



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

Imagined Cooperatives

An Ethnography of Cooperation and Conflict in
New Rural Reconstruction Projects in a Chinese Village

Verfasser

Christof Lammer, Bakk.phil.

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magister der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, 2012

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 307

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie

Betreuer:

Mag. Dr. Bernhard Hadolt, M.Sc.

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

v

0 INTRODUCTION: SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN CHINA? 1

1 NEW RURAL RECONSTRUCTION: THE THIRD COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN CHINA? 5

1.1 CHINA IN THE 20TH CENTURY: A HISTORY OF ATTEMPTS TO DEVELOP COOPERATIVE SOCIAL RELATIONS	5
1.1.1 RURAL RECONSTRUCTION IN THE 1930S	6
1.1.2 COLLECTIVIZATION UNDER MAO	6
1.2 POST-MAO DECOLLECTIVIZATION AND MARKETIZATION	9
1.3 CONSTRUCTING A NEW SOCIALIST COUNTRYSIDE	11
1.3.1 NEOLIBERAL VISIONS FOR RURAL CHINA	11
1.3.2 WĒN TIÉJŪN AND THE THREE RURAL ISSUES	12
1.3.3 SUBSTANTIVISM VERSUS FORMALISM	14
1.3.4 THE NEW RURAL RECONSTRUCTION MOVEMENT	15
1.3.5 THE SPREAD OF PEASANT PROFESSIONAL COOPERATIVES	16
1.3.6 ALEXANDER DAY'S ASSESSMENT OF THE MOVEMENT	17

2 METHODS 19

2.1 ARRIVING AT ONE VILLAGE: CHOICE AND EXPECTATIONS	19
2.2 THE FIRST TWO WEEKS: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND FIELD NOTES	20
2.3 THE LAST FIVE WEEKS: INTERVIEWS AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION	24
2.4 THE PROCESS OF ANALYZING	26
2.5 THE PROCESS OF WRITING	28
2.6 WHAT TO WRITE AND WHAT NOT TO WRITE: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	29

3 ZOOMING IN: CHINA, THE VILLAGE, THE PROJECTS 31

3.1 PEASANTS AND AGRICULTURE IN CHINA	31
3.1.1 AGRICULTURE IN THE CHINESE ECONOMY	31
3.1.2 INTERREGIONAL, RURAL-URBAN AND INTRAREGIONAL DISPARITIES	32
3.1.3 LAND OWNERSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY RURAL CHINA	33

ii Imagined Cooperatives

3.1.4	ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE	34
3.1.5	HÉNÁN PROVINCE	34
3.2	PEASANTS AND AGRICULTURE IN SHŨIDÀOZHUĀNG VILLAGE	35
3.2.1	THE VILLAGE	35
3.2.2	MY TWO MAIN INFORMANTS	39
3.2.3	THE PEASANT COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION	43
4	THE HISTORY OF THE RICE ASSOCIATION	47
4.1	COOPERATION	47
4.2	COMPETITION	48
4.3	CONFLICT AND CORRUPTION	50
5	ECOLOGICAL RICE AND MINOR FOOD CROPS	53
5.1	THE PROFESSIONAL COOPERATIVE	54
5.2	THE SMALL GROUP FOR ECOLOGICAL RICE	55
5.2.1	THE MEANING OF BEING A MEMBER: SELLING RICE TO THE COOPERATIVE	55
5.2.2	VILLAGE CADRES IN CONTROL	62
5.2.3	THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF GIFT GIVING	66
5.3	THE SMALL GROUP FOR ECOLOGICAL MINOR FOOD CROPS	68
5.4	MANAGING MEN, PACKAGING WOMEN	72
5.5	THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION	77
6	ORGANIC RICE AND WHEAT	81
6.1	THE ADVANTAGES OF GROWING ORGANIC RICE	82
6.2	MUTUAL AID AND PAID WORK IN THE RICE FIELDS	83
6.3	DEALING WITH CHALLENGES WITH(OUT) THE COOPERATIVE	84
6.4	YIELDS AND SALES: CONCERNS OF THE COOPERATIVE	86
6.5	FEELING POWERLESS: THE PEASANT'S DISSATISFACTION WITH REMUNERATION	88
7	LOTUS ROOTS AND CRABS	93
7.1	OUTLINING THE LOTUS AND CRABS SMALL GROUP	94
7.1.1	A NEW IDEA	94
7.1.2	LOTUS ROOTS AND CRABS AS COMMODITIES AND GIFTS	94
7.1.3	THE MEANING OF LOSS	95
7.1.4	STATE SUPPORT	98
7.2	VILLAGE CADRES AS SHAREHOLDERS	100
7.3	ONE PERMANENT WORKER...	101
7.3.1	... FOR GUARDING, FEEDING AND SECRET ACCOUNTING	101
7.3.2	FROM THE VILLAGE TO THE CITY AND BACK TO THE VILLAGE	104
7.4	DAY LABORERS...	107
7.4.1	... FOR PLANTING LOTUS ROOTS	107
7.4.2	... FOR DIGGING UP LOTUS ROOTS	108
7.5	VOLUNTEER DUTY AT THE LOTUS FIELD	109
7.6	RELATIONS OF CLASS OR PATRON-CLIENT RELATIONS?	111
7.6.1	CLASS RELATIONS	111
7.6.2	PATRON-CLIENT RELATIONS	112
7.6.3	CAPITALISTS/PATRONS AND WORKERS/CLIENTS	113

8	<u>HAPPY PIGS</u>	115
8.1	THE MEANING OF “HAPPY” IN HAPPY PIGS	115
8.2	INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION (1): HÚ QÍHUÁ AND THE HAPPY PIGS	116
8.3	INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION (2): MARKETING OR PRODUCTION COOPERATIVE?	118
8.4	THE DIVISION OF LABOR AT THE HAPPY PIG FARM	120
8.5	SELLING HAPPY PIGS	122
8.6	DECISION-MAKING IN THE HAPPY PIG SMALL GROUP	123
8.7	THE HAPPY PIG SMALL GROUP IN COMPARISON	124
9	<u>MUTUAL FINANCIAL AID</u>	127
9.1	OUTLINING THE FINANCIAL COOPERATIVE	127
9.2	MAJORITY SHAREHOLDERS OR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES?	129
9.2.1	THE ELECTION	129
9.2.2	THE MEETING WITH Lǐ CHĀNGPÍNG	133
9.3	DECISION-MAKING AND RESISTANCE IN COMPARISON	135
9.3.1	OFFICIAL AND INFORMAL DECISION-MAKING	136
9.3.2	OPPORTUNITY AND POTENTIAL RESISTANCE	137
10	<u>ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON COOPERATIVES</u>	141
10.1	DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF COOPERATIVES	141
10.2	SUBSTANTIVISM AND THE SPHERE OF DISTRIBUTION	142
10.2.1	MARKET EXCHANGE	143
10.2.2	RECIPROCITY	144
10.2.3	REDISTRIBUTION	146
10.3	POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE SPHERE OF PRODUCTION	146
10.3.1	MODES, RELATIONS, MEANS AND FORCES OF PRODUCTION	147
10.3.2	MODES OF EXTRACTING SURPLUS AND SOCIAL FORMATIONS	147
10.3.3	NEW SURPLUS IN THE VILLAGE	149
10.3.4	CONTROLLING THE MEANS OF EXCHANGE	149
10.3.5	CONTROLLING THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION	151
10.4	SOCIAL ACTION AND VALUE	154
10.4.1	GRAEBER’S ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY OF VALUE	154
10.4.2	NON-MONETARY TOKENS VALUING COOPERATIVE SOCIAL ACTION	155
10.5	EPHEMERAL ASSOCIATIONS: NEW COOPERATIVES?	157
10.6	“NOT A COOPERATIVE AT ALL”	159
10.7	IMAGINED COOPERATIVES	163
11	<u>CONCLUSION</u>	165
11.1	INTERNAL ORGANIZATION	165
11.2	CONNECTIONS TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD	167
11.3	CHANCES, RISKS AND LIMITS	168
11.4	DEALING WITH THE CHALLENGES TO COOPERATION	169
11.5	FURTHER RESEARCH ON NEW RURAL RECONSTRUCTION	171
	SHORT DESCRIPTIONS OF INVOLVED PERSONS	175
	ABBREVIATIONS	179
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	181

WEBSITES	191
INTERVIEWS, INTERVIEW REPORTS, AND FIELDNOTES	193
ABSTRACT	197
CURRICULUM VITAE	199
KURZDARSTELLUNG	201
LEBENS LAUF	203

Acknowledgments

Although the material token of acknowledgement for writing this diploma thesis, namely an academic title, will be attached to my name, many people were involved in the production process. Here I want to thank everyone involved without forgetting those friends and fellow students I did not mention here.

First of all I want to thank all my informants in the village who shared information with me and took their time and patiently made an effort to let me understand. In many situations I wanted to thank those nice people in the village who made my stay very enjoyable. Often I was told that I should not say “thank you” because we were friends. To avoid misunderstandings, writing “thank you” here is not intended as an act of balancing our accounts and, hence, not about ending our relationship. I am looking forward to returning to the village in the future.

Discussions with Matthew Hale and Yang Huan about the New Rural Reconstruction movement and the projects we studied helped me a lot during my research process in China. Back in Austria Gerti Seiser’s comments on my diploma thesis were very helpful. She was the one who sparked my interest in economic anthropology in the first semester of my studies.

During the whole research process and the process of writing up, my girlfriend Eva was of great help. Via phone she supported me through the ups and downs during my time in the village. Presenting initial concepts and hypothesis to her, and reflecting on them together, was a very important contribution to the resulting product.

Furthermore, the Chinese friends who helped me with the transcription of the many hours of interviews need to be mentioned, especially Wáng Yàn, Jiǎ Yànyàn, Chén Yíngyíng, Kǒng Zhìyíng, and Sūn Tòng.

For reading first drafts and commenting on them I want to thank Philipp, Viktoria, and Dani. Concerning proofreading I don’t know what I would have done without Tom.

Last but not least I want to thank my parents for both monetary and especially non-monetary support throughout my life because they made me who I am.

0 Introduction:

Solidarity Economy in China?

In contemporary China there exists a social movement that promotes cooperation in the countryside. It is called the New Rural Reconstruction Movement (新农村建设运动 *xīn xiāngcūn jiànshè yùndòng*, hereafter NRR or NRRM). However, what one hears about China in the West today has often to do either with miracle like economic growth or with the violation of human rights and the destruction of the environment. Usually one does not learn about bottom-up initiatives trying to build up economic alternatives and experiment with cooperation and self-management in China. Even many of those potentially interested in such attempts, for example those social activists and intellectuals who are promoting solidarity economy (*solidarische Ökonomie*) in German-speaking parts of Europe,¹ do not know about them. Attention is directed mainly to examples from South America. As a student of cultural and social anthropology, as well as of Chinese studies, I wondered if, in the light of the Chinese experience of both Maoist collectivization and post-Mao decollectivization, there were any practices or initiatives in China that pointed in the direction of a cooperative and self-managed alternative to both central planned economy and capitalist or socialist market economy.

This was my initial starting point. I heard about the NRRM and from what I read about the movement I thought it might be aiming at something similar to what the solidarity economy movement is working on. In spring 2011 I went to China eager to find out how the experiments in NRR worked out in practice. In this diploma thesis I present the results of my fieldwork on some NRR projects in a village in central China. My focus is on the internal organization of the cooperative projects, on their connections to the “outside world”, and on the chances and limitations of the experiments in NRR.

¹ The Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social and Solidarity Economy defines solidarity economy as modes of economy that satisfy human needs based on voluntary cooperation, self-organization and mutual aid (URL 1).

- (a) Who is (not) participating in the project? Who is involved in decision-making? How is the work divided between those involved in the project? How are they remunerated?
- (b) How is the NRR project connected with the “outside world”? What roles do the state, markets, urban consumers, intellectuals and social activists, as well as social networks, play? Where do money, materials and ideas come from and go to?
- (c) What are the chances, risks and limitations of the NRR projects? Do they help to improve the material and immaterial situation of the peasants? Do they foster cooperation between the peasants, as well as between peasants and urban consumers, or do they rather create new inequalities within the village?

Altogether I spent more than eight weeks in a village in central China and conducted ethnographic fieldwork with qualitative interviews and participant observation searching for answers to these questions.

My anthropological research is based on a critical realist perspective on ontology and epistemology. In my analysis I combine grounded theory methodology with existing theoretical works in economic anthropology and in the anthropology of cooperatives. I use existing social scientific literature when dealing with historical and greater regional, national, and global context relevant to my local example.

This paper has been organized in the following way:

The first chapter begins by outlining the broader historical context of rural China in which present day attempts to establish new cooperative relations in the village under study are rooted. Following historian Alexander Day’s (2007) proposal of understanding 20th century Chinese history as a series of attempts to create cooperation I put a special focus on cooperative and collective organization and its dissolution. Chapter 1 will then go on to give an overview of two different development models, namely the neoliberal model and the alternative model of the NRRM.

Chapter 2 describes the methods used in this research, namely interviews, participant observation, and a modified form of grounded theory methodology during the process of research. It shows how I entered the field and got into contact with my informants. It also includes reflections on the methods used as well as on ethical questions in the process of writing.

In chapter 3 I first give an overview about agriculture and disparities in China. This bird eyes view enables us to then view the village, the NRR projects, and my two main informants in context.

There exist four different kind of cooperative projects in the village, focusing either on cultural, social, economic or financial cooperation. Two of the projects, namely the cultural troupe and the seniors' association, were only active in winter in the agricultural slack season (农闲 *nóngxián*). I was in the field when there was a lot to do in agriculture (农忙 *nóngmáng*), hence, I did not study those two projects. In line with my interest in economic anthropology I focus on economic cooperation. I present my empirical data on these NRR projects in six chapters.

In chapter 4 I reconstruct the beginning of the NRR experiments by putting together different narratives that exist in the village about Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice (无公害大米协会 *wú gōnghài dànmǐ xiéhuì*). It is a short history about outside challenges like competition and inside challenges like conflict and corruption within peasant cooperatives. Concerning methods this chapter is the exception, as due to the topic I could not use participant observation but only interviews.

In 2008 the Peasant Cooperative Association (农民合作联社 *nóngmín hézuò liánshè*) was established as an umbrella organization for several organizations, including the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid (资金互助社 *zījīn hùzhùshè*), the Professional Cooperative for Edible Mushrooms (食用菌专业合作社 *shíyòngjūn zhuānyè hézuòshè*), and the successor organization of the Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice, namely the Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products (生态农产品专业合作社 *shēngtài nóngchǎnpǐn zhuānyè hézuòshè*).² This Professional Cooperative is at the center of attention in chapters 5 to 8. It is made up of several subgroups.

In chapter 5 I present the Small Group for Ecological Rice (大米生态小组 *dànmǐ shēngtài xiǎozǔ*) and the Small Group for Ecological Minor Food Crops (小杂粮生态小组 *xiǎozáliáng shēngtài xiǎozǔ*). In this chapter I focus on the meaning of being a mem-

² Throughout this paper I use the term professional cooperative or peasant professional cooperative to refer to the Chinese terms *zhǔanyè hézuòshè* (专业合作社) or *nóngmín zhuānyè hézuòshè* (农民专业合作社) respectively. These Chinese terms are translated with various combinations of the terms peasant or farmer and specialized or professional, such as farmer professional cooperative or specialized (peasant) cooperative.

ber, on who controls these small groups, on the role of gift-giving in connection to the outside, on the gender division of labor within these small groups and on the peasants' benefits of participating in them, as well as the risks involved.

In chapter 6 the Small Group for Organic Rice (有机大米种植小组 *yǒujī dànmǐ zhòngzhí xiǎozǔ*) and the Small Group for Organic Wheat (有机小麦种植小组 *yǒujī xiǎomài zhòngzhí xiǎozǔ*) receive attention. The main issues addressed here are the combination of organic agriculture and the NRR project as well as the relation between the producing peasant and the cooperative.

The Small Group for the Integrated Cultivation of Lotus Roots and Crabs (藕蟹混养小组 *ǒuxiè hùnyǎng xiǎozǔ*) is discussed in chapter 7. Concerning the relation with the outside world I deal with the question of state support. However, the main focus is on the division of labor as well as on class and patron-client relations between those involved.

In chapter 8 I give a short overview of the Small Group for Raising Happy Pigs (快乐猪养殖小组 *kuàilèzhū yǎngzhí xiǎozǔ*). I deal with the question of inclusion and exclusion from the cooperative before comparing this project with the others on questions already raised earlier, such as decision-making and the division of labor.

Finally I turn to the village's Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid in chapter 9. However, I do not deal with its operations. On my first day in the village the election of the council of this cooperative was held. The village cadres, who controlled the other NRR projects, were not elected to this council. Hence, I focus on decision-making, power and resistance.

In chapter 10 I view the empirical findings and the grounded theories developed during the research process and presented in chapters 4 to 9 through theoretical concepts from Substantivism, Marxist political economy, as well as from David Graeber's (2011) anthropological theory of value. Furthermore, I discuss if Gabriela Vargas-Cetina's (2005) concept of "ephemeral associations" and Marc Edelman's (1999) concept of "imagined organizations" are useful for understanding the village's NRR projects.

Finally, in the conclusion I summarize the results of my in-depth empirical study. Moreover, I propose future research directions, and raise further research questions.

1 New Rural Reconstruction:

The Third Cooperative Movement in China?

In this chapter I first sketch the history of 20th century rural China, focusing on rural reconstruction in the time of the republic, collectivization in the Mao-era and decollectivization after Mao's death. In this short outline China's rural population is understood as being both shaped by existing social structures and as participating actively in the transformation and reproduction of these social structures in rural China. This is how I also analyze them in the NRR projects under study. The historical background helps us to understand the present structural situation for which neoliberals and NRR scholars, who can be counted among the New Left in China, propose different strategies for the development of the countryside. Both neoliberal and NRR visions for the Chinese countryside are introduced, the latter one in more detail because this study focuses on practical experiments in NRR.

1.1 China in the 20th century: a history of attempts to develop cooperative social relations

The contemporary experiments with NRR are not the first efforts to bring cooperation and collective organization to the Chinese countryside. Historian Alexander Day even suggests the possibility of viewing 20th century Chinese history “as a history of attempts to develop cooperative social relations in order to protect and transform a rural society in crisis, a crisis always related to global capitalism” (Day 2007:330, 2008b:59). There were two big waves of cooperative movements in 20th century China: the Rural Reconstruction Movement (乡村建设运动 *xīngcūn jiànshè yùndòng*) around Liàng Shùmíng (梁漱溟) and Y.C. James Yen (晏阳初 *Yàn Yángchū*) in the 1930s, and the collectivization efforts during the Mao-Era in the 1950s. Maybe the New Rural Reconstruction Movement is the opening stage of a third cooperative movement in China.

1.1.1 Rural Reconstruction in the 1930s

Liàng Shùmíng thought that Chinese culture, especially Confucianism, could solve moral and ethical questions facing China and the world at that time. In contrast to the cities traditional Chinese culture had not completely disappeared in the countryside. Nevertheless, he thought that educational reforms initiated by urban intellectuals were necessary in rural areas. He was opposed to state involvement in rural reconstruction, because the power of the state is based on violence. Without forcing change upon the villagers, his young activists set up schools, introduced new technologies and tried to organize village life. Liàng was not only critical of the state, but also opposed violent revolution as he argued that there were no class contradictions in the villages, only social differences. Concerning economy, Liàng Shùmíng envisioned producer, marketing and credit cooperatives interconnected via decentralized networks. In practice he helped to establish several hundred cooperatives in Shandong Province (Alitto 1986; Thøgersen 2002).

James Yen was a liberal and a Christian who went to university in the USA. Despite of his different ideological starting point, James Yen also believed that the countryside was somehow superior to the cities, because there was still mutual help and understanding. So he also put his hopes for China's future on the Chinese peasant (Hayford 1990).

The works and ideas of Liàng Shùmíng and James Yen concerning rural reconstruction are important points of reference for some NRR advocates (Thøgersen 2009:11–13), whereas other NRR activists are critical of the earlier movement and look for inspiration from overseas models and certain aspects of collectivism under Mao Zedong (Day and Hale 2007:3 n. 3).

1.1.2 Collectivization under Mao

In contrast to the old and the new movements for rural reconstruction, the collectivization efforts in the Mao-era are considered “as somewhat of an aberration in the history of twentieth-century rural cooperative movements” by Alexander Day as it was largely imposed on the peasants top-down from the state without paying attention to local circumstances, and as it cannot be separated from the modernization and industrialization strategy of the Chinese state. Rural surplus was extracted to aid the urban industrialization process (Day 2007:331, 2008b:59).

In the late 1940s and early 1950s the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter CCP) carried out land reform (土地改革 *tǔdì gǎigé*) by classifying peasants as landlords, rich, middle, poor or landless peasants and by redistributing the land of the former categories to the later (Herrmann-Pillath 2009). Afterwards the CCP first organized the peasants in seasonal, and then in year-round mutual-aid groups (互助组 *hùzhùzǔ*) in order to increase economic viability (Walker 1965:5–6). Later on mutual-aid teams were put together in cooperatives, so-called semi-socialist lower-level agricultural producers' cooperatives (半社会主义性质的初级农业生产合作社 *bàn shèhuìzhǔyì xìngzhìde chūjí nóngyè shēngchǎn hézuòshè*), each containing approximately 20 households. Peasants allowed the cooperative to use their land and draft animals. In exchange they received a portion of the agricultural yields. According to their contribution of labor to the cooperative they received another part of the harvest. In the year 1956 the CCP tried to organize peasants—no matter whether or not they had already formed a smaller cooperative—into larger collectives, so-called fully socialist higher-level agricultural producers' cooperatives (完全社会主义性质的高级农业生产合作社 *wánquán shèhuìzhǔyì xìngzhìde gāojí nóngyè shēngchǎn hézuòshè*) of about 40 to 200 families. Peasants were forced to permanently hand over their land and draft animals to the collective. They only received rewards according to contributions of labor. In winter and during other agricultural low seasons the collectives organized this labor to build and repair local infrastructure, such as irrigation systems and terrace hillsides (Unger 2002:7–9).

