynamische cirkel van terugloop en ontplooiing. De werking van sociale netwerken is gebaseerd op bepaalde mechanismen van vertrouwen, en op waarden en normen. Tijdens interactie worden bepaalde waarden en normen al dan niet bewust gebruikt om het bestaan en de werking van bepaalde sociale netwerken te onderhouden. Dit geeft actoren gelegenheden om sociale en andere middelen van hun netwerken te verkrijgen. Bovendien scheppen de vervlechting en wisselwerking van verscheidene factoren sociaal kapitaal. Dit kan daarom niet tot een eenvoudige formule van verwantschap, culturele overtuigingen, normatieve kaders, bepaalde instituties en organisaties enzovoort worden gereduceerd.

Dit onderzoek toont daarom aan dat sociaal kapitaal een samengestelde factor is en vervlochten is met andere factoren, die samen bijdragen tot het initiatiefproces. Elk boereninitiatief zal worden ontwikkeld, versterkt en uitgevoerd door sommige van deze

samenwerkende factoren. Geen enkele factor bewerkt los van de anderen het gehele initiatiefproces. Een initiatief voor kleinschalige handel kan bijvoorbeeld worden voortgebracht vanuit verheldering door interactie met anderen, meestal degenen in het sociale netwerk van de boer. Door de sociale netwerken van henzelf en van anderen in het netwerk zijn boeren dan in staat om toepasselijke informatie te verkrijgen en de benodigde middelen te mobiliseren. Nadat een idee is verwekt moeten boeren misschien verwanten raadplegen om het idee te versterken tot een actieplan. Raadpleging zal op vertrouwen tussen verwanten zijn gebaseerd. Tijdens de uitvoeringsfase moet de boer misschien ervaring uit het verleden integreren en samenwerken met andere boeren, en weer zal op verwantschap of geografische ligging gebaseerd vertrouwen een bestanddeel vormen. Verdere informatie en kennis kan ook worden verkregen uit de media, (studie)bezoeken, lokale markten en tempelkermissen, enzovoort. Al deze factoren werken samen en dragen gezamenlijk bij tot het proces van een kleinschalig handelsinitiatief. Dit betekent dat zij allen een onderdeel zijn van het proces. Aan de andere kant leidt het opwekken van ideeën niet automatisch en noodzakelijk tot een begin van versterking tot een actieplan, noch tot de uitvoering van initiatieven. Deze drie fasen vinden niet noodzakelijkerwijs spontaan of opeenvolgend plaats. Tussendoor moet er misschien aan vele voorwaarden met betrekking tot andere factoren worden voldaan.

Verschillende initiatieven vertegenwoordigen vaak mijlpalen in de loopbaan van een boer. Deze mijlpalen zijn vaak doorbraakpunten in de ontwikkeling van de boer. Zulke punten werden ook wel 'springplanken' naar verdere vooruitgang genoemd. Elk ontwikkelingsinitiatief omvat strategische besluitvorming, met belangrijke implicaties op het gebied van keuzes en van interactiemechanismen. Het proces van ontwikkelingsinitiatieven is dynamisch, hetgeen voornamelijk voortkomt uit menselijke 'agency' en uit de veranderende sociale omgeving. De 'agency' van de boer zelf is het grondmotief dat tot handelingsstrategieën leidt, en de veranderende sociale omgeving is het essentiële aspect dat uitloopt in het voortdurend aanpassen van de strategie. In dit proces wordt de strategie meer gestructureerd.

Het vernieuwende van dit onderzoek is drievoudig. Ten eerste bepaald dit onderzoek expliciet de plaats van de onderzoeker als een van de vele actoren die werken in een gemeenschap. Ten tweede documenteert dit onderzoek het volledige proces van hoe de onderzoeker het toneel betreedt en hoe zijn rol tot stand komt. Ten derde vertegenwoordigd het een nieuwe koers in onderzoek naar gemeenschapsontwikkeling in China.

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