Mao and other CCP radicals wanted to speed up collectivization in 1958 by establishing ever larger collectives. This resulted in the Great Leap Forward (大跃进 *Dàyuèjìn*). Local officials anxiously followed Mao's call and people's communes (人民公社 *rénmín gōngshè*) were set up all over China. One commune usually consisted of a rural market town and its surrounding villages; some were even bigger (Unger 2002:7–9). Private plots were now completely forbidden. Everything had to be given to the collective, even cooking pots. Peasants had to eat at communal dining halls where they got food for free. In the euphoria that communism would be realized soon, and in a competition to achieve the highest output, local rural officials reported miraculous harvests to the upper levels, while in reality rural production collapsed due to several factors such as missing incentive mechanisms, shortages of labor and capital due to the state's focus on industrialization, as well as natural disasters. The Great Leap Forward was followed by a great famine in many parts of the Chinese countryside due to a combination of

failures in production, food availability, distribution, demand, and consumption efficiency (Chang and Wen 1997).

Rural China needed to be, and was, re-organized again. From 1960 to the early 1980s Chinese peasants were organized in smaller units, namely the production teams (生产队 *shēngchǎn duì*). The Chinese state now tolerated that the collectivized peasants additionally worked on small private plots for their own provision again (about five to seven percent of the arable land). However, at that time (especially during the 1970s) the state tried to suppress free markets where peasants would have been able to sell their agricultural products from these private fields. Production teams of about 10 to 50 families owned the land and its member households worked on it together. Compensation was linked more closely again with labor contribution. Team members elected or informally chose the team leader. The production team protected the individual families against ruin, and organized and paid for public services as well. The production teams of a large village together formed a production brigade (生产大队 *shēngchǎn dàduì*). The brigade operated the local primary school, sometimes a basic health clinic and village factories or repair shops. It was also responsible for the irrigation system if there was one. As the brigade was the lowest level of CCP influence, it was responsible for enforcing political campaigns. One level above the production brigades, the commune—now smaller than during the Great Leap Forward—ran the local secondary school and sometimes a small hospital. Some of them also owned and ran several small rural factories (Unger 2002:9–23).³

In face of the failure of the Great Leap Forward, China's collectives experimented with a whole variety of different wage systems from 1960 onwards. Work points were distributed first according to output, later according to piece and individual task rates. Finally, under Maoist remuneration norms the peasants assessed each other in periodic meetings and work points were distributed according to moral and political standards such as orientation towards the collective. Over time tensions and competition for status grew and eventually led to the abandonment of this remuneration mode. Like a reverse swing of a pendulum the remuneration systems were changed again, first back to task rates and finally back to household contracts (Unger 2002: 73–92).

³ Whether the communes are best seen as a bridge between state and rural society, as Jonathan Unger (1989) proposes, or as a buffer between them, as Vivienne Shue (1988) argues, is a point of disagreement in Chinese studies (Unger 2002:19–23).

Already in November 1953 a state monopoly on the purchase and sale of grain, called “unified purchase and sale” (统购统销 *tǒnggòu tǒngxiāo*), had been introduced (Li 2006:45). The collectivized peasants were not only forced to sell their products to the state for a very low price, but often the state also told the peasant collectives what to plant and where to plant it. Industrial products on the other hand were sold for higher prices. Industrialization was made possible by the exploitation of the peasants who were not able to leave the countryside due to the household registration (户口 *hùkǒu*) system. In this situation overt forms of political protest were dangerous. China’s peasants had to find other ways to resist their exploitation and in many places they made use of what James Scott (1985, 1989) calls the “weapons of the weak”, namely everyday forms of resistance (Zweig 1989; Li 2006), or at least everyday strategies of accommodation (Bianco 2001:257–273), including forms of “collective inaction” (Zhou 1993:66–67).

1.2 Post-Mao decollectivization and marketization

After Mao’s death in 1976 there were big changes in the Chinese countryside again. In the early 1980s the people’s communes were dismantled and the so-called household responsibility system was introduced. The state reduced the quotas the peasants had to fulfill and allowed them to have private plots. The peasants started selling the food that exceeded the state quota on the markets at unregulated prices. Family farming “eliminated the difficulties associated with collective cooperation by, quite simply, terminating collective cooperation” (Unger 2002:92).

Different stories exist about how decollectivization came about. In one narrative radical reformers accomplished a perfect example of policy implementation.⁴ According to another account, Chinese peasants spontaneously pushed for decollectivization.⁵ In a

⁴ This is how Chinese, as well as Western media, portrayed decollectivization: China’s radical reformers analyzed the shortcomings of collective economy and set up experiments in the countryside to test the market-oriented alternatives they had in mind. Afterwards they synthesized the local experiences and carefully prepared a policy package (Kelliher 1992:234).

⁵ Most Western-language specialists in the field of China studies more or less followed a narrative similar to Daniel Kelliher’s (1992) on peasant power under a strong state, or Kate Xiao Zhou’s, according to which China’s peasants spontaneously took the initiative to decollectivize and to return to family farming (Unger 2002:104–105; Zweig 1997:12 n. 32). According to David Zweig, Zhou’s version downplays and Kelliher’s version entirely rejects the important role of radical reformers and factionalism in the process of decollectivization. He states that the leadership could have stopped decollectivization if they had wanted to (Zweig 1997:12–14). To do justice to Kelliher’s argument it should be mentioned that he does not completely ignore the role played by the state as he draws a distinction between innovation and implementation: “local people innovated; the state implemented” (Kelliher 1992:236). Jonathan Unger criticizes Kelliher’s and Zhou’s versions of the story, claiming they lack empirical evidence in the form of

third version a complex and unplanned interplay between different levels of the strong state apparatus imposed the reform upon all of China's peasants.⁶ Yet another narrative tries to get closer to the complex reality of decollectivization in a vast country such as China by looking for a solution between these extremes. David Zweig for example puts stress on the roles of both peasants and radical reformers in the process of decollectivization (Zweig 1997:12–15,29). A combination of everyday forms of peasant resistance and accommodation, collective inaction and initiative from below, policy guidelines from radical reformers from above, and the reactions of lower-level rural officials to this new political wind led via many local variations to a quite unitary and new agricultural system in the Chinese countryside after 1978, namely the household responsibility system under which peasant households individually worked a piece of land contracted to them by the collective. They had to fulfill a quota set by the state but were allowed to sell on the markets the part of the harvest that exceeded the state quota.

However, the promotion of marketization and decollectivization through the post-Mao reforms only replaced one set of problems with another. Whereas agricultural production increased, rural public work and social welfare fell into despair (Day 2008b:57). History has left its tracks on rural China: Technically the land is still owned by the collective at the village or township level. However, since the abandonment of collective agriculture around 1980, China's peasant households have worked their contracted pieces of land individually. Today China's small peasants sell their products not only on local markets, but also on big national and (since China's accession to the WTO in 2001) international markets. Due to a huge population and the scarcity of arable land, scholars talk about a vast "surplus rural population" (农村 / 农业剩余人口 *nóngcūn/nóngyè shèngyǔ rénkǒu*). In the new post-Mao situation there is not enough income for those working in agriculture and living in the countryside, resulting in what economists call a huge "surplus of labor-power" (剩余劳动力 *shèngyǔ láodòngli*) in rural China. This makes many millions of Chinese peasants move to the big cities as

interviews with peasants and officials. He argues that they "essentially adopted the Chinese government's claims that decollectivization was voluntarily initiated by farmers" (Unger 2002:106).

⁶ This is the claim of Jonathan Unger; Kathleen Hartford's is similar (Kelliher 1992:235; Unger 2002:95–118; Zweig 1997:12 n. 33): "A complex and unplanned interplay between the top and bottom levels of the bureaucratic structure, involving ambiguous directives from the top and competitive pressures among politically nervous lower-level officials, had culminated in the countryside's near-total abandonment of the collectives. There had been no master plan, no deliberate effort from above to steer all of rural China uniformly down a single path." (Unger 2002:104) According to David Zweig, this version is also not satisfactory because any explanation of decollectivization must recognize that peasants pushed for it (Zweig 1997:13).

migrant workers to look for a job, where they often perform low paid and onerous work (Schädler 1998:58–61; Unger 2009).

China's rapid economic growth since the beginning of Reform and Opening up (改革开放 *gǎigé kāifàng*) brings with it growing inequalities, social unrest and social, as well as environmental, crisis. In the countryside, where reforms started with decollectivization and the reintroduction of markets, the crisis is now especially deep. After the formulation of the “three rural issues” (三农问题 *sānnóng wèntí*) by the intellectual Wēn Tiějūn (温铁军) in the 1990s (Wen 2001),⁷ and after the complaints of a rural cadre named Lǐ Chāngpíng (李昌平) in early 2000 that “the peasant's lot is really bitter, the countryside is really poor, and agriculture is in crisis”, the Chinese Communist Party finally turned its attention to rural issues again in 2003: Document No. 1 in 2004 suggests boosting peasant incomes (Weigelin-Schwiedrzik 2008), and in 2006 the People's Republic of China launched the campaign to “construct a New Socialist Countryside” (建设社会主义新农村 *jiànshè shèhuìzhǔyì xīn nóngcūn*), a policy framework that is more than just a political slogan, but less than a substantial policy change, according to Ahlers and Schubert (2009).

The reason why I summarized rural China's history, with special attention to collective cooperation, here at length is twofold. First, it is interesting to compare present day efforts with the two earlier waves of attempts to establish rural cooperative relations. Second, the experiences and memories of the second wave still exist in the minds and bodies of some villagers, at least in those of the older ones. When the idea to organize a cooperative in the village under study here was presented at a meeting in 2004, old people immediately remembered Mao-era people's communes (HQH, 2011-06-07:215–222).

1.3 Constructing a New Socialist Countryside

1.3.1 Neoliberal visions for rural China

The new policy framework to construct a New Socialist Countryside mentioned above is also influenced by mainstream economists (主流经济学家 *zhǔliú jīngjìxuéjiā*)—left leaning Chinese intellectuals started to call them “neoliberals” (新自由主义学者 *xīn zìyóuzhǔyìzhě*) in the 1990s (Day 2007:8). They propose further marketization, privati-

zation and continued urbanization as a strategy to solve the rural problems. For example the Western-trained mainstream economist Justin Yifu Lin (林毅夫 Lín Yīfū), who has been the chief economist of the World Bank since 2008, argues that rural China just needs integration into the market economy and modern technology to develop. He sees economic rationality as a universal, the problem of the Chinese countryside being a lack of proper universal institutions, namely market institutions. With a unified national market for land, labor, inputs and agricultural commodities and proper investment opportunities Chinese peasants would act as other entrepreneurs do, trying to maximize their economic profit, resulting in higher productivity and efficiency. Justin Yifu Lin further argues that there is a crisis of overproduction in China, because national productive capacity increased, while demand, especially rural consumption, is low. This is caused by the lack of a proper infrastructure for consumption in the countryside. To solve this problem he proposes that the nation's labor and consumer goods market should be integrated, and that the state should invest in rural infrastructure to boost domestic demand in the countryside. Increased demand would help to maintain economic growth. There would be more employment opportunities in the cities and this would in turn lead to more rural-to-urban migration (Day 2007:223–235). Justin Yifu Lin's influence on national policy is reflected on the semantic level as the title of the campaign uses the words “new countryside” (新农村 *xīn nóngcūn*), a term he uses in his articles (Day and Hale 2007:3 n. 2), as well as on the more material level of growing state investment in rural infrastructure (as I was also able to witness in the village under study).

1.3.2 Wēn Tiějūn and the three rural issues

In the 1990s China's New Left (新左派 *xīn zǔopài*) started to criticize market dominance over society. Wēn Tiějūn (an earlier advocate of market reforms) became the most prominent left (although he does not use this term to describe himself) critic of the mainstream model of rural development oriented towards marketization and urbanization. Wēn Tiějūn is an agricultural economist and, since its foundation in 2004, dean of the School of Agricultural and Rural Development at Rénmín University in Běijīng. Earlier in the 1990s China's intellectuals usually discussed rural China's problems under the rubrics of agricultural economics (农业经济 *nóngyè jīngjì*) and rural development (农村发展 *nóngcūn fāzhǎn*). Only after Wēn Tiějūn (2001) had formulated his

⁷ The term “three rural issues” is explained in the subsection about Wēn Tiějūn below.

version of the three rural issues was there a discursive shift to peasants (农民 *nóngmín*), rural society (农村 *nóngcūn*), and agriculture (农业 *nóngyè*), putting peasants first. If one spoke about the three rural problems earlier (and this was rather rare), peasants were usually placed in the last position. Wēn Tiějūn argues that the three rural issues are interconnected and should therefore not be discussed separately. For him surplus rural labor and the well-being of the peasantry are the keys to understanding current rural problems and to finding a suitable development strategy. In his view, non-market experimentation with cooperation and continued pursuit of equality are necessary to avoid large-scale social conflict, maybe even revolution, in rural society (Day 2007:195–205, 2008b:51–53).

This experimentation with cooperation is necessary, because China can not simply follow the Western path of development and modernization, as this was a unique rather than a universal way, as Wēn Tiějūn (2007) argues in the article “Deconstructing Modernity”. Because of different positions within the world system, China cannot copy the Western path of colonial exploitation of foreign resources and populations. In order to industrialize China had to accumulate primary capital internally in the form of agricultural surplus. Therefore, under Mao China delinked from global capitalism and Chinese socialism was used for the primitive accumulation of capital: The state made the rural sector subsidize the urban sector. Wēn Tiějūn calls this “State Capitalist Primitive Accumulation” (国家资本原始积累 *guójiā zīběn yuánshǐ jīlěi*). Although delinking was necessary due to global capitalist relations, it also led to new contradictions. Wēn Tiějūn argues that the primitive accumulation of capital for industrialization is now over. He calls the reform period after Mao’s death the post-primitive-accumulation period. He argues that because of this new situation, a new rural policy is now possible (Day 2007:206–217, 2008b:53–58).

In his eyes a new rural policy is also necessary, because by way of historical and international research Wēn Tiějūn found out that urbanization, marketization, and privatization did not solve rural problems in other so-called developing countries. Polarization of rural and urban did not diminish, on the contrary. Rural poverty increased and slums mushroomed. Sometimes even rural rebellion or guerrilla warfare was the consequence. Similar to Karl Polanyi’s discussion of “fictitious commodities”, Wēn Tiějūn argues, that land, labor and capital are not commodities in the structural context of the Chinese countryside. On the one hand there is a large peasantry; on the other hand there

are limited resources. This ratio between land and population leads to a particular character of land use. In the small peasant economy (小农经济 xiǎonóng jīngjì) farm land is a means for survival rather than a factor in production. Thus, under these conditions privatization of land is inappropriate. A second problem arises if rural labor is treated as a commodity. If treated like a commodity, rural labor is in surplus and cannot find non-agricultural uses. According to Wēn Tiějūn the outflow of capital to the cities is the third big problem for the countryside. His view can be summarized in one sentence: China's small peasant economy is an economy of its own logic and is different from the rest of the economy. For him, rural China is basically anti-market (非市场 fēi shìchǎng). The concept of small peasant economy Wēn Tiějūn uses stems from Fèi Xiàotōng (费孝通), who was China's first anthropologist (Day 2007:217–223, 2008b:54–58).

1.3.3 Substantivism versus Formalism

Alexander Day finds parallels between these Chinese discussions of rural China and the debate between substantivists and formalists in the West. He puts Wēn Tiějūn in the substantivist tradition of Emile Durkheim, Alexander V. Chayanov, Karl Polanyi, Marshall Sahlins, Teodor Shanin, and James Scott, who all argued that there were substantial differences between the social and economic logics of actors acting in agrarian and industrial economies. Justin Yifu Lin on the other hand should be viewed in the formalist tradition of Theodore Schultz and Samuel Popkin, who put forward the argument that there is only a single economic logic at work within “traditional” and “modern” economies. For them the differences are not substantial, but only institutional. Wēn Tiějūn argues that because of the differing logics one cannot use the formal categories and reasoning of market economics in the countryside (as Justin Yifu Lin did) to develop a proper rural policy. Market institutions would not transform the rural economy into an efficient market economy as Justin Yifu Lin imagines, but would lead to even more rural poverty. Wēn Tiějūn refers to the displacement of poverty from the countryside to the slums in the cities when he warns of the Latin Americanization of China (Day 2007:223–235).

Wēn Tiějūn's arguments are the theoretical foundation of the NRRM's practical rural experimentation with cooperation and institutional innovation. From the point of

view of the activists these experiments should enable the peasants to deal collectively with the three rural problems (Day and Hale 2007:3–4).

1.3.4 The New Rural Reconstruction Movement

The NRR is a (self-proclaimed) movement led by urban intellectuals and social activists. Instead of the Western development model—which wants further urbanization, marketization and privatization—the NRRM wants to build up rural cooperation to increase the welfare of the rural population. Urban intellectuals and social activists therefore initiate NRR experiments in the Chinese countryside. They do so not by coercion but by bringing external resources, mainly ideas and funding, to the countryside to mobilize the internal resources of the villages. The participation of peasants in the NRR projects is voluntary (Day 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Day and Hale 2007; Thøgersen 2009).

Before giving an overview of the different streams within the movement I want to say a few words about terminology. Since the state proclaimed the new policy to construct a New Socialist Countryside, proponents of the NRRM tend to use the term “construction of a new countryside” (新农村建设 *xīn nóngcūn jiànshè*)—Alexander Day and Matthew A. Hale translate it as “new rural construction” (Day and Hale 2007:3 n. 2)—rather than the term “New Rural Reconstruction” (新乡村建设 *xīn xiāngcūn jiànshè*), which they used before the year 2006, a term that drew a clear connection to the earlier movement of the Republican Era as it just added a “new” (新 *xīn*) to the old “Rural Reconstruction” (乡村建设 *xiāngcūn jiànshè*). In contrast the new term uses parts of the state terminology. Alexander Day’s interpretation of this shift is that it opens greater political space for the movement to grow (Day 2008b:58 n. 32). The state’s terminology was in turn influenced by Justin Yifu Lin’s perspective on the “new countryside”. As the content of NRR activists’ conceptions of the “new countryside” differs greatly from what Justin Yifu Lin is suggesting, I use the term “New Rural Reconstruction” (or NRR) when I speak about the movement.

Within the NRRM different streams can be identified. Wēn Tiějūn is said to have the ability to incorporate the innovative work of others into the movement (Day 2007:344, 2008b:64). One of the two currents within the movement puts more focus on material welfare. It tries to raise peasant’s income through economic cooperation. The most prominent proponent of this current is Wēn Tiějūn himself. He sees production cooperatives as the most important way to foster rural development. Economic coopera-

tives can indeed have material advantages for the peasants: It becomes easier for them to get loans. They can buy cheaper and sell at a higher price. Mutual aid increases their ability to withstand market forces (Day 2007:350, 2008b:67–68; Day and Hale 2007:4; Wang 2009:141).

The other current puts more emphasis on immaterial welfare. Liú Xiāngbō (刘相波) opposed the fact that the movement raised the peasants' expectations that cooperation could considerably increase their incomes. Instead he envisioned the movement as a way of helping to build a culture of cooperation (合作文化 *hézuò wénhuà*). Similarly, for Hè Xuěfēng (贺雪峰) NRR means cultural reconstruction through community services and the arts rather than raising peasant incomes (Day 2007:333–334, 2008b:62; Day and Hale 2007:4–5; Hale 2009:139; Wang 2009:141).

Together with peasants, NRR intellectuals and activists set up different kinds of institutions, namely cultural troupes (文艺队 *wényì duì*), seniors' (or old people) associations (老年人协会 *lǎoniánrén xiéhuì*), and economic cooperatives (合作社 *hézuòshè*) to institutionalize different forms of cooperation, namely cultural, social and economic cooperation (He 2007).

Despite their different approaches to NRR, all proponents agree that peasant cooperatives cannot develop within the competitive market economy without outside resources, such as education, technical support and capital. Lacking capital themselves, many activists hope that their projects manage to attract the attention of the government and receive government support (Day 2007:347). Concerning the movement's relationship to the state, it has to be mentioned, that although most activists are not state officials, they have entangled relationships with the state, trying to both “shape government policy and open a political space for experimentation” (Day 2007:321, 2008b:51).

1.3.5 The spread of peasant professional cooperatives

It is estimated that there existed more than 200 thousand peasant professional cooperatives in China around the year 2009.⁸ According to Deng et al. almost no peasant professional cooperative existed in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1998 the Chinese government started to promote rural cooperatives and the number of villages with cooperatives start-

⁸ According to the Ministry of Agriculture 180 thousand peasant professional cooperatives were registered in 2008. Deng et al. estimate that 185 thousand out of a total of 212 thousand cooperatives were registered with local government agencies (Deng et al. 2010:500). According to Zhao 246 thousand cooperatives were registered nationwide at the end of 2009 (Zhao 2011:680).

ed to increase. The most rapid growth occurred after 2004 and especially after the new national law on cooperatives was adopted in 2006 and became effective in 2007 (Deng et al. 2010:499–500).

This new law endowed peasant professional cooperatives with a legal status. They are under the leadership of the agricultural bureaus and have to register with the bureaus of industry and commerce. The law states that the state should support cooperatives through preferential tax treatment as well as through financial and technical support. Interestingly, non-peasants like citizens, enterprises, and institutions are allowed to become members of the cooperatives. Furthermore, each member has at least one vote. Additionally individual members with a large share of capital contribution or volume of transaction are allowed to have up to 20 percent of all votes (Bijman and Hu 2011:103).

It is estimated that around the years 2008 and 2009 more than 20 million peasant households, that are almost ten percent of all rural households, were members of cooperatives (Deng et al. 2010:500; Zhao 2011:680). In comparison with these numbers, the NRRM operates on a small scale nationwide. Activists told Alexander Day that they considered about sixty cooperatives to be somehow connected with the movement (Day 2007:347 n. 626, 2008b:66 n. 53).

1.3.6 Alexander Day's assessment of the movement

To summarize all of the above, I cite Alexander Day, who suggests viewing the NRRM “as a social protective movement responding to the marketization of social relations” (Day 2008b:72). However, although NRR projects can be seen as attempts to protect peasants against the privatization and marketization of society, many NRR activists stress, “that the cooperatives are part of a market economy, not its replacement” (Day 2008b:68). In the NRR discourse utopian marketization is criticized, but not the economic use of markets per se. Exploitation is “understood as the result of unfair competition between weak peasant producers and big capital” (Day 2007:351). With this formulation NRR places itself in the discourse of market socialism (Day 2007:350–354, 2008b:68).

As the NRRM includes attempts to replace, at least partially, market relations with cooperative relations, Alexander Day views the movement as an experiment that continues the theoretical and practical projects of early 20th century Chinese populism and anarchism, as well as of some parts of Maoism (Day 2007:355).

In the present we can witness peasant movements around the world, for example Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil or the Zapatistas in Mexico. From a global perspective Alexander Day views China's NRRM in connection with these peasant movements. They share their doubt that global neoliberal capitalism can include the majority of the population of our planet. In their reaction to the utopian marketization of society, these social protective movements construct new social relations of cooperation that point to a future world beyond exclusion (Day 2007:358, 2008b:50–51).

Historian Alexander Day's dissertation focuses mainly on Chinese discourse about the peasantry. Day stresses the necessity of in-depth ethnographic studies to be able to begin to answer questions about how this new cooperative movement works in practice (Day 2007:339–340). Anthropologist Matthew Hale is writing his dissertation about several NRR experiments in villages in four provinces, namely in Ānhuī, Shānxī, Sìchuān and Guìzhōu (URL 2). My own ethnographic project (this diploma thesis) is smaller than Hale's and focuses only on one village. This does not allow for a comparative study taken on its own, but I hope that it can be another point of comparison when read together with his dissertation and other empirical studies about experiments in NRR.

2 Methods

In this chapter I first describe how Shǔidàozhuāng Village became my research site. I write about my expectations, about how I entered my field of research and about how I got into contact with my informants. I present and reflect on the methods I used to gather empirical data, namely participant observation, informal conversations, field notes, as well as open and semi-structured interviews. Later I reveal the process of analyzing the collected data. As I generated theory following grounded theory methodology I did not do data collection first, data analysis second and theory formation in the end. Instead I already started to analyze my data and formed theory during my time of data collection in the village. In the last section of this chapter I write about how I tried to balance ethical standards and self-censorship.

2.1 Arriving at one village: choice and expectations

China has an uncountable number of villages. As there are less than one hundred practical experiments of NRR in whole China, the choice of my topic already reduced the number of eligible villages drastically. When I asked anthropologist Matthew Hale about potential research sites he proposed to do research in Dàhé County in Hénán Province. In April 2011 I met Zhū Xiǎojiān in her office in a university in Běijīng. She proposed to me the possibility of going to Shǔidàozhuāng and helped me to arrange accommodation in the village.

Her words “home stay tourism” evoked certain expectations about my future stay in the village. I thought that I would stay at one family’s home and that I would sleep at their place, eat and work with them. She also told me that a student volunteer was in the village. I imagined a student volunteer who was enthusiastic about cooperation, cooperatives and the NRRM. I thought that the volunteer would show me around after my arrival in the village. Furthermore, I hoped to find a solidarity economy project, a self-managed cooperative with a lot of participation of peasants, who have a direct say in decision-making.

With my luggage, these expectations and hopes I arrived in Shǔidàozhuāng in the evening on April 18, 2011. This was the time when my expectations started to meet reality. I did not stay at a peasant family's home but at a building called the "cooperation hall" next to the new two-story office building of the village committee. One of the two young men who welcomed me was Mǎ Zhiyǒng, the student volunteer Zhū Xiǎojiān had mentioned. In fact Mǎ Zhiyǒng was no longer a student. He had already graduated with a bachelor in economics and was paid by the Chinese Academy of Sciences as part of a project focusing on mutual help between city and countryside. The other man was called Fāng Fēipéng. He was a young, local villager who worked for one of the small groups of the cooperative. I was also introduced to the NRR intellectual and activist Xiè Yǒngmó who stayed in the village for a few more days. In the week before my arrival he and his teacher Jiāng Bǎilín had held a training session on financial cooperation in the village (FN, 2011-04-18). The three young men gave me a new Chinese name composed of parts of their names because it was not easy for the villagers to remember my name.

2.2 The first two weeks: participant observation and field notes

Although I had prepared several pages of questions before I came to the village, I used my first two weeks to concentrate on participant observation to get an overview of what was going on in the village and started with interviews later on.

The method of participant observation can be invisible to the people around you. That is because, "all humans are participants and observers in all of their everyday interactions," as DeWalt et al. point out. What makes participant observation as a social scientific method different from this everyday activity is "the systematic use of this information for social scientific purposes" (DeWalt et al. 1998:259). The degree of participation in participant observation can vary. DeWalt et al. differentiate between "nonparticipation", "moderate" and "active participation" as well as "complete participation" (DeWalt et al. 1998:262–263). In my case participation was most often moderate. In the case of the cooperative's meetings I was present at the scene of action, but did not get involved in the discussions actively. When I walked through the village and through the fields, I most often only watched the villagers working in the fields or selling their products to peddlers or the cooperative. Sometimes I got actively involved and worked

together with them as in the cases of preparing the lotus field for the crabs, the packaging of rice, or the planting of rice seedlings.

The method of participant observation includes not only participation and observation, but also a third important part. The observations have to be recorded in field notes. Writing field notes is not simply the production of data but always already includes analysis. You cannot write down everything. You have to decide which things are of importance for your research. Sometimes you will leave out relevant things. This is why different descriptions of the same situation and events are not only possible but usual. The quality of the field notes also depends on when they are written. If too much time passes between observation and writing there is an increasing tendency to homogenize and simplify what happened. On the other hand it is not always possible to immediately take notes as this can have a huge influence on ongoing interaction and observation (DeWalt et al. 1998:259,270–272; Emerson et al. 1995:1–65). This is how I tried to deal with this challenge: Sometimes I took out my notepad on the spot, especially in order to remember numbers correctly, sometimes I wrote about the events I witnessed after I left the scene. Later when I returned to my own room in the cooperation hall I wrote more detailed accounts of what happened based on my notes and memories.

On my first morning in the village the members of the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid (or Financial Cooperative) held a meeting and elected the council. This was a great opportunity to start participant observation. Because I did not know anything about the Financial Cooperative at that time except that it existed, and because villagers were talking with a local accent and quite fast, it was hard for me to understand the exact arguments, and sometimes it was not only difficult but impossible for me to get what they were talking about. Due to these circumstances my participant observation included more observation than participation. After this meeting I talked to different participants in order to better understand what I had observed earlier. During my time in the village I had the chance to participate in several meetings of the cooperative projects.

In the village I started my days having breakfast together with Mǎ Zhìyǒng, the student volunteer. Contrary to my expectations it turned out that he did not really want to talk to me about the cooperative. He told me that he had no special interest in cooperatives and that his main focus was on ecological agriculture (生态农业 *shēngtài nóngyè*). He had almost no contact with the local peasants. Most of his time he spent in his room in the new building of the village committee in front of his computer connected to the internet (FN, 2011-04-18). Later it became more and more clear to me that he

was in fact involved in many affairs of the cooperative. I continued questioning him with the response that he said he did not know the answer. Once he told me that I should not ask any questions concerning the present because, he explained, the affairs in the village were very complicated. However, I could ask whatever I wanted about the past of the cooperative. Mǎ Zhiyǒng also called to my attention that Chinese peasants often tell lies and that what they do is different to what they say.⁹ He was different, he explained. Instead of lying he simply said nothing if he did not want to talk about a certain topic (FN, 2011-04-25). Indeed, this was what he did. Sensing that he felt uncomfortable when I bombarded him with questions about the cooperative made me feel uncomfortable too. During my stay I wanted to ask him a lot more questions than I actually did.

Luckily, during my first few days in the village I had the chance to talk with the visiting NRR intellectual and activist Xiè Yǒngmó, who explained to me recent developments of the village's Financial Cooperative. When he went to talk to two council members of the Financial Cooperative, he asked me if I wanted to join him. In this way I first heard about conflicts in the village and got to know two of my later interviewees.

Apart from that, I usually set out to explore the village and the surrounding fields on my own. During my exploratory walks through the village I chatted with peasants about what they were doing and about their daily life in the village.

Of course I was not the only one who was asking questions in these conversations. They wanted to know more about me. They were especially interested in my position and wanted to know why, how and with whom I came to their village. I had the impression that many of them were more relaxed and open when I told them that I came there on my own and that I was neither a student of Zhū Xiǎojiān, who had initiated the NRR projects in the village, nor invited by Wáng Wěi, the party secretary and village leader. I told the villagers that I was interested in the NRRM and in their cooperative and asked if they were members. Many of them replied that the “cooperative was theirs” (合作社是他们几个的 *hézuòshè shì tāmen jǐge de*). By “them” they meant “those few cadres” (他们几个干部的 *tāmen jǐge ganbu de*), “those from the brigade” (大队他们 *dàduì*

⁹ As there is often a difference between what people say and do, anthropologists often combine methods, for example interviews, with participant observation. That was what I did in the village. However, in retrospect Mǎ Zhiyǒng warning about lying peasants appears in another light. Maybe he had certain rumors about the village cadres and the cooperative in mind. For example I heard from villagers that the cooperative allegedly sold ordinary rice as environmentally harmless, ecological or even organic rice to urban consumers for a higher price.

tāmen).¹⁰ They told me that if I wanted to learn something about the cooperative, I should ask Wáng Wěi, the village party branch secretary. I only met a few peasants who told me that they were members of the cooperative (meaning the village's Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid) or that they sold their rice to the cooperative.

During the first two weeks I tried to get to know some of the villagers and to give people time to get used to my presence as well. Although I was not the first not-Chinese looking person in the village, villagers were still curious, especially at the beginning. Although there were quite a lot of students coming to the village to do research I did not have the impression that villagers were tired of being asked questions. Maybe it was of advantage for me that I was not-Chinese looking and thus interesting for them. This was not the only time when my personal characteristics affected participant observation (DeWalt et al. 1998:277–280). I had the impression that people were even more interested in talking with me when I mentioned that I grew up on a small farm in the countryside. Concerning gender, I suspect that female researchers would not have been invited to dinners with the male members of the village committee and their friends. Usually it was only men sitting, eating and drinking together. No women were invited. The wife and daughters-in-law of the host would normally just get some food and eat it in a separate room. If they joined us at the same table it was only towards the end of the dinner. On the other hand, female researchers had probably been able to participate in other ways and to find out about things I was unable to discover, especially about what cooperation and the cooperative meant to the women in the village.

On my tours through the village and the surrounding fields I sometimes had difficulties understanding villagers, especially older people who spoke with an accent. This is why I once asked one young woman who spoke good Mandarin to help me. However, the results were not satisfactory. Instead of talking with me they turned to her and engaged her in small talk. However, the biggest problem was that many of the villagers could not tell us anything about the current situation of the cooperative. I felt it was now necessary to follow the advice of the young woman and to make an expert interview with Wáng Wěi, the party secretary—seemingly the only person who knew anything about the cooperative (FN, 2011-05-02).

¹⁰ Many villagers used the term “brigade” to refer to the village committee, both to members of the village committee and the building, as example in “there at the brigade” (大队那边 dàduì nàbiān).

2.3 The last five weeks: interviews and participant observation

In the following weeks I conducted more than 35 interviews with more than 20 interviewees. The interviews lasted more than 50 hours all together. I took notes and recorded these interviews with my digital voice recorder. After the interviews I wrote the interview reports. In these reports I included information about date, location, contact, a description of the interview process, special events and a lengthy summary of the interview content as well as further questions for the next interview.

My interviews were open and semi-structured. The interviews were open in the sense that there were no given response options. My interviewees were free to answer with whatever they wanted to tell me. The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that I did not strictly abide by a ready-made questionnaire (Mayring 2002:66). I had prepared several pages with interview questions before I came to the village. I used information gathered during the first two weeks of my stay to update these questions. Doing my first interviews in Chinese, I felt more relaxed having a set of Chinese language questions prepared, but I never strictly followed them. During the interviews new questions came to mind and some other questions appeared to me to be of less relevance. After having done several interviews, I did not use my pre-prepared questions any longer. First of all, I became more confident and a few catchwords in German, English or Chinese were enough to remember the questions I wanted to ask. Second of all, the prepared questions turned out to be too general sometimes. In order to get to know specific details I had to ask detailed questions I could not have prepared in advance without knowing the local circumstances.

The first interviews with different interviewees often lasted between one and one and a half hour. The follow up interviews usually were shorter and lasted about half an hour. The longest interview lasted for three and a half hours. With my two main informants I talked for over nine and 14 hours in several interviews. One of my main informants was Wáng Wěi, the party secretary and chairperson of the village committee. The other was Hú Qǐhuá, a council member of the Financial Cooperative. He was a founding member of the Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice (or Rice Association) earlier in 2004, but was not participating in the cooperative projects anymore, the Financial Cooperative being the exception. These two men, who were now in their forties, had been good friends when they were younger but now they were in conflict with each other because of the development of the cooperative projects and their differing views

concerning cooperation. This conflict is visible throughout the picture I draw of the village's NRR projects in the following chapters. As those two are not the only ones involved in this conflict and as there are also other lines of difference and conflict, I always tried to gather different perspectives on certain situations in order not to end up with a one-sided and distorted account. However, the stories I was told moved me and my view on what cooperation was or should be was closer to Hú Qǐhuá's perspective than to Wáng Wěi's. I also felt a bit more comfortable with Hú Qǐhuá. I tried to keep this bias and emotion out of the following analysis. Nevertheless I want to disclose this information to the reader in order to make sure I indeed managed to do so.

In addition to the many hours of interviews with those two men, I did interviews with other founding members of the former Rice Association, with peasants who invested in the cooperative, with peasants who were raising the so-called happy pigs, with peasants who sold their rice to the cooperative, with the peasant who planted organic rice and wheat for the cooperative, with the young man who was raising crabs in the lotus fields for the cooperative, with the council chairperson and with members of the Financial Cooperative, but also with peasants who did not participate in these projects. In addition I also interviewed student volunteers.

Concerning gender, the number of men and women I interviewed is very uneven. Not only my two main informants but also the great majority of my interviewees in the village were men, namely 15 out of 19. One reason for this was that there was no single woman in the councils of the cooperative projects of the village. The village committee had five members. Four of them were men. By law there had to be at least one woman on the village committee, I was told. However, during my seven weeks in the village I never saw her in the new building of the village committee although I was living next door. I heard that she was responsible for birth control. Still, some women were (at least indirectly) involved in the cooperative, namely all the wives of the participating men. I discuss the gender division of labor within the cooperative in chapter 5. Although I talked to some of these women informally the perspectives of women on the cooperative are largely absent.

After my second week I started with interviews but I did not stop participant observation and informal conversations. One day there was an activity for urban consumers in the village. Around that time journalists from CCTV, the main state television station, spent about one week in the village. Several times local officials, scientists, and students visited the village. In fact participant observation proofed to be a very useful

way to gather new information and inputs. It enabled me to ask more specific and detailed questions later on in the interviews. Even my mere presence in the village had an influence on my interviews. People guessed or knew that I saw and heard certain things during my stay—things that they otherwise probably had left unmentioned. Instead of leaving certain events (like arguments, rumors, and one fight) uncommented, it seemed that they thought it would be better for them if they took a stand and conveyed to me their perspective on what had happened.

In cultural and social anthropology it is common wisdom that “the length of time that a person spends engaged in participant observation does make a very large difference in the kind of findings that may be reported” (DeWalt et al. 1998:288). The duration of my stay was seven weeks and thus relatively short, especially as I did research in the countryside. Even after several weeks in the village there were still many new things to discover. It was for example only in my second last week that I took notice of the women packaging the rice for the cooperative in the old building of the village committee. Generally speaking, what is occurring in the village keeps changing with the agricultural activities during a one-year cycle. I had enough time to see the wheat harvest and the planting of rice, but I was not there for the rice harvest. I also could not participate in some activities of the NRR projects. For example the old people’s association was said to be organizing activities only in the agricultural slack season in winter. Anyway, in this case it did not matter so much as my research focus was on economic cooperation.

In November 2011 I returned to the village for a short visit of only four days to get updated about what had happened during the summer. Before going to the village I visited a new shop in the suburbs of Zhengzhou, the capital city of Hénán Province. The shop sold products of several cooperatives from Dàhé County including the village’s cooperative. This time I did five interviews additionally to several informal conversations. I took notes but I did not use the digital voice recorder to record these interviews.

2.4 The process of analyzing

In my research I did not carry out data collection first, data analysis second and theory formation in the end. Instead, following grounded theory methodology in this respect, namely the idea of parallel and circular processes of data collection, data analysis and theory generation (Charmaz 2001:245,251; Glaser and Strauss 1998; Strübing 2004:14;

Truschkat et al. 2005:16–18), I already began analyzing my empirical data and generating theory during the process of data collection in the village. Based on empirical data I wrote memos about hypothesis and preliminary conclusions that came to my mind (Charmaz 2001:259–261; Strübing 2004:33–34). Moreover, in the last five weeks I used information gathered through participant observation, informal conversations and interviews to generate new questions for interviews and informal conversations. On this basis I also thought about where to make participant observation and whom to interview next. In grounded theory methodology this process is called theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss 1998:53; Truschkat et al. 2005:2,13–14).

Generally speaking I did not strictly follow grounded theory methodology in my analysis, however, its central element was ever present, namely the comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1998:11,17). In the process of analysis I always tried to compare persons, actions, situations, the different small groups, and so on, culminating in a comparison between ephemeral cooperatives from Mexico and the ones I studied.

During my stay in the village I did analyze my material, but not yet in a very systematic way. Back in Austria I systematized my analysis. First I numbered all my research questions and sub-questions. I assigned one color to my main research questions. Then I printed out my materials and started the analysis by identifying what people talked about in the interviews, somewhat similar to open coding (or line-by-line coding) in grounded theory methodology (Charmaz 2001: 254–256; Truschkat et al. 2005:14–15; Strübing 2004:19–30). I wrote these categories in German on paper next to the sections in my material. Hence, an act of translation was already involved in this step of analysis. I also used the above-mentioned numbers and colors to mark these sections and make it easier for me to find certain sections that could contribute to answering the research questions later on. Having the approximate content of the rest of the material in mind, I did not wait until similar codes appeared in the material. Sometimes I immediately tried to find the connections between different codes, called axial coding in grounded theory methodology (Truschkat et al. 2005:14–16; Strübing 2004:20–31). Sometimes these were connections I had already detected earlier on in the village. When reading the materials these ideas popped up in my mind again. I also did not wait until I finished these two coding processes before moving on to identify core categories and their connections to other codes and categories, called selective coding (or focused coding) in grounded theory methodology (Charmaz 2001: 257–259; Strübing 2004:18–21,31; Truschkat et al. 2005:15). Sometimes I even skipped the whole coding process

and immediately started writing, because there was so much information that was useful for giving a description of a situation. Indeed, following the instructions of grounded theory methodology too closely and rigidly would restrict creativity and hence impede the generation of theory (Truschkat et al. 2005:2–3).

I started reading all of the interviews of my two main informants as those interviews contain information on every part of the cooperative projects. As I organized the description of my empirical material around the different small groups of the cooperative, I always used those interviews that contained relevant information and then finished the process of analyzing and writing about one small group, as described below, before moving on to the next one. Due to time constraints, as well as to theoretical saturation, I did not code all of my interviews. Theoretical saturation is a concept from grounded theory methodology. It refers to the point when no new data can be found to further develop a grounded theory on a certain topic (Glaser and Strauss 1998:69; Strübing 2004:32–33; Truschkat et al. 2005:18–21). As I knew the empirical data I had collected in the village, I could make such a judgment without going through the material that was still left. There is certainly still useful information in this material that touches upon question I did not deal with in this diploma thesis.

2.5 The process of writing

After going through the material for the first time I typed into the computer what I thought was important about the small group I was currently focusing on. In this manner I got my overall ideas about the small group in order. I built a rough framework with more specific questions, small hypothesis as well as some preliminary conclusions.

The next step was to go through my materials again, identifying relevant passages by the numbers and colors I had added in the first step of coding. I added more detailed information from interviews and field notes to the rough framework I had constructed before, and by doing this refined my hypothesis and conclusions. Hence, this step included both analyzing and writing.

My initial intention was to first write the empirical chapters and generate my own grounded theory out of the material. The second step was to set my grounded theory in relation to anthropological theories suitable to the material and analyze the empirical data presented in the preceding chapters a second time. However, at some points I felt

that adding theoretical perspectives was already needed in the empirical chapter, for example concerning the question of class and patron-client relations in chapter 7.

There are different perspectives among those social scientists who promote grounded theory methodology concerning if, how and to what extent to use already existing theories in the generation of the grounded theory. The founding fathers of grounded theory methodology, Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser, take an ambivalent position concerning existing theories. Therefore, Danermark et al., arguing from a critical realist perspective, charge them with the accusation that their approach to grounded theory is based on an empiricist epistemology (Danermark et al. 2002:136–137).

As my anthropological research is based on a critical realist perspective on ontology and epistemology (Bhaskar 1998, 2008; Danermark et al. 2002; Sayer 1992), I generated theory about the subject of my study not only along the lines of grounded theory methodology (Charmaz 2001; Glaser and Strauss 1998; Strübing 2004; Truschkat et al. 2005) but in combination with existing theoretical frameworks. In this way I was able to come to conclusions I would have not been able to draw based on a pure inductive approach.¹¹ Hence, I tried to follow the advice of Danermark et al., who argue that there is a tendency that a research process is most productive if the open attitude towards the empirical data is combined with existing concepts and theories (Danermark et al. 2002:136–137).

2.6 What to write and what not to write: ethical considerations

One day I encountered Zhào Yùgāng, the former chairperson of the Cooperative for Economic Development and a council member of the former Rice Association, at the bridge in the northeastern edge of the village. Before he agreed to conduct an interview with me, he asked me, if I would write about the true story, or about the story Wáng Wěi and Zhū Xiǎojiān were telling (IR ZYG, 2011-05-28).

Zhū Xiǎojiān, who had initiated the NRR projects in the village and who has written scientific texts about them without anonymizing the names of the village and the actors involved, asked me to make the name of the village anonymous after discussing my research before I returned to Austria in summer 2011 (FN, 2011-06-14). Already

¹¹ Glaser and Strauss argue that grounded theory methodology is an inductive approach (Charmaz 2001:245,264–265; Glaser and Strauss 1998:15). Other authors have argued that this is a self-misunderstanding and that grounded theory methodology develops in an abductive manner as well (Strübing 2004:31–32; Truschkat et al. 2005).

earlier on, when I asked her for recordings of the cooperative's meetings that had taken place before I came to the village, she told me that I should make a distinction between internal and external affairs of the cooperative in order not to destroy their business (FN, 2011-05-03).

Wáng Wěi, party secretary, village leader, and one of my main informants, once told that it was not necessary for me to know too many details about some of the internal problems of the cooperative projects (WW, 2011-05-15b:256–257). Another time he wanted me to switch of my recording machine when he told me about alleged corruption at the township or county level. Obviously I should not use this information (IR WW, 2011-06-08).

After the interviews Hú Qǐhuá, the other one of my main informants and a council member of the former Rice Association, told me that I could write down everything that he had told me, especially the things about Wáng Wěi, the village party branch secretary and chairperson of the village committee. He also told me that I could use his real name (HQH, 2011-06-07:709–711). He thought he had nothing to lose and he did not say anything bad about his country—he used the term *guójiā* (国家), which means both country and state—by telling the truth (HQH, 2011-05-07:576–579). However, he asked me not to mention some things he told me about other villagers with whom he was not in conflict. He asked me not to mention that he thought that they obeyed whatever the village leader said. He did not want to spoil his relationships with these fellow villagers.

In the following chapters I tried to respect these diverse wishes of my informants. However, not writing about existing internal conflicts would make the whole effort of analyzing the NRR projects in the village pointless. In order not to harm my informants, who were willing to share information with me, I made all the names of the villagers anonymous as well as those of NRR intellectuals more deeply involved in the project. Furthermore, I made the names of places up to the province level anonymous.

3 Zooming In: China, the Village, the Projects

In this chapter I move from a very general overview of rural issues in China to ever more concrete contextual information about the village, the cooperative projects and the social actors that appear in the empirical chapters that follow. I start with a very general picture about peasants, migrant workers, agriculture and disparities in China. This should help to view the village under study, which I present in the second part of this chapter, in context. In this first part I also offer a short outline of the administrative structure and land ownership in rural China. Before focusing on the village I studied, I add an intermediate step by way of briefly introducing the Hénán Province. Readers, who are familiar with the basic situation in rural China, might want to skip the first part of this chapter.

In the second part of this chapter I provide the reader with more specific contextual knowledge when I describe the situation of the village. Furthermore, I introduce my two main informants at this point as this will help to understand their statements in the empirical chapters that follow. Other persons are introduced in these chapters when they enter the stage. Finally, I present an overview of the NRR projects in the village.

3.1 Peasants and agriculture in China

3.1.1 Agriculture in the Chinese economy

“China has been a peasant society for millennia” if peasant is defined “as a smallholding farmer, producing crops for family consumption and for market exchange, using family labor throughout the farming cycle” (Little 2009:81). China has still a vast rural population. In the early 21st century about two thirds of the population might still fit in the category of peasantry.¹² However, not all of them are cultivators. Around the year

¹² The term “peasant” is now generally used to translate the Chinese term *nóngmín* (农民). However, the controversy whether peasant or farmer is the more appropriate term remains unresolved (Padovani and Finnane 2009:78).

2000 nonagricultural income already accounted for more than half of the rural income. In 1949 the agricultural sector made up more than 60 percent of China's GDP. In 1998 it was a mere 18 percent. Today agriculture makes up about 10 percent of the Chinese economy. Since 1994 less than one half of the workforce has been active in agriculture (Ash 2009:22; Padovani and Finnane 2009:79,81).

3.1.2 Interregional, rural-urban and intraregional disparities

China is a vast country with many different agrarian zones (Kolb 2006; Taubmann 2007). In north China there is the best and mainly flat soil. However, the climate is not as favorable as in the south. Winters are colder and there is not a lot of rain. In south China there is a lot of rain and agriculture is possible year round. However, in the south the quality of the soil is poor (Taubmann 2007:18).

The income distribution in rural China is unequal. According to the sociologist Lu Xueyi from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in 2001 the average annual per capita income of the rural population was 2,366 CNY, but 58 percent of the rural population's annual income was below that average (Zhang 2009:316–317). According to official data, in 2007 the per capita annual net income for rural households was about 4 thousand CNY, while for urban households it was almost 14 thousand CNY. However, the measurement of personal income in China is difficult. Hence, numbers should be used with caution (Herrmann-Pillath 2009a:297–298). Nevertheless, there is agreement about significant rural-urban and interregional disparities within China (Zhang 2009:316; Schädler 1998:61–65; Taubmann 2007:40). The most poverty-stricken districts are situated in the southwest and west, as well as in the mountainous area of the north-central part of China. In these areas the soil is poor and rain is inadequate. The rural districts along the east coast of China are better off due to off-farm entrepreneurship and rural industrialization. The agricultural heartland of central China is situated between these two extremes (Unger 2009:310).

Concerning internal migration there exist regional differences as well. Overall there are far more than 100 million migrant workers on the move within China (Dillon 2009:34; Schädler 1998:66; Taubmann 2007:40; Unger 2009:310). In 2007 some started to argue that the wave of migration was slowing down, but whether or not this is a steady tendency is not yet clear (Dillon 2009:34). In west and central China it is mainly young men who migrate to the cities to work in the industrial sector, while women and old people stay in the village where they cultivate the family's land. In the coastal areas

peasants from other areas work in the fields of the local rural population as most family members from the local rural population in these richer regions work in non-agricultural occupations (Schädler 1998:64–65).

In addition to the just mentioned differences between regions, there are considerable differences within regions and provinces as well (Zhang 2009:316; Taubmann 2007:43,47). Transport infrastructure and proximity to cities are important factors for these differences (Schädler 1998:63–64). According to Herrmann-Pillath, highly aggregate measures “blur the fact that total inequality is most strongly influenced by inequality within the smaller units of measurement. For example, intrarural income inequality is determined less by interregional inequality than by inequality within villages.” (Herrmann-Pillath 2009:298–299). Differences are more pronounced within richer areas, where wage labor plays a more significant role, as in the villages where peasants chiefly practice subsistence agriculture (Schädler 1998:64).

3.1.3 Land ownership in contemporary rural China

Arable land in China is limited and shrinking. In 2003 China had a per capita area of arable land of only 0,10 hectare in comparison to 0,79 hectare in the USA and 0,21 hectare in India (Taubmann 2007:19–20).

While land in the urban areas is state property, rural land is collectively owned in formal and legal sense. The land in the countryside is also *de facto* controlled by the state, namely by the lowest level of the government structure, the township administration. Since reform and opening up the peasant households have long-term contracts for land use rights. However, the families do not have the inalienable legal right to sell or retain their land (Dillon 2009:34–35). The land use right of the peasant family is the safety network of the rural population in China (Schädler 1998:61). In 2008 a law was passed to allow peasants to trade their rights to use of the land (Padovani and Finnane 2009:81). In the process of expansion of industry, urban housing and transport networks, a lot of agricultural land is bought or requisitioned. Often corruption of local officials is involved in these deals and peasants are forced off their land. At the beginning of the new millennium land disputes replaced protests against high taxation as the main source of rural unrest (Dillon 2009:34–35). The unpopular agricultural tax had been gradually reduced in many places in China, especially in the poorest counties, before in 2006 the agricultural tax on land was completely abolished. In this new situation local government has to find other ways of generating revenue (Dillon 2009:37).

3.1.4 Administrative Structure

The government system of the People's Republic of China has four levels of local government, namely the province, the prefecture, the county, and the township level. The villages are not part of the government system. Every level of the government system has a "people's government" that is elected by the "people's congress" of the same level. From the county level upward, the people's congresses are elected by the lower-level people's congresses. The same four-level division also applies to the territorial apparatus of the CCP. The CCP committees lead all state governmental organs at the corresponding level (Cabestan 2009).

There is a branch of the CCP, a village committee and a village representatives' assembly in every village (He 2009:213). Since 1987, the central government requires rural authorities to implement elections for the selection of village officials. Sometimes there is multicandidate competition but in many cases incumbent village officials dominate the election procedures and hence manage to become reelected (Unger 2009:311). He Baogang differentiates between the absence of democracy, formalistic democracy, semi-democracy and established democracy in the Chinese villages. Both the absence of democracy and established democracy are very rare. In most cases village democracy is formalistic, however, moving more and more often towards semi-democracy. In many villages elections are held, but these are either not competitive or only semi-competitive. Often elections are manipulated or muddled and, hence, only a formality, but some villagers have started to fight for their village citizenship (He 2009:213–214). Above the village level there are no direct elections for officials at all. Moreover, many village party branch secretaries are not elected but selected by officials from a higher level within the CCP (Unger 2009:311).

3.1.5 Hénán Province

The village under study in this diploma thesis is located in Hénán Province in the Central Plain of China. Hénán province is part of the agricultural heartlands of central China. The Yellow River flows through this zone. Hence, the names of two provinces in this zone are north (Héběi Province) and south of the river (Hénán Province). Hénán Province has a population of almost 100 million people and was until recently the most populous province of China. As it is rich in natural resources it served as a granary for the Chinese empire. There is a lot of rain in June and July. This short rainy period is

followed by an almost rainless period of eight months. Both floods and droughts are frequent (Heberer 2009b:196). Hénán is part of an agricultural zone in central China that also includes most parts of Běijīng, Tiānjīn, Héběi, Shāndōng, Ānhuī and Jiāngsū. About one fifth of China's agrarian land is situated in this area. About half of the agrarian land in this zone is irrigated. Due to the semi-humid or humid climate, up to two harvests per year are possible (Kolb 2006:111). Until recently most peasants in Hénán have not been specialized in commercial crops but in growing grain, mainly wheat and maize, as Hénán is part of the Chinese grain belt (Kolb 2006:111; Unger 2009:310). Other agricultural products grown in this agricultural area are sweet potatoes, cotton, tobacco, sesame, and fruits. There is not a lot of animal husbandry or forestry. The region is predominately free of woods (Kolb 2006:111).

3.2 Peasants and agriculture in Shǔidàozhuāng Village

3.2.1 The village

Shǔidàozhuāng is located in Dàhé county of Píngyuán Municipality in Hénán Province. Whenever I told people on the train or on the bus that I was going to Dàhé County they told me that it was a very poor place (FN, 2011-04-18). Shǔidàozhuāng is about ten kilometers away from the county town and two kilometers south of a big national road. Hence, transportation is convenient. Not far away from the village there are also two expressways. About one kilometer to the south of the village, one of the expressways crosses a railway line and this artificial elevation is far and wide the only one as the land is completely flat. There is a big irrigation channel at the eastern edge of the village that provides the fields surrounding the village, especially those in the east, with water from the Yellow River. The linear distance from the village to the big river is only about ten kilometers.

In 2011 the village Shǔidàozhuāng had a population of about 1.5 thousand inhabitants.¹³ According to the village's party secretary, the village had 359 households (WW, 2011-05-15a:292). Around 2006 the average annual per capita income in the village

was

¹³ This number comes from an online article written by the chairperson of the village committee, Wáng Wěi. Another written source mentions that the population of the village was less than three thousand. According to yet another one it was exactly 1,351. I cannot mention the sources used here in order to do not expose the identity of the village under study.

about two thousand CNY.¹⁴ The village had a land area of 2860 *mǔ* (亩),¹⁵ according to the party secretary (WW, 2011-05-15a:455). During the reform process post 1978, the land was contracted to the individual households. Every household was contracted 1.8 *mǔ* per person.¹⁶ While Jonathan Unger maintains that in many Chinese villages land was redistributed every three to five years (Unger 2009:309), this was not the case in Shǔidào_{zhuāng}, according to the accountant of the village committee (FN, 2011-04-20).

On their land the villagers of Shǔidào_{zhuāng} usually planted winter wheat and after the wheat harvest maize or rice. Some villagers cultivated more labor-intensive crops, such as cotton or lotus roots. The peasants of the different small groups, whose fields were adjacent, had to agree whether to plant crops such as maize or cotton in dry fields or rice and lotus roots in wet fields every season. In their own courtyards, villagers usually planted vegetables for their own consumption. Some of the villagers raised chickens and pigs in their own courtyards. A few villagers herded a few goats between the fields. Very few of the villagers had cows. Many but not all households had motorized three-wheelers or small tractors to transport grain, soil, or other things. Around five to ten years ago villagers have increasingly been using machines for planting and harvesting wheat, rice, and maize. The peasants did not own these machines themselves. Rather they paid other people to do the work with their machines. If one family member earned money as a migrant worker, or if the family ran a small business in the village, many households could afford this facilitation. However, poorer villagers still harvested by hand. If a combine harvester could not enter the dry field because wet fields surrounded it, or because cotton was planted between strips of winter wheat, the villagers had no other option than to do the work by hand. The part of the harvest the villagers did not eat themselves, they usually sold to small private peddlers who came to the village. Normally they did not sell staple food such as wheat and rice immediately after the harvest. They waited until prices rose or until they urgently needed the money.

Some villagers were engaged in other nonagricultural activities within the village. Until a few years ago many villagers had produced leather shoes at home. When I came

¹⁴ Again in order to protect the anonymity of the village I cannot mention the source here.

¹⁵ Fifteen *mǔ* are equal to one hectare.

¹⁶ When I asked peasants how much land their family cultivated, they, especially the older ones, often told me that they had 1.7 or 1.8 *mǔ* per person, although old family members had died and new ones were born since the distribution of land. Only when I asked a second time they told me how much land they actually tilled.

to the village for the first time, everyone had already stopped due to falling prices. However, there were five to six small convenience stores in the village. Two households sold steamed buns and another one cold vegetarian and meaty dishes. If guests from the outside came to the village, food was offered in the clean living room of another household. Villagers could have their wheat processed to flour and noodles in at least two different households. Other households had small rice processing machines. On the walls of some households it was written that they offered oil and water for motorized vehicles. Furthermore, there were three suppliers of agricultural inputs in the village.

Every five days a temporary market came to the village. Villagers could buy shoes, clothing, vegetables, seeds, food, sweets, tools, dishes, and plates there (FN, 2011-04-21). The temporary market was a recent development. A few years ago some houses had been torn down in order to widen the small road and to make room for the temporary market. During my time in the village I witnessed a violent fight between the party secretary and one angry villager, who complained about insufficient compensation (FN, 2011-06-04). As mentioned above in the first part of this chapter, land issues are now the most common cause for social unrest in the countryside.

Concerning public welfare there was a small health station in the village, as well as a kindergarten and a primary school for the first six grades. After primary school children from the village could visit the junior middle school in the township and later on a senior middle school in the county town.

After the beginning of the new millennium more and more villagers from Shǔidàozhuāng started to migrate to the cities to find work. At least one fifth of the village's population earned money as migrant workers in one of China's big cities, a villager told me (FN, 2011-04-19). Some young people lived and worked in the nearby county town. When I walked through the village, I saw mainly women, old people, and many young children, but almost no young adults.

Most villagers used electro bikes for mobility. Some of them were still using bicycles. There were not many cars on the small roads of the village Shǔidàozhuāng. Wáng Wěi, the party secretary, owned a car. The other village cadres, most often Wáng Yājūn, the accountant of the village, and sometimes Huáng Guóqiáng, used the little red minibus, which was supposed to be used for transporting things for the cooperative. In addition to these two cars, at least one villager was a taxi driver in Dàhé County. Sometimes cars were standing in front of the courtyards when relatives who lived in the cities visited the villagers.

In the village patrilocal residence was common, like in most parts of rural China (Fan 2008:9). During my time in the village several new houses were constructed. Usually new two-story buildings replaced older one-story buildings.

Family clans played a not negligible role in the affairs of the village and the cooperative projects. In the village there were several clans, most importantly the Wángs, the Chéns, and the Huángs.

The last village election took place in 2008. The next one was held shortly after my second time in the village at the end of November 2011. In 2008 Wáng Wěi, Wáng Yàjūn, Chén Yùjiàn, Huáng Guóqiáng and a woman called Lǐ Hóngyīng were elected to the village committee. Wáng Wěi, one of my main informants, was not only in the position of party secretary but also in the position of chairperson of the village committee. Wáng Yàjūn was in the position of accountant. Lǐ Hóngyīng, whom I never saw at the building of the village committee during my stay in the village, was responsible for the implementation of birth control in the village. The former village accountant Gāo Shùnkāi, who was the chairperson of the Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice (or Rice Association),¹⁷ was not reelected to the village committee. However, Hú Qǐhuá, my second main informant, complained to me about irregularities in the election process (HQH, 2011-05-06b:318–362, 2011-06-05:575–576, 2011-06-07:118–123). If we use He Baogang's classification, which I shortly presented above in the section on the administrative structure, village democracy in Shǔidàozhuāng can roughly be classified as formalistic democracy, probably on the way to semi-democracy. In comparison with other Chinese villages, this is rather unexceptional.

The village cadres did not benefit in a direct material way. Wages for the village cadres were low. Around 2005 the wage of the village cadres was a bit more than 100 CNY per month; in 2011 it was 150 per month. Wáng Wěi, the party secretary, earned a bit more, namely 180 CNY per month. Starting in July 2011 he would earn more, namely 1,430 CNY per month, because in 2008 he had passed an exam to become a government employee (公务员 gōngwùyuán), Wáng Wěi told me. He claimed that he was the first pure peasant (纯粹的农民 chún cuì de nóngmín) in Hénán Province to pass this exam (WW, 2011-05-29:144–146, 2011-06-08c:327–335).

¹⁷ In the next chapter I offer a short summary of the conflict-laden history of the Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice.

3.2.2 My two main informants

Here I introduce my two main informants mentioned above. Wáng Wěi and Hú Qīhuá told me many different stories about the village's NRR projects.

In their childhood Wáng Wěi and Hú Qīhuá were not only schoolmates but also best friends (FN, 2011-04-20). Since the beginning both of them were also involved in the NRR projects in the village. In the process of the development of the cooperative projects, a split between them occurred.

Wáng Wěi held many offices in the village but also at higher administrative levels. In 2011 he was village party branch secretary, chairperson of the village committee, chairperson of the Peasant Cooperative Association, chairperson of the Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products, member of the Standing Committees of the People's Congresses of Dàhé County, as well as of Píngyuán Municipality.

Concerning cadres in the People's Republic of China, Thomas Heberer differentiates between (1) the political leading core, (2) the political elite, that is in leading positions at the central and provincial level, (3) the political sub-elite, that is leading distinct sub-areas, and (4) the local sub-elite, that is made up of leading officials of prefectures, municipalities, districts, counties, and townships. In the whole of China there are about nine million people that can be considered part of the local sub-elite. This is less than one percent of the population. Additionally there are about 45 million cadres at the local level, who have limited decision-making power and are closer to the people than to the elite (Heberer 2009a:161).

According to this classification the other village cadres like Wáng Yàjūn, Chén Yùjiàn and Huáng Guóqiáng belong to the last huge group of local level cadres. Wáng Wěi, however, had managed to rise in political office in the past years. He can be considered to belong to the local sub-elite.

Wáng Wěi was in his early forties by the time of my research in 2011. His family has always been selling veterinary medicine. In the early 1990s he followed his father and studied to become veterinarian. Until 1998 he served as veterinarian together with his father. Although competition was getting tougher in the 1990s, his family did very well in this field. In 1998 he registered a business with 300 thousand CNY together with a friend. The business went well. However, in 2000 Wáng Wěi left the business to his friend because he was chosen as party secretary of the village party branch and was elected as chairperson of the village committee. In that time the relationship between

village cadres and the villagers was very tense because the cadres had to collect the taxes for the upper levels of administration. Conflicts often arose because villagers suspected village cadres of putting the collected taxes into their own pockets. Hence, villagers were often unwilling to pay. Wáng Wěi explained that many people voted for him because he had a lot of money and they thought that he would not collect as much money from them as the others did. Furthermore, Wáng Wěi was young and his father had a lot of prestige in the village. He was not only the veterinarian. Many families also invited him to speak at weddings and other feasts. Nevertheless, Wáng Wěi did not like his post as village head and wanted to resign up until 2003 because, before the introduction of the taxation reform (税费改革 *shuìfèi gǎigé*) in 2004, his job was nothing more than displeasing the villagers by collecting taxes. After the elimination of rural taxes the relationship between villagers and cadres improved, he told me. After a call from the agricultural bureau in 2004, Wáng Wěi got involved with Zhū Xiǎojiān and her NRR experiments (WW, 2011-05-15b:52–57, 348–428). Since that time Wáng Wěi managed to rise in political office. Above I mentioned all of his positions.

Hú Qǐhuá, my second main informant, counted his family among the poorest in the village and emphasized that his one-story house was old and worn out (HQH, 2011-06-05:1023–1024). Indeed there were many families with new houses in the village.

Since his marriage almost 20 years ago, Hú Qǐhuá has been raising pigs. He started with only two to five pigs. In 2011 he had forty pigs and his economic income stemmed mainly from pig farming (HQH, 2011-05-06a:33–46). According to Hú Qǐhuá, his family was not wealthy, because he and his wife had their own household since their marriage with only three *mǔ* of land. When his second child, a son, was born in 2000, almost no one from the village was working as a migrant worker in the cities. Around that time he was team leader of a small group, a subgroup of the village, and was busy with collecting the agricultural tax paid in grain and with organizing the digging of a channel together with other village folk. Taking care of these affairs until 2004, he had no time to migrate to the cities to work (HQH, 2011-06-05:1024–1051). In 2004 Wáng Wěi sent Hú Qǐhuá to participate in a training session about cooperatives. Hú Qǐhuá was fascinated by the idea of peasant cooperatives as a way of improving everyone's situation in the village (HQH, 2011-05-07:151–157, 388–393). Between 2004 and 2008 he was busy with the cooperative's affairs as he was a council member of two NRR projects, namely the Rice Association and the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid (or Financial Cooperative). Therefore, in this period he still had no time and energy to im-

prove his household income, he explained to me. Only in 2007 and 2008 was he disappointed with developments within the cooperative and began to focus on expanding his family's piggery. In 2007 he raised more than one hundred pigs and in 2010 he started raising chickens, too. However, he complained about losses due to a lack of experience. In 2011 he allegedly also made losses with his pigs and with vegetables due to bad weather. Hence, in 2011 he was raising fewer pigs as he was under economic pressure (HQH, 2011-06-05:1024–1051).

According to a neighbor, Hú Qǐhuá managed to start new agricultural projects because he was specialized in agriculture, and was not a migrant worker. Furthermore, he had the ability to raise so many pigs and start other new projects because his family, namely his wealthy, elder brother, who had studied abroad, supported him financially (PYH, 2011-05-15:86–101).

Hú Qǐhuá's elder brother studied at the Railway Institute in Shànghǎi and worked in Zhèngzhōu in the communication department of the railway administration before going abroad for two years. When he returned to China he worked for a few years as technical manager in big telecommunication companies in Zhèngzhōu. After a few years he moved to Canada with his whole family (HQH, 2011-06-05:1056–1063).

When I asked Hú Qǐhuá about his elder brother, he told me that although he could ask his elder brother for help in key moments, he did not want to do so. He did not want to depend on the help of others. He wanted to rely on himself. Hú Qǐhuá claimed that he did not use his brother's money but borrowed several tens of thousands from the bank for buying the one hundred pigs in 2007 (HQH, 2011-06-05:1053–1063).

Working as team leader and for the cooperative had a negative influence on his family's economic development, but now Hú Qǐhuá felt that his family's financial situation was slowly improving (HQH, 2011-06-05:1056–1063). His annual income was about 20 thousand CNY. Now he and his wife are cultivating ten *mǔ* of land. (HQH, 2011-05-06a:39–60). Hú Qǐhuá started to concentrate on producing healthy, ecological and organic food because he—as an ordinary peasant, as one of the common people, he emphasized—realized the serious problem of food safety. However, in comparison to the thinking of other people, he viewed himself one step ahead (HQH, 2011-05-06a:77–108). He claimed that many ideas that were realized in the cooperative projects were originally his ideas and only stolen and used by Wáng Wěi (HQH, 2011-05-06a:108–109, 2011-05-06b:26, 2011-05-07:438–459,761).

Hú Qǐhuá had contact to urban consumers, who bought his ecological and organic agricultural products, like pigs, eggs, and chicken. They wanted his products because they trusted their quality. They were willing to pay a better price than on market. Even if Hú Qǐhuá did not want the financial help of his elder brother, he nevertheless made use of his elder brother's connections to wealthy urban consumers. His brother introduced Hú Qǐhuá to them (HQH, 2011-05-06a:113–158). With his elder brother's friends Hú Qǐhuá discussed issues of food safety issues as well as market issues and they told him what they did not dare to eat (HQH, 2011-05-06b:40–51). However, according to Wáng Wěi, Hú Qǐhuá used the contacts he established when Wáng Wěi let him participate in meetings in his place concerning the cooperative in the city (WW, 2011-05-06:175–176).

Hú Qǐhuá stressed that there were not many people like him who consciously did not use agricultural chemicals and chemical fertilizers in agricultural production. He emphasized that no one required him to do so but that he himself wanted to do so (HQH, 2011-05-06a:312–320).

During the interview it became clear that education was very important for him, especially when talking to students and intellectuals. He told me that he liked reading books and studying (HQH, 2011-05-06b:37–39). He proudly told me about his daughter who studied at the best school in the county town (HQH, 2011-05-06a:22). He also proudly recounted that NRR intellectuals applauded him for his proper standard Chinese (HQH, 2011-06-07:178–181). He further mentioned that once a NRR intellectual called him teacher Hú Qǐhuá after reading his report about the financial cooperation in the village (HQH, 2011-06-05:1198–1202).

Hú Qǐhuá said about himself that he sometimes upset people because he spoke openly and directly on certain issues (HQH, 2011-06-07:196–197). Furthermore, Hú Qǐhuá told me that he never viewed himself as inferior to other people. As an example he told me about his meeting with Vice President Xí Jìnpíng, who visited the village in 2009. When Hú Qǐhuá shook Xí Jìnpíng's hand, Hú Qǐhuá thought that they were both Chinese and that they were both citizens and that they only had different duties. He himself was responsible for producing healthy foods, while Xí Jìnpíng was responsible for a better development of China (HQH, 2011-06-07:198–205).

3.2.3 The Peasant Cooperative Association

In 2011 the Peasant Cooperative Association of Shǔidào²zhuāng was officially an umbrella organization of the NRR projects in the village. Wáng Wěi, the village party branch secretary and village committee chairperson of Shǔidào²zhuāng, was also the chairperson of the cooperative association. In my first interview with him he gave me an overview of the village's cooperatives (WW, 2011-05-03). There were five organizations under the umbrella of the cooperative association, namely the Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products, the Professional Cooperative for Edible Mushrooms, the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid as well as the cultural troupe and the seniors' Association (see figure below). The Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products included several sub-groups, which were literally called small groups (小组 xiǎozǔ). Wáng Wěi explained to me that these small groups could be called "cooperatives" (合作社 hézuòshè) as well. Only legally were they not separate cooperatives (WW, 2011-05-03:50–62). There are six sub-groups: the Small Group for Ecological Rice, the Small Group for Ecological Minor Food Crops, the Small Group for Raising Happy Pigs, the Small Groups for Organic Rice and Wheat, and the Small Group for the Integrated Cultivation of Lotus Roots and Crabs (or Lotus and Crabs Small Group).

Wáng Wěi claimed that he had been elected to chairman of the cooperative association in 2008. Hú Qǐhuá, former founding member of the Rice Association, doubted that there had been such an election. If there had been an election, then he had not been invited to participate, even though he was not only council member of the Rice Association, but also vice-chairperson and accountant of the Financial Cooperative. He was not the only one who did not participate in the election. None of the council members of the former Rice Association knew about the election. In Hú Qǐhuá's story Wáng Wěi only proclaimed himself to be the chairperson of the cooperative association (HQH, 2011-05-27a:225–251).

What astonished me was the fact that the peasant cooperative association held its first meeting at the end of May 2011, although it had already been established three years earlier in 2008 (FN, 2011-05-28). Hú Qǐhuá complained to me in an interview that, although he was a council member of the Financial Cooperative, he was not invited to the meeting (HQH, 2011-05-27a:233–245). For Gāo Shùnkāi, who was village accountant until 2008 and the chairperson of the former Rice Association, and Hú Qǐhuá

there was an obvious reason why there had been no meetings of the association until that point. Both suggested that the cooperative association was only a construct for publicity reasons and that it did not de facto exist (HQH, 2011-05-27a:248; GSK, 2011-06-03:480,500). Hú Qǐhuá claimed that the cooperative association was a construct that was only serving Wáng Wěi as a tool to control all the other projects (HQH, 2011-05-27a:251–254).

When I returned to the village in November 2011 Wáng Wěi was in Běijīng at that time. The village cadre Huáng Guóqiáng replaced Wáng Wěi temporarily. He told me that there have been no formal meetings of the cooperative association in summer or in autumn. In the village it was possible to handle such things informally, as people met each other quite often, he explained (FN, 2011-11-14).

In chapters 4 to 9 I deal with several sub-organizations of the peasant cooperative association in more detail, but not with the cultural troupe, the seniors' association, and the Professional Cooperative for Edible Mushrooms. Therefore I write little about them here.

When I was in the village from April to June and in November the seniors' association was inactive. The chairperson of the association, Chén Mùgēn, told me in an interview that the seniors' association opened its doors only in winter. There were many activities for old people, even people from neighboring villages knew about these. The main advantage of this organization was said to be that the in-law relationships in the homes of the villagers improve (CMG, 2011-04-29:191–214).¹⁸

Similar to the seniors' association, the cultural troupe was not very active during my stays in the village. I only saw them performing once on April 30, when the cooperative organized the second happy pig pre-order activities in the village. When asked about the relationship between cultural and economic cooperation, Wáng Wěi, the chairman of the cooperative association, answered that the relationship was one of mutual aid (互相帮忙 *hùxiāng bāngmáng*). The cultural troupe was, for example, performing at marketing events of the cooperative, for example at the happy pig activities just mentioned. On the other hand the cooperative supported the cultural troupe financially if they needed to buy new instruments (WW, 2011-05-03:445–452).

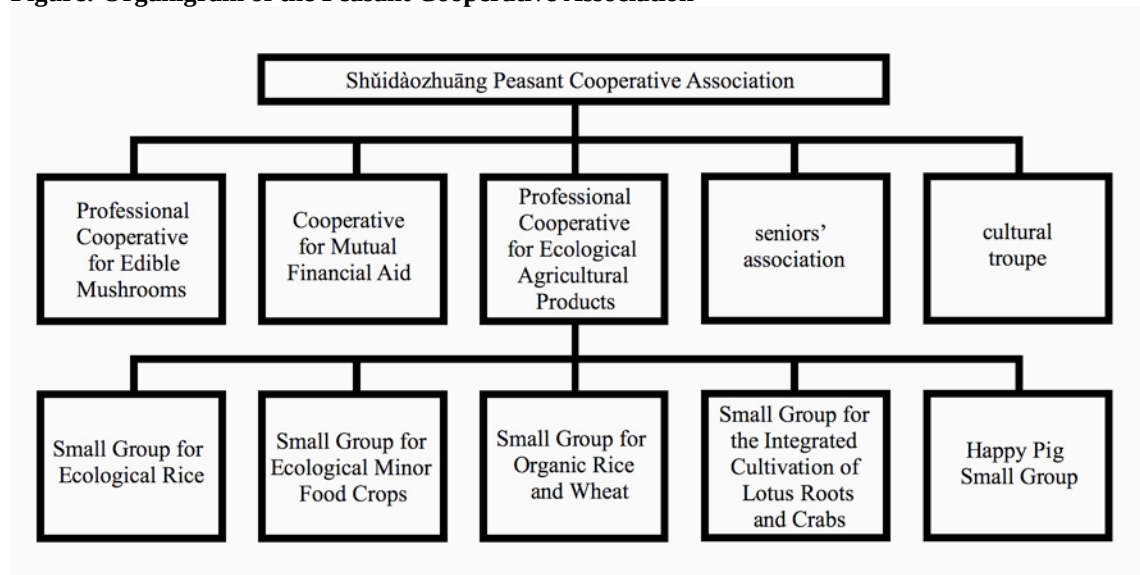
When I was in the village I only saw some material leftovers of the Professional Cooperative for Edible Mushrooms. In the buildings with the many small windows

¹⁸ There is more general information about seniors' associations as NRR projects in rural China in Wang 2009.

members of the cooperative had earlier been growing edible mushrooms. The Mushroom Cooperative was established as a professional cooperative in 2007 (WW, 2001-05-03:25), but it had existed since 2004. Because of falling prices, this business was, by 2008 and 2009, not lucrative. According to Wáng Wěi, “the common people are very realistic, if they loose money, then they don’t grow it”.¹⁹ The Mushroom Cooperative did not operate in 2010 and in 2011, but officially it still existed, as it was still registered. The chairperson of this cooperative was Huáng Jiànguó, a member of the village party branch, a former member of the village committee and an active member of the Lotus and Crabs Small Group. At the beginning the Mushroom Cooperative was one of the best in the village, Wáng Wěi told me. Perhaps the Mushroom Cooperative will start operation again one day in the future (WW, 2011-05-03:11–33,71–75).

In this chapter we had an ever closer look at rural China, at the village, and finally at the NRR project and at two main actors and informants. In the next chapter I summarize the history of the village’s Rice Association and its transformation into the Small Group for Ecological Rice as part of the Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products.

Figure: Organigram of the Peasant Cooperative Association



Source: Own graphic, based on interview with Wáng Wěi (WW, 2011-05-03).

¹⁹ 老百姓很现实嘛，赔了就不种。Lǎobǎixìng hěn xiànré, péile jiù bú zhòng (WW, 2011-05-03:19).

4 The History of the Rice Association

In this chapter I summarize the history of Shǔidàozhuāng's Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice (hereafter RA) by putting together different narratives that existed in the village. It is a history of peasant cooperation, especially at the beginning, facing outside competition on the market and increasing conflict as well as alleged corruption within the organization and the village.

4.1 Cooperation

In 2004 cooperative projects were started in Shǔidàozhuāng with the help of the NRR intellectual Zhū Xiǎojiān. First the Cooperative for Economic Development was established. Zhào Yùgāng, who was one of the three suppliers of agricultural inputs in the village, was elected in the position of the chairperson of the cooperative. With only one vote less, Hú Qǐhuá was elected to be one of the four other council members. Wáng Wěi, who saw himself as the initiator of the cooperative efforts in Shǔidàozhuāng (WW, 2011-05-06:9–11, 2011-05-15b:18), was not in the council of the cooperative because of a rule made up by Zhū Xiǎojiān and Wēn Tiějūn. Village cadres were not allowed to participate in the leadership of the cooperative. Despite this rule Wáng Wěi, Zhào Yùgāng and Zhū Xiǎojiān allowed Gāo Shùnkāi, who at that time was the village's accountant, to become an additional council member through a by-election (WW, 2011-05-15b:11–29, 106–122; GSK, 2011-06-03:49–58).

As everyone was growing paddy in this locality, the council of the comprehensive cooperative proposed to establish the Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice. Everyone at the cooperative's general assembly thought that it was a good idea. However, in order to get the RA started money was needed to pay for the environmental certification process and most peasants were not willing to take this risk. Finally six villagers, mainly council members of the comprehensive cooperative, namely Gāo Shùnkāi, Hú Qǐhuá, Wáng Wěi, Zhào Yùgāng, and two other relatively wealthy villagers, invested a few thousand CNY in the RA. In addition, in 2005 the RA received money from

the Ministry of Agriculture with the help of Zhū Xiǎojiān and Wēn Tiějūn. The environmental examination of the production area was passed and the rest of the invested money was used to organize technological training sessions on environmentally harmless production for the peasants. Furthermore, the RA rented a piece of land to build a warehouse and bought equipment for packaging. They also registered their own trademark.

The first council of the RA was not elected. It was simply comprised of those initial investors. Wáng Wěi and Zhào Yùgāng appointed Gāo Shùnkāi as the council chairperson of the RA. Wáng Wěi himself became the vice-chairperson of the RA.

Peasants from Shǔidàozhuāng and the neighboring villages joined the RA by buying small shares. Organized in small production groups (生产小组 *shēngchǎn xiǎozǔ*), the members of the RA individually produced environmentally harmless rice on their own fields. At the beginning the RA supplied the participating peasants with agricultural inputs. Not all members followed the strict criteria for environmentally harmless rice and some were excluded.

After the paddy harvest, individual member households of the RA usually first stored their harvest at home. When they sold paddy to the RA, the RA promised to pay them the local market price of paddy per *jīn* (斤) plus an initial dividend (一次分红 *yí cì fēnhóng*) of 0,05 RMB per *jīn*.²⁰ Then the RA sold the rice to urban consumers. However, the RA never distributed a second dividend (二次分红 *èr cì fēnhóng*) due to a lack of profits.

The input costs for growing environmentally harmless rice were comparatively high and the output was comparatively low. However, the RA paid the peasants the initial dividend for their environmentally harmless rice. Nevertheless, considering the small size of the peasant's individual plots the overall benefit was limited. Hence, from the perspective of the chairperson of the RA, Gāo Shùnkāi, the RA's success was limited (GSK, 2011-06-03:277–300).

4.2 Competition

The RA was organized like a marketing cooperative. Wáng Wěi summarized the idea behind marketing cooperatives as follows: Individual peasant households cannot enter the market on their own. If peasants get organized in a cooperative they can fulfill

²⁰ One Chinese *jīn* is equivalent to half a kilogram.

all requirements and sell their own products on the market. In this manner they can earn money, which would otherwise be the profit of peddlers, wholesale dealers and supermarkets (WW, 2011-05-29:29–38).

In practice this was, however, not so easy. Over the years the RA tried different methods of selling their environmentally harmless rice. Competition on the market was tough and sometimes other companies cheated them.

Wáng Wěi and Hú Qǐhuá tried to sell rice themselves, first in Zhèngzhōu, the capital of Hénán Province, and later on in Běijīng. However, the urban consumers did not approve their products and preferred to buy rice in the supermarket. Only when Zhū Xiǎojiān helped them to arouse media attention did they manage to sell a lot of rice. However, even with the support of NRR activists, the costs of selling rice in the city were high and as soon as there was less and less media coverage the sales decreased as well.

One of the customers in Běijīng put forward the idea of *gòu mǐ bāo dì* (购米包地). *Gòu mǐ bāo dì* literally means “purchase rice contract land”. It can be seen as one version of community supported agriculture. In 2006 Zhū Xiǎojiān organized a meeting. Individual consumer households contracted half a *mǔ* of land and paid a deposit for it. Later on the urban consumers bought the rice harvested from their contracted land for a price they had agreed upon in advance.

In March 2006 the RA entered for the first time the stores of a big supermarket chain with the help of friends from NRR intellectuals. However, the price the supermarket paid the RA for the environmentally harmless rice was lower than when it sold the rice directly to urban consumers. Moreover, the supermarket did not pay immediately in cash.

From 2008 to 2009 the successor organization of the RA, the Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products, cooperated with a big glutamate company. The company paid the peasants a contracting fee and supplied them with fertilizer and agricultural chemicals. In turn the peasants produced rice for the company on the contracted land.

The RA, and later on the Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products (or Professional Cooperative), also tried the method of sale on consignment. However, once a company in Shēnzhèn tricked them. Another attempt closer to the village, namely in Zhèngzhōu, did not succeed because the consumers did not approve of

the high prices. The Professional Cooperative's own shop in the county town (FN, 2011-04-26), and a shop in the suburbs of Zhèngzhōu, which tried to sell products from several cooperatives from Dàhé County, faced the same problem (FN, 2011-11-08).

From time to time the Professional Cooperative, the successor organization of the RA, also managed to sign contracts with big companies, which wanted to use the ecological rice of the Professional Cooperative as a promotional gift. Possibilities for such contracts did not appear on a regular basis and competition for such contracts was tough (WW, 2011-05-29:268–280).

The problem of selling the rice was one central aspect—if not the most important one—of the story Wáng Wěi told me about the history of the RA in the interviews. The key issue was the competition with other companies on the rice market.

4.3 Conflict and Corruption

In Hú Qīhuá's story the sales problem was not a big deal. Instead of this external problem he focused on internal disagreements and conflicts. Therefore, there exist different narratives within the village about how the transformation from the RA to the Professional Cooperative came about.

In the interviews Wáng Wěi mentioned that some of the earlier council members left the RA because they were exhausted from supporting its development. However, additional contributions were necessary in order to develop Shǔidào Zhuāng and the cooperative. Hence, he and the other village cadres continued (WW, 2011-05-06:223–227). However, not all of the council members dropped out of the RA voluntarily.

Hú Qīhuá told me that the first disagreement between him and Wáng Wěi appeared in Běijīng around New Year 2005. Hú Qīhuá felt that Wáng Wěi wasted the RA's money by inviting journalists and higher-level leaders for meals, by giving rice as presents, by organizing expensive publicity activities, and by making private phone calls at the expense of the cooperative. Earlier on they had managed to sell the same amount of rice without spending so much money (HQH, 2011-05-07:320–481).

Another conflict of interest between the village cadres and the RA arose because Wáng Wěi decided that the village committee was to deal with the *gòu mǐ bāo dì* contracts in 2006. Wáng Wěi distributed the contracts to household who were not members of the RA. Ordinary members and council members of the RA were opposed to Wáng

Wěi's decision because they felt that they did not receive the benefits they were entitled to (HQH, 2011-05-27a:583).

In 2007 the village committee did not give the *gòu mǐ bāo dì* contracts to individual peasant households any more. Instead the village cadres used them for themselves. They rented more than fifty *mǔ* of land, according to Wáng Wěi, for the sake of better management (WW, 2011-06-08a:262–275).

Both Zhào Yùgāng and Gāo Shùnkāi were removed from their offices as chairperson of the Cooperative for Economic Development and village accountant respectively through elections that were not in accordance with the statutes of the cooperative in the first case and manipulated in the second one (HQH, 2011-05-07:549–608, 2011-05-27b:287–362, 446–457, 2011-06-05:851–869; GSK, 2011-06-03:411–423; ZYG, 2011-05-28:389–398).

In 2008 Wáng Wěi registered the Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. Wáng Wěi was elected as chairperson of this new Professional Cooperative. At the end of 2009 Wáng Wěi brought about the cancellation of the RA. In Wáng Wěi's own narrative he did so because the RA was not in accordance with 2007's new law on professional cooperatives (WW, 2011-05-06:213–218, 2011-05-15b:146–239, 2011-06-08b:210–218).

In Hú Qǐhuá's narrative the village cadres had realized that the RA was successful. After initial problems consumers finally accepted its products on the market and it was possible to make money. Hence, the village cadres created the Professional Cooperative and made use of the RA's preparatory work (HQH, 2011-05-06b:206–212).

In 2009 the village cadres started to use the material and immaterial property of the RA, namely the things bought with the initially invested money, the RA's warehouse and packaging machines, the packaging materials, the trademark and, hence, also the RA's reputation, as well as the awards the cooperative projects received from the state (HQH, 2011-05-06b:175–178, 381–394, 2011-05-27a:110–118, 553–556; GSK, 2011-06-03:433–437; ZYG, 2011-05-28:401–406).

Furthermore, three former council members of the RA and other villagers told me that the village cadres who operated the Professional Cooperative bought conventional paddy or rice from outside the village. After packaging it they sold it as allegedly ecological (or organic) rice, supposedly produced by the member households of the village's Professional Cooperative. The rumor went that, in this manner, the village cadres cheated the consumers and earned a lot of money (HQH, 2011-05-06b:214–220, 2011-

05-07:707–730, 2011-05-27a:427–430, 2011-05-27b:439–442; ZYG, 2011-05-28:500–522; FN, 2011-11-12).

Of course, Wáng Wěi claimed that these rumors were not true (WW, 2011-05-29:340–345). Be that as it may, what is a fact is that these rumors existed. James Scott (1985) pointed out that covert tactics of resistance, he called them everyday forms of peasant resistance, are more common among peasants than overt tactics. Gossip is one of these covert tactics.

The village officials and the council members of the former RA shared the view that the village and party cadres controlled the cooperative projects in Shǔidàozhuāng. However, they disagreed on whether this was good or bad.

From Wáng Wěi's point of view it was a good thing. Otherwise there would be contradictions and the development of the cooperative would have been obstructed (WW, 2011-05-29:244–251, 2011-06-08a:174–181).

From the perspective of the council members of the former RA, it was a problem that Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres de facto controlled the cooperative projects in the village. Although they had opposed Wáng Wěi's plans in their position as council members of the RA, they did not manage to prevent him from holding irregular elections, from appropriating the *gòu mǐ bāo dì* contracts, from canceling the RA, and from using its property. According to Hú Qǐhuá, the main reason for this was that officials had many special rights in China.

Hú Qǐhuá summarized the history of the early RA by describing what Wáng Wěi did as a “triple jump” (三级跳 sānjítào): “In the first year it was a cooperative, in the second year it was the village [committee]’s, ... in the third year it became their own [thing].”²¹

Ordinary members of the RA did not seem very concerned about the turbulent history of the RA. The influence on the other villagers was not as big as on the council members of the former RA who had invested quite a lot of money, time and energy into this cooperative venture. With this conflict-laden history in mind we can now have a look at the processes within the cooperative projects in the village in 2011.

²¹ 第一年是合作社，第二年是村里的，... 第三年就成了他们自己的。Dìyì nián shì hézuòshè, dì'èr nián shì cūnlǐ de, ... dìsān nián jiù chéngle tāmen zìjǐ de le (HQH, 2011-05-07:672–674).

5 Ecological Rice and Minor Food Crops

The Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products (or Professional Cooperative) included several small groups which were not separately registered as cooperatives with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. In this chapter I deal with the Small Group for Ecological Rice (大米生态小组 *dàmǐ shēngtài xiǎozǔ*) and the Small Group for Ecological Minor Food Crops (小杂粮生态小组 *xiǎozáliáng shēngtài xiǎozǔ*).

I write about the other small groups of the Professional Cooperative in separate chapters, namely the Small Group for Organic Rice and Wheat in the next chapter, the Lotus and Crabs Small Group in chapter 7 and the Small Group for Raising Happy Pigs in chapter 8.

In the description of the Small Group for Ecological Rice (hereafter ER group) I use my empirical material to discuss the meaning of membership in the Professional Cooperative. I compare the former Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice (or Rice Association) with the later ER group of the Professional Cooperative and point out differences and similarities. Based on my empirical data on the small group I also write about the practices of leadership and gift giving through the village head and the other village cadres in the Professional Cooperative.

When describing the Small Group for Ecological Minor Food Crops (hereafter MFC group) in the next section I compare it to the ER group, because of the many similarities, and point out some differences.

Whereas men managed the affairs of these small groups, their wives were also involved in the operation of the cooperative as they were packaging the rice as well as the minor food crops. The next section focuses on this gendered division of labor within the cooperative.

When Wáng Wěi, the chairperson of the Professional Cooperative, first presented the Professional Cooperative to me in an interview, he focused on the advantages. However, later he conceded that due to risks, limited benefits and the limited capacity of the

cooperative, participation of peasants was limited too. Before dealing with all the issues just mentioned, I start with a short introduction to the village's Professional Cooperative.

5.1 The Professional Cooperative

The Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products was officially founded on April 18, 2008. One month earlier, on March 18, Wáng Wěi had been elected by about eighty households to become chairperson of the council of the new Professional Cooperative (WW, 2011-05-15b:204–206, 2011-06-08b:210,218).²² According to Wáng Wěi, one of the common people proposed to use the method of raising hands for the election (WW, 2011-06-08b:220).

Every year one general assembly was held, with about twenty to thirty of the eighty member households attending. Wáng Wěi thought that many households did not come to the meetings because many people were working somewhere outside of the village, and women were often busy with housework (WW, 2011-06-08b:233–248). In Wáng Wěi's eyes many of the common people simply did not care about the collective. They did not care about the profits or about the losses of the collective, as long as they did not suffer any loss themselves (WW, 2011-06-08b:257–268). Wáng Wěi identified this as “small-peasant consciousness” (小农意识 *xiǎonóng yìshi*). He emphasized that he did not view this consciousness as an inevitable trait of these people. In a materialist way he explained that this small-peasant consciousness was created by the social system, namely when China divided up the land and gave it to the small peasants (WW, 2011-06-08c:111–114).

Through the new law on cooperatives the state protected the professional cooperatives and gave them status as legal entities. The state also provided economic support, for example the Professional Cooperative was exempted from taxes (WW, 2011-05-15b:239–240,253–254).

²² Whether this election was regular, as Wáng Wěi maintained (WW, 2011-05-15b:206), or not, was disputed within the village, as I mentioned in the short summary of the history of the Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice in the preceding chapter.

5.2 The Small Group for Ecological Rice

In the first interview Wáng Wěi nearly forgot to tell me about the Small Group for Ecological Rice (生态大米 *shēngtài dànmǐ*), although it was the biggest one, he told me, when it came to his mind (WW, 2011-05-03:331).

In 2011 the surface area for ecological rice was increased from five to seven hundred *mǔ*. This was all run by the cooperative according to Wáng Wěi (WW, 2011-05-03:331–333; 2011-05-06:238). More than ninety households planted the rice on these seven hundred *mǔ*, according to Wáng Wěi (WW, 2011-05-03:359–360).

The cooperative had the ability to sell the harvest of about four to five hundred *mǔ*, Wáng Wěi told me, which was only about seventy to eighty percent of all the rice produced in the village (WW, 2011-05-06:257–258).

The cooperative organized a unified supply of agricultural inputs, for example of seeds (WW, 2011-05-03:332–333; 2011-05-06:233). However, Wáng Wěi told me that in fact the cooperative specified some varieties of rice, which were neither hybrid nor genetically modified. The peasants had to use these varieties if they wanted to sell the rice to the cooperative later on. Only earlier on did the Rice Association alone supply the peasants with the seeds. Now the peasants could also buy the suitable seeds at those three peasant households in the village who were selling agricultural inputs, such as seeds, fertilizer and agricultural chemicals (WW, 2011-05-03:362–364, 2011-05-06:244–245).

5.2.1 The meaning of being a member: selling rice to the cooperative

As the village got the certification for environmentally harmless rice earlier on and as the cooperative organized countless training sessions from its foundation in 2004 until 2007, the common people from the village and even from the neighboring villages all planted the rice according to the environmentally harmless standards, Wáng Wěi told me (WW, 2011-05-03:341–346, 367–368).

When asked if everyone who planted environmentally harmless rice was also a member of the cooperative, Wáng Wěi said that they all were. He explained this answer as follows. As everyone had participated in the training sessions on environmentally harmless production, the villagers could all produce according to these standards on their own initiative (WW, 2011-05-03:347–351, 368–369).

However, the Professional Cooperative did not—in contrast to the earlier Rice Association—organize the production of environmentally harmless rice, former council members of the Rice Association told me. The former Rice Association even excluded some of its members because they did not produce in accordance with the standards (HQH, 2011-05-06b:218–220, 2011-06-05:269–384; GSK, 2011-06-03:458–459).

When the Professional Cooperative collected the ecological rice,²³ the peasants received the market price plus an additional 0,08 CNY per *jīn* for processed rice or an additional 0,05 CNY per *jīn* for paddy (WW, 2011-05-03:351–357).²⁴ Wáng Wěi understood this additional money as a kind of “protection” (保护 *bǎohù*) offered by the cooperative to everyone (WW, 2011-05-03:388–389). For one special kind of rice called Huángjīnqíng (黄金晴) the cooperative even paid the peasants an additional 0,37 CNY per *jīn* (WW, 2011-05-06:235–236, 38–40).

In cases when the market price for rice was low, when the cooperative had an order for rice coming in and when the peasants were not willing to sell their paddy, the cooperative tried to explain to everyone that it was very important for the reputation of the cooperative to fulfill the order. If still nobody wanted to sell the paddy to the cooperative, the village cadres and council members of the cooperative were mobilized to sell their rice, Wáng Wěi told me. In normal times the peasants only sold rice to the cooperative when they were in need for money and when they felt that the market price was high (WW, 2011-05-06:250–255).²⁵

Usually it was the village cadres and their family clans who sold their rice to the cooperative, for example Wáng Wěi's older brother and his relatives, as well as Chén Yùjiàn's and Huáng Guóqiáng's relatives. Furthermore there were some reliable members of the cooperative, Wáng Wěi stressed. They gave their rice to the cooperative, even if outside enterprises paid a better price. They did that, according to Wáng Wěi, because they knew that in times of falling prices these companies would put high pressure on the prices and the cooperative did not do that (WW, 2011-06-08a:94–100).

²³ Here Wáng Wěi first said “I” before he corrected himself and said “the cooperative” (WW, 2011-05-03:353).

²⁴ One *jīn* is equal to half a kilogram. By “market price” Wáng Wěi meant the price the traders who came to the village to buy the paddy of the peasants were willing to pay (WW, 2011-06-08a:33). The former Rice Association also paid this additional money per *jīn* to its members (WW, 2011-05-03:351–357; GSK, 2011-06-03:327–328).

²⁵ This was very similar to what the council members told me about the practice of the former Rice Association (HQH, 2011-06-05:20–69; GSK, 2011-06-03:350–358).

Only once during my time in the village was I able to witness the cooperative's practice of paddy collection. In early June I observed how peasants transported big bags of paddy to the building of the rice mill with their three wheeled vehicles. They parked their three-wheelers on the weighbridge in front of the rice mill. Zhèng Guìhuā, the wife of Wáng Wěi, took samples to find out about how much rice would be left after processing. The peasant watched her husking the sample with a small machine. Then the load of paddy was weighed and multiplied with the calculated rate of rice. Zhèng Guìhuā wrote these numbers down into a notebook before the eyes of the villagers. The peasants did not immediately receive any money. Together with one of the women, who were hired by the cooperative for packaging the rice, the peasant unloaded her paddy, while Zhèng Guìhuā was already repeating the sampling and weighing procedure together with the next peasants (FN, 2011-06-05).

The peasants could also sell their rice on their own, but they were not allowed to use the packaging of the cooperative and they would therefore not be able to get a higher price on the market, Wáng Wěi explained. The peasants could also sell their rice via personal relationships to consumers, who had heard about the good rice from Shǔidàozhuāng (WW, 2011-05-06:262–267).

Some peasants in the village,²⁶ especially council members of the former Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice, which was the forerunner organization of the ER group of the Professional Cooperative, claimed that the new Professional Cooperative had no members at all (HQH, 2011-05-06b:168–169, 2011-05-07:438–439), and that the money the cooperative earned belonged to those few village cadres (HQH, 2011-05-06b:429). For example Hú Qǐhuá said: “They do not have a cooperative, but they say that there is one.”²⁷

With these other voices from the village in mind, I persistently asked Wáng Wěi whether or not the peasants who sold their paddy to the cooperative were members. He finally said that the permissiveness (随意性 suíyìxìng) of the members was high at the

²⁶ Here I only mention some remarks of two villagers, who worked for the cooperative. Huáng Yùtíng, who cultivated organic rice and wheat for Wáng Wěi and the village cadres, said that there was no cooperative, no organization and no individuals. When I asked her, if there were no meetings, she said: “Look, did you see any meetings?” (你看你见过开会吗? Nǐ kàn nǐ jiànguò kāihuì ma? HYT, 2011-06-04a:443–445). Although I observed some meetings of the HP small group, I did not see any meetings of the ER group of the Professional Cooperative. Fāng Fēipéng, who cultivated lotus roots and crabs for the cooperative, said that this cooperative was only made up of four people, namely the village cadres and no one else (FFP, 2011-05-29:147–159).

²⁷ 他们没有合作社, 但他们就说有一个合作社。Tāmen méiyǒu hézuòshè, dàn tāmen jiù shuō yǒu yí gè hézuòshè (HQH, 2011-05-06b:434).

moment. In one year they planted rice and participated, in the next they did not and withdrew voluntarily from the cooperative. Management was very permissive, very relaxed concerning membership, Wáng Wěi stated, pointing out that this was not only the case in this village. At the moment the operations of the cooperative could not strictly conform to the requirements of the cooperative law, Wáng Wěi conceded. The reason for this was that the land was in the hands of the common people, he argued. Therefore the cooperative was unable to control what the peasants cultivated (WW, 2011-05-03:371–381).

The members of the cooperative did not have to pay a membership fee. Only once at the beginning of the Rice Association in 2005 had some of the current members paid 20 CNY per *mǔ* (WW, 2011-05-03:382–383).

Later Wáng Wěi specified that only those peasants who bought the seeds supplied by the cooperative received the additional 0,05 CNY per *jīn*. The cooperative also bought the rice of the others, but they usually did not receive the additional money. Only before New Year 2011, Wáng Wěi told me, did the cooperative change this rule. Around that time the cooperatives had many orders and needed a lot of rice. Therefore the cooperative also paid the additional 0,05 CNY to peasants who did not get their seeds from the cooperative. Wáng Wěi saw a risk in this practice. He thought that this could make the peasants speculate that they did not need to buy the seeds from the cooperative, but that they could still manage to sell the rice to the cooperative and receive the additional money (WW, 2011-06-08a:42–52).

At the beginning the Rice Association signed contracts with its members about collecting their harvest. However, when the peasants did not want to give their paddy to the Rice Association, the contracts were useless. Later on the Professional Cooperative did not sign any contracts with the peasants, they only had oral agreements (WW, 2011-06-08a:53–56).

Thus, in Wáng Wěi's version, the reason for not having contracts was that they would be useless for the cooperative in the case that peasants broke the contracts. However, he did not mention that it could also happen the other way around.

Hú Qǐhuá told me one story about a broken promise Wáng Wěi made to peasants. Allegedly Wáng Wěi once told the villagers from a neighboring village that only if they bought the seeds the cooperative supplied the cooperative would collect their paddy and pay them a high price. After the harvest, Wáng Wěi never came to collect their paddy. Hence one peasant from that village became active and transported his paddy to the

cooperative, but later on Wáng Wěi did not give him any money. Wáng Wěi only told him that he should come again in two days time, but whenever the peasant came to Wáng Wěi to fetch his money, Wáng Wěi said that he had no money to pay him. After this event, the other peasants from that village also did not dare to give their paddy to the Professional Cooperative (HQH, 2011-06-05:694–703).

The cooperative only bought the products from the peasants. This was the only relationship the peasants had with the cooperative, Hú Qǐhuá claimed. When the village cadres then sold the agricultural products to urban consumers, the money they earned was their money. The peasants were not involved in the process of packaging, marketing and selling (HQH, 2011-05-27a:22–26).

Indeed, when I talked with peasants in the village, many told me that they sold their rice to those who paid most for it (FN, 2011-06-03, 2011-06-05). Once a group of more than fifteen Chinese students from a vocational college of agriculture came to the village for one week to do some research. The peasants also told them that sometimes the market price was higher than the price the cooperative offered. They therefore did not always sell their paddy to the cooperative (FN, 2011-06-03). The peasants did not mention the cooperative as something special. Apparently, for them the Professional Cooperative was just another trader on the market. And obviously, the cooperative did not always offer the best price, although it announced that it always paid the market price plus the additional initial dividend.

Peasants, who handed over their rice to the cooperative one day in June, told me that they did not always sell their paddy to the cooperative because of the price. However, they said that one advantage of the cooperative was that they did not have to transport their paddy so far. This statement was however relativized by my next observation. In the next alleyway some peasants sold their paddy to a trader who came from another province to the village. He collected the paddy right in front of the gate of the home of the peasants (FN, 2011-06-05).

A few days later I told Wáng Wěi what I had observed. First he explained that some traders from South China were probably willing to pay a higher price, because the yields of the harvest of paddy was low in Hubei and Hunan Province due to a big drought and a flooding later on (WW, 2011-06-08a:20–22).

Later he gave me two further reasons, which were independent of such weather influences on the market price. First Wáng Wěi told me about traders who could afford to pay a slightly higher price because they mixed fresh paddy with cheap aged paddy

from state warehouses. They would wash the old rice with special machines and add some flavor to it (WW, 2011-06-08a:58–67).

The second reason Wáng Wěi mentioned was that there were about four to six very big rice companies in Hénán Province, whose rice had a very good reputation. Therefore they managed to sell ordinary rice for an extraordinary high price, which was much higher even than that of the Professional Cooperative's ecological rice. The cooperative was not able to compete with these companies because of these two reasons (WW, 2011-06-08a:74–90).

Wáng Wěi summarized this issue by stating that “the common people are like that, they sell the rice to those who are giving more.”²⁸

Indeed most peasants, whom Wáng Wěi called “members” of the cooperative, did not seem to view their relationship to the cooperative as something different from the market relationship they had to the small peddlers who come to the village to buy paddy. Although the cooperative was supposed to bring an advantage in the form of the initial dividend, which was added to the market price, the cooperative did not even always offer the best price for the peasant. Most peasants in the village did not seem to view the cooperative as “their cooperative” and they were not involved in its operation. The relationship between buyer and seller on an ideal market ends as soon as the exchange is over. Market exchange is a kind of transaction that is mainly about the denial of obligation and the maximization of individual autonomy:

What marks commercial exchange is that it's “impersonal”: who it is that is selling something to us, or buying something from us, should in principle be entirely irrelevant. We are simply comparing the value of two objects. (Graeber 2011:103)

That is exactly what many villagers did when they decided whether to sell to the cooperative or to other traders. However, once the peasants gave their paddy to the cooperative, a temporary bond between member/seller and cooperative/buyer was created, as the cooperative did not pay the peasants immediately. However, as soon as the cooperative gave the outstanding money to the peasant, the relationship with the cooperative was more or less over.

Many peasants were reluctant to participate in the cooperative through selling because of the limited benefits the cooperative offered and the risk of not receiving any money at all for their produce. Most of those who sold their paddy to the cooperative

²⁸ 老百姓就是这样，谁给的高就卖给谁。 Lǎobǎixìng jiùshì zhèyàng ma, shuí gěi de gāo jiù mài gěi shuí (WW, 2011-06-08a:87).

were, if it was not the village cadres themselves, the members of their family clans. Thus their relationship with the cooperative—a market relationship of buying and selling—was based on a preexisting social relationship of kinship—a social relationship that existed before the market exchange and persisted afterwards.

Concerning the question of membership, the former Rice Association was in some respects similar and in some different to the ER group. The main difference was the stronger involvement of the members in the Rice Association. In the first year of the Rice Association, its members participated in many training sessions and they had to buy shares, albeit small ones, in the cooperative. Furthermore the members were organized into production teams with production team leaders being the link between the members and the council of the cooperative. There was mutual supervision and those who did not accord with the standards of the cooperative were excluded from it. At the beginning only the Rice Association supplied the members of the cooperative with agricultural inputs.

However, changes in organization and member involvement already started before the more radical break with the foundation of the Professional Cooperative in 2008 and the cancellation of the Rice Association in 2009. Even before that, the Rice Association did allow its members to buy agricultural inputs from other traders. Already in the second year members did not have to buy any shares or pay any membership fees. And at that time the council members directly informed the members if the Rice Association wanted to buy their paddy. Although the production teams still existed, the production team leaders no longer served as a link between members and council.

One constant feature was that both the Rice Association and the ER group paid the peasants a initial dividend of an additional 0,05 CNY per *jīn* of paddy. The only change in this regard was that the ER group introduced a special kind of rice and that they paid a higher initial dividend for this kind of rice, namely 0,37 CNY per *jīn*.

What remained the same was that the peasants only sold their paddy to the cooperative if they were in need of money or if the marked price for paddy was high. If the ordinary members were not willing to sell, it was the council members who gave their paddy to the Rice Association or the Professional Cooperative later on. However, a crucial change occurred concerning who the council members were. With the change from the Rice Association to the Professional Cooperative not one council member stayed the same. Now it was exclusively village cadres who ran the ER group.

5.2.2 Village cadres in control

The ER group had four shareholders, namely Wáng Wěi, Wáng Yàjūn, Chén Yùjiàn and Huáng Jiànguó. Wáng Wěi told me in one early interview (WW, 2011-05-06:269–275).²⁹ Wáng Wěi stressed, that there had been more shareholders earlier on. However, no one wanted to continue because there was not a lot of money to be earned when the production of rice decreased (WW, 2011-05-06:269–275).³⁰ Only those four kept the cooperative up and running and now managed the cooperative (WW, 2011-05-06:269–275).

Hú Qǐhuá pointed out that this did not meet the standards of the new cooperative law, according to which a cooperative needed to be made up of at least five member households (HQH, 2011-05-27a:123–129). In Wáng Wěi's representation of the Professional Cooperative, it was made up of several small groups. Even if Hú Qǐhuá was right, and there were no other members involved in the operation of the so called cooperative (HQH, 2011-05-06b:168–169, 2011-05-07:438–439),³¹ there were at least five village cadres involved, namely Wáng Wěi, Wáng Yàjūn, Chén Yùjiàn, Huáng Jiànguó,³² and Huáng Guóqiáng if the small groups for rice, minor food crops, and lotus roots and crabs were taken together. I witnessed that even more households were involved in the Happy Pig Small Group. However, if the small groups for rice, minor food crops and

²⁹ In fact in that interview Wáng Wěi said Huáng Guóqiáng (WW, 2011-05-06:269–275), but he must have meant Huáng Jiànguó. Huáng Guóqiáng himself said that he was not involved in selling rice and minor food crops (HGQ, 2011-05-27b:398–403), and Huáng Jiànguó said that he had a share in the ecological rice and minor food crops small groups and Huáng Guóqiáng did not (HJG, 2011-06-04:335–346). Hú Qǐhuá said that the four village cadres originally involved in the operation of the Professional Cooperative were Wáng Wěi, Wáng Yàjūn, Chén Yùjiàn and Huáng Jiànguó. Although Huáng Jiànguó had no longer been part of the village committee since 2008, he was still involved in the operation of the Professional Cooperative because he also held a share in the cooperative. Huáng Guóqiáng, who replaced Huáng Jiànguó in the village committee, was involved in the Happy Pig Small Group of the Professional Cooperative. However, it was not clear to Hú Qǐhuá if Huáng Guóqiáng was also involved in the other parts of the cooperative (HQH, 2011-05-27a:82–93).

³⁰ The stories former council members and shareholders of the Rice Association told me were quite different. They wanted to continue, but they could not. According to their accounts, the village cadres occupied the warehouse of the Rice Association and stole its material (such as the packaging machines) and immaterial (such as the certification for environmentally harmless production and the trademark) property (HQH, 2011-05-06b:175–178, 2011-05-27a:110–118, 2011-06-05:483–495; GSK, 2011-06-03:459–463, 515–516; ZYG, 2011-05-28:401–406). They claimed that from those managing the ER group today only Wáng Wěi had been among those six people who had made a bigger initial investment to get the Rice Association started. Wáng Yàjūn and Chén Yùjiàn had only made the small investment of 20 RMB per *mǔ* of environmentally harmless rice and Huáng Jiànguó had not even bought these small shares in the Rice Association (ZYG, 2011-05-28:309–310).

³¹ Wáng Wěi claimed that there was a general assembly of the Professional Cooperative every year with about thirty of the eighty member households attending (WW, 2011-06-08b:233–248). I was unable to witness with my own eyes whether this was true or not as I did not stay in the village for a whole year.

³² Since 2008 Huáng Jiànguó has no longer been on the village committee, but he has still been in the village party branch (WW, 2011-05-29:241–242), and thus villagers still referred to him as village cadre.

lotus and crabs were treated as separate cooperatives, Hú Qǐhuá was right that each group did not have more than four member households who were involved more deeply in the operation of these small “cooperatives”.

In spring 2011 Wáng Yàjūn was responsible for the management of the ER group. He managed the warehouse, the transport and the financial affairs, as well as the small store of the cooperative in the county town (WW, 2011-05-06:269–275). During my time in the village I saw Wáng Yàjūn selling ecological rice to visitors who came to the village. I also saw him transporting packaging materials from the county town to the warehouse in the small red minibus (FN, 2011-06-02).

Hú Qǐhuá claimed that in fact Wáng Wěi controlled everything in the Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products and that there were contradictions between the village cadres. Wáng Wěi was the only one who had an overview of all the operations of the cooperative. According to Hú Qǐhuá, Wáng Wěi used the method of rotation of work orders to prevent the other village cadres knowing about all the income and expenses of the cooperative. Wáng Wěi would for example give the key of the warehouse to one person for two months, and then to someone else for the next period of time. That person knew how much paddy came in and how much rice went out during that period of time. That person also knew how much money the cooperative should pay or earn but that person would never get the money as Wáng Wěi controlled this aspect of the cooperative's operation. In the case of the MFC group, Wáng Wěi would first let Huáng Jiànguó buy or sell the beans outside of the village, then he would change the responsibility to Wáng Yàjūn, then to his own wife, then to Chén Yùjiàn and so on. In this manner the other village cadres all knew a little bit, but they did not know how much was bought and sold in total and how big the whole profit was. That way they were not able to know for sure if Wáng Wěi put some of the money into his own pocket and how much it was. Only Wáng Wěi knew about all the expenses and all the income, Hú Qǐhuá asserted. Therefore, Wáng Wěi could always tell the other village cadres that the cooperative did not earn a lot of money. Hú Qǐhuá was certain that the cake was not equally divided among the village cadres. All the people visiting the village would first come to Wáng Wěi. His name appeared in all the news about the cooperative, in the media, and was written on all the packaging materials. People from the outside only knew Wáng Wěi. My evidence from participant observation of visits of students, intellectuals, leaders and urban consumers in the village coincide with Hú Qǐhuá's observation of the distribution of social capital, to use Pierre Bourdieu's term

(Bourdieu 1986), generated through the cooperative. Hú Qǐhuá could not say anything about the concrete circumstances concerning the internal distribution of economic capital generated by the cooperative. However, Hú Qǐhuá estimated that Wáng Wěi took about fifty to eighty percent of the cooperative's income for himself. The other village cadres also received a part, but much less than Wáng Wěi. Wáng Wěi would only give them some small benefits, to make them go along with him (HQH, 2011-06-07:794–839).³³

These little benefits were not even direct monetary benefits all the time. Hú Qǐhuá heard that the wife of Huáng Jiànguó, a former member of the village committee, complained that Wáng Wěi asked them to invest money in the cooperative again and again, but that they did not get any money back. Therefore Hú Qǐhuá was convinced that there were internal contradictions within the cooperative (HQH, 2011-06-07:839–853).

Instead of monetary benefits, Wáng Wěi could provide his accomplices with other benefits, Hú Qǐhuá pointed out. Apart from corruption, the other village cadres profited from Wáng Wěi allowing them to be village cadres. In the case that there arose a conflict between their family and other families, their position as village cadres and their connection to Wáng Wěi would be of advantage to them (HQH, 2011-06-07:906–912).

During my stay I was not able to find enough evidence to prove that Hú Qǐhuá's description of the rotation in the management of the cooperative was indeed close to reality. For one my stay was not long enough to find out through participant observation, and secondly Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres were not very talkative when I asked them about the internal affairs of the cooperative. Some interviews with the village cadres, especially the one with Wáng Yàjūn, developed from an interview into something more like an interrogation (IR WYJ, 2011-05-25). During one of my earlier interviews with Wáng Wěi, the other village cadres were even in the same room and could hear everything that Wáng Wěi told me. It is possible that this was just a coincidence. On that evening they awaited the arrival of Zhū Xiǎojiān and a manager from Běijīng (IR WW, 2011-05-06). The fact is that the other village cadres already knew what Wáng Wěi told me about the cooperative before I interviewed them. If what Hú Qǐhuá told me was true and Wáng Wěi really took the lion's share of the cooperative's profit, the others would very probably not talk about it with me because of the possible

³³ Indeed one village cadre at first repeated all the reasons Wáng Wěi had already given me as explanation for the constant losses of the Professional Cooperative. However, when I said that I could not imagine that all these things cost so much, he said that he also could not explain very clearly where all the income of the cooperative went (CYJ, 2011-05-29:235–275).

consequences. The short history of the Rice Association showed that Wáng Wěi was able to get rid of those people who did not go along with him, as the cases of Gāo Shùnkāi, Zhào Yùgāng and Hú Qǐhuá demonstrated.

However, back to the limited evidence I collected through participant observation concerning the management tasks. As mentioned above, I saw Wáng Yàjūn organizing the operation of the ER group. Only once did I see someone else involved in the operation of the small group. The wife of Wáng Wěi was collecting and weighing the paddy some peasants sold to the cooperative (FN, 2011-06-05). Mǎ Zhìyǒng assisted Wáng Yàjūn in the management and was responsible for issuing invoices (WW, 2011-05-06:269–275).

The point I want to make to summarize this section about the leadership of the ER group is that cooperation is not automatically egalitarian. The Professional Cooperative not only created economic but also social capital (Bourdieu 1986). The Professional Cooperative aroused the attention of many intellectuals and government officials because the projects in Shǔidào Zhuāng were part of the NRR movement. The social capital was not equally distributed within the ER group. Involvement of ordinary members in cooperative affairs was low. Therefore they could barely establish any new connections with outside visitors. Even the village cadres, who managed the cooperative, did not benefit to the same extent. Wáng Wěi, who was both the chairperson of the village committee and the village party branch secretary, profited the most from the social capital produced by the model cooperative. Whereas this was easily visible during my stay in the village, it was harder to find out what happened to the economic profits of the cooperative. According to the village cadres, especially Wáng Wěi, the ER group made no profit at all. However, other villagers doubted whether or not this was true. They suspected that the village cadres made profits and that the profit was shared unequally. It was impossible for me to find enough evidence to support or refute this hypothesis with high certainty. I did not manage to have a look at the account books of the cooperative. Even this would not prove anything. During my stay in the village, several villagers made their own estimations and calculations about the alleged profits or losses of the cooperative. They had to do so, because, as Hú Qǐhuá told me once, Wáng Wěi and the village cadres did not publish all the information about the money the village and the cooperative received from the state, although they were supposed to do so in order to enable mass supervision (HQH, 2011-05-27b:431–437). However, apparently the villagers did not manage to force the village committee and the cooperative to operate

with more transparency. Since the beginning of the cooperative project it had been difficult to keep clear accounts. Hú Qǐhuá, who was the first accountant of the Rice Association, complained to me in an interview that it was hard for him to keep the accounts because he did not receive the invoices of those who were selling the rice in the different places in time (HQH, 2011-06-05:333–341). With the change from the Rice Association to the Professional Cooperative, inconsistencies persisted. According to Wáng Wěi, the chairperson of the Professional Cooperative, some accounts were still not settled because of the bad relationship between the former council members, who had managed the Rice Association, and the village cadres, who now managed the Professional Cooperative (WW, 2011-05-15b:443–449).

Although the central role Wáng Wěi played in decision making and in the contact with the outside world suggested that what was true for the distribution of social capital might as well be true for the distribution of economic capital, it did not need to be so. Even if it was true that the cooperative made no profits, the alleged losses of the cooperative were in part caused by gift-giving, a social practice crucial in building social relationships—as the anthropologist Marcel Mauss pointed out in his famous essay “The Gift” (Mauss 1968)—or, to return to Bourdieu’s terminology, in building social capital.

5.2.3 The costs and benefits of gift giving

Shǔidào Zhuāng became famous and it was mainly officials who bought rice from the Professional Cooperative because it was a trademark with a good reputation, Wáng Wěi told me. As a local speciality, the rice was often given as a present. Especially at Chinese New Year, many work units gave the cooperative’s rice as welfare presents to their employees. At that time the cooperative received many orders and processing took quite a while. Therefore, before New Year everyone tried to be first. The work units even made orders and paid in advance. Normally the rich bought the cooperative’s rice, and only very few common people (WW, 2011-05-29:204–210).

Although the customers were mainly officials, they still bought the products of the Professional Cooperative on credit. Therefore, the profit of the Rice Association was basically made up of outstanding invoices (WW, 2011-05-29:215–216).

What further prevented the Professional Cooperative from making profit was that Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres often gave presents to leaders visiting the village. Sometimes they did not really want to do it, but they did it in order not to lose

face. In an interview Wáng Wěi told me a story about what had just happened that morning. Leaders from the Zhèngzhōu Bureau of Animal Husbandry came to visit the village. Local leaders from the Dàhé County Bureau of Animal Husbandry as well as leaders from the township government accompanied them. They urged Wáng Wěi to give the higher-level leaders some packages of their tasty rice and minor food crops as a present. They told him that it did not need to be a lot, just five or ten bags. In order not to lose face Wáng Wěi got ten bags from the cooperative's warehouse and gave it to leaders without charging them for it. In this manner the cooperative lost money (WW, 2011-06-08b:70–83). Once, when business people from Zhèngzhōu visited the village, leaders from the Discipline Inspection Bureau of Dàhé county, who had good relations with them, proposed that the cooperative handed out some rice as presents to them. These presents were worth more than four thousand CNY, Wáng Wěi told me (WW, 2011-05-29:217–220).

Sometimes the village cadres also decided on their own to present the cooperative products as a gift to visitors. A professor from the rural development sociology group from Wageningen University in the Netherlands, who visited the village together with her Ph.D. student, wanted to buy some rice for her. As Wáng Wěi was not present, Wáng Yājūn gave the rice to her. However, he did not charge her (FN, 2011-05-13).

Whereas Wáng Wěi only mentioned the negative influence of giving presents to leaders, Hú Qǐhuá asserted that Wáng Wěi also used presents (and money) in order to gain protection from leaders from above (HQH, 2011-05-27b:243–246).

To summarize this section I want to turn to Marcel Mauss' (1968) theoretical thought on the ambiguity of these gifts, and on Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) general science of the economy of practices. Marcel Mauss stressed that there is an inherent tension in gift giving: On the one hand it appears as a voluntary and selfless act, but on the other hand it seems obligatory and selfish (Mauss 1968). Wáng Wěi stressed that he felt that there was an obligation to give gifts to visiting, higher-ranking officials. Apparently he (and the lower-ranking officials who asked him to do so) felt that they were indebted to the higher-ranking officials, maybe because they took the time to come down to the village. By giving them a lot of the cooperative's expensive and tasty rice, he quite probably not only paid this "debt", but also created new "debt" on the side of the higher-ranking officials.³⁴ In this way Wáng Wěi established a relationship with the higher-

³⁴ As mentioned above, Wáng Wěi claimed that the rice was worth more than four thousand CNY (WW, 2011-05-29:217–220).

ranking officials, who were now indebted to him. While Wáng Wěi denied this side of the gift and not only presented it as selfless but also disadvantageous for him, his adversary Hú Qǐhuá only stressed the selfish character of such gifts because the high-ranking officials might now help and protect Wáng Wěi in times of need. Of course there is no guarantee of that. The obligation is as voluntary for them as the act of giving rice was for Wáng Wěi.

With Bourdieu (1986:253), who offers a theoretical perspective on such transformations of economic capital into social capital, we might look at the above mentioned situation of gift giving like this: “From a narrowly economic standpoint, this effort is bound to be seen as pure wastage, but in the terms of the logic of social exchanges, it is a solid investment.” One might argue that by talking about the gifts from this narrowly economic perspective, Wáng Wěi hid the fact that the apparent economic loss could also be viewed as a profit in terms of social capital.

Before turning to another commodity sold by the cooperative, namely the minor food crops, I want to finish this summary by pointing out that Wáng Wěi (and sometimes the other village cadres) used the economic capital of the cooperative to create social capital for themselves. The high cost of gift giving prohibited the cooperative from giving bigger economic benefits to its members. On the other hand, the practice of gift giving indirectly also benefited the cooperative, as the village cadres, especially Wáng Wěi, could use the gift-created and gift-cultivated relationships to sell even more of the cooperative’s products. However, these benefits did not seem to trickle down to its members.

5.3 The Small Group for Ecological Minor Food Crops

The Chinese term “xiǎozáliáng” (小杂粮) can be translated as “minor food crops”. It is also often translated as “food grains other than wheat and rice”. In the case of the cooperative the term included not only millet (小米 xiǎomǐ), but also different kinds of beans, such as black mung beans (黑绿豆 hēilǜdòu) and red beans (红豆 hóngdòu). Maize was not included.

Hú Qǐhuá, a council member of the former Rice Association and one of the adversaries of Wáng Wěi, claimed that originally it was his idea to grow minor food crops in the village, for example the black mung beans. He wanted to introduce such a fine variety because on the market there was no such thing at that time. He knew that rarity

enhanced the value. Indeed, the black mung beans could be sold for ten CNY per *jīn* (HQH, 2011-05-06a:108–115). However, Hú Qǐhuá did not participate in the MFC group. He sold his minor food crops directly to urban consumers, whom he called his friends (HQH, 2011-05-06a:194–200). At the beginning Wáng Wěi said to him that the minor food crops would be part of the cooperative, Hú Qǐhuá recounted. However later on it was changed into “their own” project. By “them” Hú Qǐhuá meant Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres (HQH, 2011-05-07:767). Yet, to the outside they said that their “clique” (小团体 *xiǎotuántǐ*) or “small gang” (小团伙 *xiǎotuánhuǒ*)—that is how Hú Qǐhuá called it—was a cooperative because otherwise the consumers would not trust their products (HQH, 2011-05-27a:26–32). In my interviews Hú Qǐhuá complained several times that Wáng Wěi stole his ideas and used them for the cooperative and then for himself (HQH, 2011-05-06a:108–109, 2011-05-06b:26, 2011-05-07:438–459).

The MFC group was organized in a similar way to the ER group. It offered a unified supply of seeds to the peasants who produced minor food crops. According to Wáng Wěi, the peasants could not easily buy this kind of seeds from other traders because they were rather special (WW, 2011-05-03:393–394).

After the harvest the cooperative bought the minor food crops from the peasants and gave them the market price plus an additional ten percent as an initial dividend (WW, 2011-05-03:395,407). Wáng Wěi gave me some examples. The price the cooperative paid for one *jīn* of black mung beans was one CNY higher than the market price, namely 11 instead of 10 CNY. When the market price for red beans was 5,5 CNY per *jīn*, the cooperative paid 6,05 CNY (WW, 2011-06-08a:162–164).

Wáng Wěi explained that when the council members of the Professional Cooperative decided how much additional money the MFC group wanted to give to the peasants, they considered all the costs of selling the minor food crops, such as the wages and the packaging material. They calculated how much money they could make and how much they could give to the peasants. They decided to give the peasants about ten percent, because like this the cooperative could still make profits (WW, 2011-06-08a:166–172).

In the case of black mung beans, the market price was 10 CNY per *jīn*. After packaging the costs amounted to 14 CNY, according to Wáng Wěi. The cooperative sold the package, including eight kinds of minor food crops, for 60 CNY to consumers and for 55 CNY on the wholesale market. In this manner the cooperative made a profit

of about eight to nine CNY per item without paying the peasants the initial dividend (WW, 2011-06-08b:101–106).

Some peasants, for example the former council member of the Rice Association Hú Qǐhuá, did not consider this practice of giving the peasants a dividend of an additional ten percent as appropriate for calling the organization of the village cadres a cooperative. From his perspective the village cadres bought the minor food crops from the peasants, packaged it, and sold it for a high price. All the money the so-called cooperative earned was in fact the profit of the village cadres. If it was a cooperative, the practice should be implemented in the following way: First the minor food crops should be collected, packaged and sold. Only afterwards would all members share the income. The cooperative would get a very small amount of money for operation, but the major part would be distributed as a dividend among the masses (HQH, 2011-05-07:761–767).

The cooperative managed to give larger benefits to the peasants in the case of the minor food crops than in the case of the ecological rice because the cooperative sold the minor food crops for a very high price (WW, 2011-06-08b:112–114).

Another difference to the ecological rice was that peasants in the Central Plains of China traditionally did not use any kind of fertilizer for growing beans and minor food crops (except maize and sesame), Wáng Wěi told me. The yields were nevertheless very high. That the peasants did not need to use fertilizer also meant that they could save some labor, and this made growing minor food crops even more attractive (WW, 2011-06-08b:123–128).

In my first interview with Wáng Wěi he estimated that about fifty households participated in the production of minor food crops (WW, 2011-05-03:402–403). However, in our final interview he told me that it was only about thirty or thirty-five households (WW, 2011-06-08b:116–117).

The real acreage of minor food crops (without maize) in the village is about one hundred to one hundred and fifty *mǔ*, although the cooperative claimed to have an acreage of three hundred *mǔ*, Wáng Wěi disclosed (WW, 2011-06-08b:133–134).

Similar to the group for ecological rice, the cooperative informed its members when someone ordered minor food crops. The peasants then had the possibility to deliver their minor food crops to the cooperative. Sometimes the peasants themselves told the cooperative when they wanted to sell their minor food crops. It would be unreasonable not to buy the peasant's products in such a situation because the peasants were "your

members” (你的成员 *nǐ de chéngyuán*), Wáng Wěi told me (WW, 2011-06-08a:204–209).

The MFC group had been cooperating very well in the last few years, according to Wáng Wěi (WW, 2011-05-03:393). In accordance with the principles of cooperatives, a second dividend would be distributed to the members if the cooperative made profits. Yet the MFC group never distributed a second dividend, Wáng Wěi explained. There were several reasons for this, according to Wáng Wěi. Firstly, the costs of management were high. There were many outstanding accounts, some of which were uncollectible. Secondly, every year the MFC group paid four thousand CNY for public welfare because it made profits. This was Wáng Wěi's decision: “I told it [the small group] to do it.”³⁵ This public welfare financed by the MFC group included the electricity bill for the road lamps, the wage for the women who were responsible for cleaning and garbage collection.³⁶ Furthermore the profit of this group was used for financing eggs in gift boxes (WW, 2011-05-03:408–414). In another interview Wáng Wěi gave me a further reason for the losses of the Professional Cooperative. The Professional Cooperative organized activities for urban consumers in the village every year, for example the happy pig activities for signing the happy pig contracts in spring and the ecological culture tourism festival (生态文化旅游节 *shēngtài wénhuà lǚyóu jié*) in autumn. These activities were not only exhausting to organize, but also very expensive (WW, 2011-05-29:217–224).³⁷

Some villagers—not only the council members of the Rice Association, who did not have a good relationship with Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres—thought that it was possible that the cooperative nevertheless made profits and that the village cadres stuffed money into their own pockets (FN, 2011-06-03).

³⁵ 我就让它去办。 Wǒ jiù ràng tā qù bàn (WW, 2011-05-03:412).

³⁶ Although this was for the good of everyone, Hú Qǐhuá said that this was not possible. In his eyes, the village committee was supposed to pay for the public services such as garbage collection and the electricity for the road lamps. What Wáng Wěi said was “sheer nonsense” (无稽之谈 *wújīzhītán*). Hú Qǐhuá explained that Wáng Wěi said that the expenses of the village committee were expenses of the Professional Cooperative, because the Professional Cooperative was fake and did in fact not exist (HQH, 2011-05-27a:2–6). Fāng Fēipéng, who worked for the cooperative at the lotus field, also thought that the village committee should pay for these expenses. However, he noted in an informal conversation, if the village committee did not have enough money, it was okay if the village cadres also used the money from the cooperative (FN, 2011-06-03).

³⁷ Fāng Fēipéng confirmed that the cooperative lost money by organizing these promotion activities. He recounted that the cooperative had prepared food for the urban consumers last autumn. However, they did not know about it and brought their own drinks and food. Thus the cooperative lost about two thousand CNY, according to Fāng Fēipéng (FN, 2011-06-03).

Apparently to emphasize that he and the other village cadres did not benefit from the profits of this small group, Wáng Wěi told me that those involved in the management worked for the small group for free. They did not get a wage. Wáng Wěi also told me that loans are taken out on their names. For Wáng Wěi the initial dividend was an advantage from the perspective of the peasants, but a risk from the perspective of the cooperative. Although the cooperative should technically carry this risk, he and the other village cadres accepted the risk the other members were not willing to take, Wáng Wěi pointed out (WW, 2011-05-03:414–420).

In summary we can say that the MFC group was very similar to the one for ecological rice concerning membership and leadership. The peasants who sold their minor food crops to the cooperative were called members. For selling their minor food crops to the cooperative they received the market price plus a dividend. The village cadres managed the packaging, marketing and sale of the minor food crops. Because the minor food crops, especially the black mung beans, were rare on the market, the cooperative managed to sell them for a higher price. Therefore, the benefits for the peasants as well as for the cooperative were higher than in the case of ecological rice. However, fewer peasants participated in this small group due to the limited sales capacity of the cooperative. Thus the main difference was of quantity rather than of quality.

5.4 Managing men, packaging women

Before the Professional Cooperative could sell ecological rice and minor food crops, processing and packaging was of course necessary. At the time I was in the village, the rice mill, which had been established in 2006, was already out of operation.

Small amounts of rice were processed within the village at peasant households who owned small rice processing machines. Bigger amounts, for example one big truck with about twenty to thirty tons of rice, were processed in bigger rice mills in other places, some closer, for example in the neighboring village, some further than one hundred kilometers away (WW, 2011-06-08a:232–237).

Usually the packaging was done at the place where the Professional Cooperative had had the paddy processed to rice. Only the small boxes were packaged in Shǔidào zhuāng. The packaging of these small boxes required manual work. This work was very troublesome as the cardboard boxes had to be stuck together and tied up with a cotton thread (WW, 2011-05-29). Common people (老百姓 *lǎobǎixìng*), who earned a

wage of 5 CNY per hour, did the processing and packaging, Wáng Wěi told me (WW, 2011-05-06:13, 2011-05-29:349).

In normal times about seven to eight women packaged the rice for the Professional Cooperative. Sometimes even ten women did the packaging, but in the busy periods of the year, for example during the wheat harvest, it was hard to find someone to do the work, so there were only four of them, Wáng Wěi explained (WW, 2011-06-08a:117–123).

One day I worked with these women for a few hours. In the early morning Wáng Wěi told me that the cooperative had just processed a small amount of rice with a small rice processing machine at a peasant household within the village. In the mid morning a man transported about twenty to thirty big bags of rice with a blue, three-wheeled, motorized vehicle to the building of the old village committee. Zhèng Guihuā, the wife of Wáng Wěi, had the key for the building but the lock was jammed. After cracking open the lock, the women first swept the floor. Then I helped the three women and the man to carry the heavy bags of rice from the three-wheeler into the building. A few of the bags were filled with the special kind of rice called Huangjinqing. After we had finished this task, the man left the scene with his blue vehicle (FN, 2011-06-02).

The women now prepared the machines and devices for drying and sieving the rice before packaging. First they dried the rice with a hot-air machine. In a second step the women put the rice on the sieve with a small shovel or their hands to sift out small and broken grains. Then the women moved the rice onto a small table. Now the tedious part of the work started. We were sitting around the table on low stools with buckets between our legs and began to sort out the good grains from the bad ones. We picked out single black and yellow grains as well as little pieces of stones and dirt with our fingers and threw them to the ground. The good rice grains we wiped into the buckets with our hands. This laborious and time consuming job would be omitted if big processing machines removed the husk of the paddy, the women told me. The bigger machines managed to sort out bad grains and little pieces of stones and dirt, whereas the peasants' smaller processing machines did not manage to do this (FN, 2011-06-02).

When I asked the women if they also did all of these jobs before cooking and eating the rice themselves, they answered that they did not. Hence, they only did this because the rice was supposed to be sold on the market for a high price as a quality product of the Professional Cooperative's trademark (FN, 2011-06-02).

When we were sitting around the table sorting out the bad rice grains, I also asked them why it was them who did this work. Zhèng Guihuā, the wife of Wáng Wěi, told me that they did it because no one else did it. Men did not do this kind of work because they left the village to work in the cities, she explained (FN, 2011-06-02).

At that moment Wáng Yàjūn, the one responsible for the management of the ER group, arrived at the old village committee with the little red minibus. His wife did not work with the other women because she was taking care of her grandchild at home. The minibus was full with packaging material, which Wáng Yàjūn had just picked up at a factory in the county town. I asked him why men did not do the packaging work. He explained that the wage was too low for men to do this work (FN, 2011-06-02).

This was also the explanation Wáng Wěi gave me first. If men worked not too far away from the village they could earn about seventy to eighty CNY. Further away they could even earn about one to two hundred CNY. Moreover, it was “work done by women” (妇女做的活 fù nǚ zuò de huó), Wáng Wěi explained (WW, 2011-06-08a:145–154).

When I asked how high a wage the cooperative needed to pay so that men would also do this work, Zhèng Guihuā claimed that no matter how high the wage, men would never do such work. At home she had to do all the work, she continued. As Wáng Wěi was always busy, only her parents-in-law helped her with housework and fieldwork (FN, 2011-06-02).

On the next morning I stopped by the old building of the village committee again. Three women were still preparing the rice for packaging. One was sieving the rice, and the other two were sitting around the table sorting out the rice. A fourth woman was packaging minor food crops, namely beans, with the vacuum packaging machine. Then she used the coding machine to put the date of production on the small bags (FN, 2011-06-03). Only on the next day did three of them start preparing the packages for the rice, before finally packaging it. One woman was folding the cardboard boxes and the other two stuck the boxes together (FN, 2011-06-04).

The next day they were still preparing and packaging the rice. When I passed by two women were sorting out the rice, while temporarily Zhèng Guihuā, the wife of Wáng Wěi, and another woman were collecting paddy from peasants next-door at the building of the former rice mill (FN, 2011-06-05).

These packaging women were all members of the cooperative, Wáng Wěi said, namely in the sense that they produced rice and minor food crops for the cooperative (WW, 2011-06-08a:158–159). They were about forty years old but not older than fifty

because it was important that they had good eyes in order to sort out little stones and bad grains (WW, 2011-06-08a:125–126).

Among the four working women were the wives of Wáng Wěi and Chén Yùjiàn. According to Wáng Wěi, these two were responsible for packaging rice and minor food crops. The other two women were not members of their family clans but neighbors. Originally the wife of Wáng Yàjūn also took care of packaging. The wives of the four big shareholders of the small groups for ecological rice and minor food crops were responsible for packaging in place of their husbands. They took care of the key and recorded all the accomplishments (WW, 2011-06-08a:130–143, 211–213). The wives of the village cadres received the same wage as the other women, namely 5 CNY per hour (WW, 2011-06-08a:215).

In Hú Qǐhuá's narrative about the Professional Cooperative it was crucial that the wives and neighbors of the village cadres, and not someone else, did the packaging of the agricultural products. He made the allegation that the village cadres bought ordinary rice from other villages and sold it as ecological rice, which was supposedly produced by the members of the Professional Cooperative in Shǔidào zhuāng. Hú Qǐhuá claimed that the village cadres bought the rice from the outside and that their wives took care about the packaging. Hence, they were in fact like a “gang of criminals” (犯罪团伙 *fànzuì tuánhuǒ*), he said (HQH, 2011-05-27a:179–186).

To recapitulate this section I repeat how the social actors explained their own actions concerning the gender division of labor. First they argued that they were doing it because no one else was doing this work. Men were usually working outside of the village, so they could not do this work. The second explanation was that men would not do the work for such a low pay. A more abstract statement about men and women backed up these two concrete explanations, namely that the packaging work was simply the work of women. Men did not do this kind of work.

Tamara Jacka (1992) argues that there is evidence of a public–private dichotomy concerning the gender division of labor in rural China as there is in the West. She understands this dichotomy neither as universal nor as inevitable but “as a set of norms governing the work opportunities and choices of women and men and the ways in which work is to be recognized” (Jacka 1992:117). Men are responsible for the outside, women for everything inside the household. Jacka stresses that the meanings associated with it were changing within rural China over time.

Earlier on men were said to work in the fields (outside of the house), while women were said to work at home (inside of the house). Through this rhetoric the significant contribution of women to agriculture remained hidden. Increasing rural to urban migration furthered the feminization of agriculture as many husbands pursued migrant and non-agricultural work outside of the village. Men were now working outside of the village while women were working inside of the village (Fan 2008:9–11,89–92).

Although the village cadres did not leave the village in order to find wage labor, within the organization of the cooperative they and their wives (as well as the women packaging the rice) reproduced a gender division of labor that was based on a public–private and outside–inside dichotomy, albeit in a slightly different form. Social imaginings about what kind of work was appropriate for whom were reconstructed with reference to sexual differences within the cooperative. The managing men represented the cooperative to the outside. They were the “pioneers of cooperation,” whereas the packaging women inside of the old building of the village committee were more or less invisible to the outside.

I could not witness any attempts to transform this kind of gender division within the cooperative.³⁸ There was, however, one difference to the prevailing gender division of labor in the Chinese countryside within the cooperative. Usually men were the breadwinners through their urban wage work, on which their wives relied on for improving the live of the family. If it was true that the cooperative made no profits and the village cadres did not share them, then the packaging women—although their wage was very low—earned more than the managing man, who did not receive any wage from the cooperative at all. This situation would directly challenge the social actor’s second explanation for the gender division of labor, namely that the pay for men was too low for doing the packaging work. Obviously, as “pioneers of cooperation” in the focus of intellectuals and students, as well as of government officials, men were willing to do the managing work for free while they were not willing to do the invisible work of preparing the outside cover of the products the cooperative was selling.

³⁸ This might be due to my position as male researcher. When I asked the women if I could help them with the packaging work, they did not hesitate although men did usually not do this work. Nevertheless, I think, it is quite possible that they would have told other stories to female researchers, if they had packaged the rice together with them.

5.5 The risks and benefits of participation

Although the MFC group provided bigger benefits for the peasants, the advantages of participating were still limited. The additional income per *mǔ* was only about three hundred CNY, Wáng Wěi noted. For the ecological rice the benefits were even smaller. According to Wáng Wěi, this explained why not many peasants participated in the project (WW, 2011-06-08c:27–29).

Another reason was that to participate in the cooperative also meant trouble (麻烦 *máfan*) for the members of the cooperative. The cooperative did not have capital. Therefore, it could not pay the peasants immediately when they gave their paddy or minor food crops to the cooperative. If an enterprise cheated the cooperative, the cooperative would not be able to pay the peasants. Thus many peasants felt that giving their produce to the cooperative was a risk. Hence, although they wanted to participate in order to receive the initial dividend, they feared that they might not get any money at all (WW, 2011-06-08c:31–44).

Even if the cooperative was able to pay them later on, it could happen that at that time the market price was already higher than the market price plus the dividend when they gave their paddy to the cooperative. In such a situation the peasants felt that they suffered losses (WW, 2011-06-08c:44–50).

Moreover, the cooperative could only provide the service (of selling their products) for a certain number of peasants and not for more (WW, 2011-06-08c:29–31), as its sales capacity was limited. According to Wáng Wěi, the common people wondered how Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres could be “so stupid” (这么笨蛋 *zhème bèndàn*) that they did not manage to successfully sell the products of the cooperative, even though there was lots of support from the media and the government leaders (WW, 2011-06-08c:213–216).

According to Wáng Wěi, one student identified the main problem of the cooperative as a sales problem. The student argued that the cooperative lacked a competent person who had the ability to successfully organize the sale of the peasants’ products. If the cooperative managed to sell more products, more peasants could participate in the cooperative (WW, 2011-06-08c:125–128).

Wáng Wěi himself doubted if even experienced managers of big companies would be able to sell the products of the cooperative because competition on the big

market was tough and there were not so many methods available to compete successfully (WW, 2011-06-08c:209–213).

Despite Wáng Wěi's efforts, and despite the support from the outside world, the cooperative did not manage to develop. Wáng Wěi attributed this to the just mentioned market problem. Furthermore, he argued that a reform was necessary. A specialized state organization, organized from the center down to the local level, was needed for the support of agricultural cooperatives (WW, 2011-06-08c:396–399).

Before moving on to another project of the Professional Cooperative, I want to note that all of the information in the last section of this chapter stems from my final interview with Wáng Wěi in June 2011. In the first interview he mainly talked about the advantages of the cooperative. At that time he did not yet mention that the peasants took a risk if they handed their paddy over to the cooperative. Earlier on Wáng Wěi also did not tell me that the benefits the cooperative offered the peasants were relatively small compared with the income the peasants could generate through wage labor as migrant workers in the cities. Not only were the benefits limited, the number of peasants who could benefit from the cooperative was also limited.³⁹

In several informal conversations villagers who had a small business told me that they did not participate in the cooperative (FN, 2011-04-24, 2011-04-25, 2011-04-27).⁴⁰ Owners of a small supermarket told me that they did cultivate rice but not in an environmentally harmless way because this was too troublesome (FN, 2011-04-25).

³⁹ Wáng Wěi first explicitly said to me that the cooperative in *Shǔidàozhuāng* was indeed not very successful more than one month after my arrival in the village, when on one late evening we were sitting in his car in a neighboring village. It was the first day of a normal two-day funeral ceremony of the grandmother of one of his former schoolmates. He and his schoolmates waited for their last turn to mourn in front of the picture of the deceased on that evening. After the dinner, where the family of the deceased, as usual, offered the guests a lot of Chinese liquor, Wáng Wěi told me in the car that only very few peasants could participate in the cooperative and that the benefits for those who participated were not very high (FN, 2011-05-23).

⁴⁰ Many of them told me that they only cultivated wheat and maize (FN, 2011-04-24, 2011-04-25, 2011-04-27). If a combine harvester was used, these were the least labor intensive crops grown in the village. The customary use of harvesters in the village started about five to ten years ago. If villagers could afford it, they would employ a combine harvester. However, it was not always possible for combine harvesters to enter the fields, for example if peasants had already planted lines of small cotton plants between strips of winter wheat, or if wet fields with lotus roots or rice seedlings surrounded the wheat field (FN, 2011-06-06). Some of those villagers who had a small business cultivated paddy too. Rice seedlings were planted by hand in the village. For those who could afford it, it was possible to hire other people to do it. In autumn combine harvesters did most of the harvesting work. However, poor families still used hand and sickle to harvest. In contrast to other households in the village, most of those who had a small business additional to agriculture did not plant lotus roots and cotton.

In contrast, the peasant who participated in the Small Group for Organic Rice and Wheat discussed in the next chapter emphasized the positive non-monetary effects of growing wheat and rice in an organic way.

6 Organic Rice and Wheat

In this chapter I present the Small Group for Organic Rice (有机大米种植小组 *yǒujī dànmǐ zhòngzhí xiǎozǔ*) and the Small Group for Organic Wheat (有机小麦种植小组 *yǒujī xiǎomài zhòngzhí xiǎozǔ*). Since 2010 one peasant household has cultivated organic rice and wheat for the cooperative. As agricultural chemicals and chemical fertilizers were not used at all in the production, these agricultural products were organic, in contrast to the ecological products from the small groups discussed in the preceding chapter. Here I describe the perspective of the peasant and the cooperative's chairperson on their arrangement. While the peasant did not need to care about yields and sales, as this was the affair of the cooperative, the peasant was dissatisfied with inadequate and outstanding remuneration and felt powerless about it. Furthermore I present what I found out about forms of cooperation in the organic rice fields, which had nothing to do with the cooperative, as well as the challenges the peasant faced, but which the cooperative did not help to address.

In 2010 the Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products started this new project. It was the idea of a student from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (WW, 2011-06-08b:17–18). Organic meant that the peasant did not use any chemical fertilizers and agricultural chemicals (WW, 2011-06-08b:45–46). Instead of chemical fertilizer, chicken manure was used for fertilization (HYT, 2011-06-04a:149–150). Instead of agricultural chemicals, they experimented with alternative methods to deal with pests, for example by using chili powder against plant lice (HYT, 2011-06-04a:212–216).⁴¹

One peasant household started to grow eight *mǔ* of organic rice on its own land for the cooperative. The cooperative signed a contract with the peasant. According to Wáng Wěi's first description, this contract was a kind of guarantee for the peasant as it

⁴¹ The peasants learned about this special method not through oral traditions, but through the volunteer's research on the internet (HYT, 2011-06-04a:209–216).

assured that the peasant's income per *mǔ* would be the highest one in the village. The rice was sold via the platform of the cooperative, Wáng Wěi explained (WW, 2011-05-03:316–321).

6.1 The advantages of growing organic rice

From the perspective of the peasant, the project started in the following way: Huáng Yùtíng recounted that Wáng Wěi came to her around May Day 2010 when she was washing rice seedlings in her field, which was adjacent to the small road in the south of the village. Huáng Yùtíng thought that Wáng Wěi asked her because she was comparatively good at cultivating rice and year after year she had no problems with plant diseases or pests. Wáng Wěi trusted her. He knew that she would not use any agricultural chemicals if he told her not to use them. In contrast to other people she went to the fields with the rice seedlings every day in order to weed (HYT, 2011-06-04a:3–12).

According to Huáng Yùtíng, Wáng Wěi prepared the contract. When I asked her if she was a member of the cooperative, she said that she was not. In her eyes she did not sign a contract with the cooperative but with the village committee, which she referred to as the “production brigade” (大队 *dàduì*).⁴² In fact Huáng Yùtíng did not sign the contract herself. Her son did because he was the head of the household (HYT, 2011-06-04a:133–139), although he was not present in the village most of the time as he was working as migrant worker outside of the village (HYT, 2011-06-04a:56–58).

According to the contracts, Huáng Yùtíng was required to grow eight *mǔ* of organic rice and wheat. Besides these eight *mǔ*, the household of Huáng Yùtíng only had one other piece of land, namely half a *mǔ* of lotus roots (HYT, 2011-06-04a:98–102).

When Wáng Wěi proposed that she grew organic rice and said that she would receive a fixed income, she did not think twice, Huáng Yùtíng told me. Spraying agricultural fertilizer was very painful, she explained. Afterwards she had to wash her whole body, but still during the night the face and the hands would itch. Hence, she appreciated the idea of not using agricultural fertilizers (HYT, 2011-06-04a:15–21). Furthermore she thought that it was a good thing because she could also eat the organic food herself (HYT, 2011-06-04a:170–171).

⁴² However, on the contract she showed me, it was written that it was a contract between the household and the Peasant Cooperative Association signed by Wáng Wěi.

Planting organic rice required a lot of labor (HYT, 2011-06-04a:26), but Huáng Yùtíng did not complain about it and did not explicitly refer to this as a disadvantage. Instead Huáng Yùtíng stressed that not everyone could do what she did because not everyone had the same way of thinking she had. For her it was no problem to go to the field everyday, to go there several times a day to weed, to look after the water and to wash the rice seedlings (HYT, 2011-06-04a:46–50).

6.2 Mutual aid and paid work in the rice fields

While Huáng Yùtíng usually did these everyday tasks alone, she did work together with others when planting rice seedlings (HYT, 2011-06-04a:104).

At the time of the wheat harvest I met Huáng Yùtíng and three other women in the fields in the east of the village. They just had a short rest in the shadow of the trees next to the road. When they returned to work, Huáng Yùtíng showed me how to plant rice seedlings. I only managed to plant them in a crooked line, some seedlings I pushed to deep into the mud, some not deep enough so that they floated to the surface. Huáng Yùtíng and the two other women in the field were much quicker than I was, and the lines they planted were straight. One woman stayed out of the field and just watched us doing the work. When I asked her to take a photo of us planting the seedlings, I wondered, why she was just sitting there. She was wearing rubber boots, which indicated that maybe she had worked before I came there. However, as long as I stayed there, she did not work. I was especially astonished since she had just told me that the women were not paid for this work because it was mutual help. It seemed strange to me that the woman did not participate in the work herself if it was true that the three women worked voluntarily and for free (FN, 2011-06-03).

Later I learned that only Huáng Yùtíng did not get any money for planting rice seedlings there. The other two women were in fact paid for their work. In the interview Huáng Yùtíng explained that the one woman stayed out of the field because she did not want to do the work. Her husband worked in Zhèngzhōu and had money. Therefore, she could afford to pay the two younger women to do the work for her. Usually it was younger women in thirties who were hired to do this kind of work, Huáng Yùtíng told me. For one day they got about sixty CNY. Old people were not able to do this kind of work for one day without suffering pain in their lower back, Huáng Yùtíng remarked (HYT, 2011-06-04a:76–86).

Huáng Yùtíng herself worked at the other women's field for two days for free because she did not have anything to do at home. Moreover, it was also a kind of method to get the work on the own field done. Later the woman would help Huáng Yùtíng planting rice seedlings in her field too. They did this, she explained, simply because it was pretty good if the neighbors were together. Huáng Yùtíng did not give her any money and she also did not get any money. In addition to this method of mutual help, Huáng Yùtíng would also hire young women to help her planting rice seedlings in the field where she was growing organic rice for the cooperative (HYT, 2011-06-04a:63–86).

Here I found a setting that was interesting in at least two respects. Firstly, mutual aid and paid labor coexisted side by side. Secondly, the cooperation within the project of the cooperative seemed to be independent of the cooperative. The mutual aid between the two women was based on friendship and had existed even before the foundation of the first NRR project in 2004.

Let us now have a closer look at the relationship between the peasant and the cooperative. Huáng Yùtíng only did the work (劳动 *láodòng*) of cultivating the organic rice. For all the inputs, for example seeds and chicken manure, Huáng Yùtíng only told Wáng Wěi what she needed. Wáng Wěi then bought these agricultural inputs and also organized the transportation to the field (HYT, 2011-06-04a:140–152).

In the first years the village cadres bought the seeds for the organic wheat and rice Huáng Yùtíng cultivated for them. However, in autumn 2011 the situation changed. Wáng Wěi claimed that he had no money. Hence, Huáng Yùtíng had to buy the seeds for the organic wheat for the next season herself (FN, 2011-11-12).

6.3 Dealing with challenges with(out) the cooperative

The cooperative asked Huáng Yùtíng to take notes about how she cultivated the organic rice in a diary. She had to write down when she washed the rice seedlings and when it was raining. She also noted if big or important changes occurred. She recounted that the NRR intellectual Zhū Xiǎojiān and other people from the outside, for example a TV station from Běijīng, had had a look in her diary (HYT, 2011-06-04a:204–207).⁴³

⁴³ Villagers involved in the Happy Pig Small Group and the lotus and crabs projects of the cooperative also had to write such diaries about their agricultural activities.

If something happened, Huáng Yùtíng reported this to the village committee. Huáng Yùtíng gave me one example. Once the ordinary rice plants of other people got diseases. After two weeks, when the plant disease was at its highest point, it also occurred in Huáng Yùtíng's field. She reported it to Mǎ Zhìyǒng. He then did some research on the internet in order to find out what they could do instead of using agricultural chemicals (HYT, 2011-06-04a:209–212).

In 2011 other peasants used agricultural chemicals for three to four days in order to deal with plant lice. Again, when the problem was at its peak, the same problem also occurred in Huáng Yùtíng's organic wheat field. Huáng Yùtíng informed Mǎ Zhìyǒng, who then did some online research. He told Huáng Yùtíng to use chili powder to deal with the pests. However, this method did not show any effects, so Huáng Yùtíng stopped it (HYT, 2011-06-04a:212–216).

For Huáng Yùtíng the big challenge concerning plant disease was not so much the question of not using agricultural chemicals but more a question of irrigation. If there was not enough water, the plants easily got diseases. However, irrigation was something she could not control alone. Her field was in a bad location, as it was quite far away from the big irrigation channel in the east of the village. The small channel next to her field was dried and grass was growing at the bottom of the channel. Only one week before the interview, water finally filled up the small channel. The big channel had already been opened soon after the wheat harvest, when the peasants started to plant their rice in the fields where they had previously cultivated wheat. When the water from the Yellow River came to the village through that big channel, the villagers whose fields were located in the east of the village could use it first because they were closer to the source of water. According to Huáng Yùtíng, they used a lot of it. Only at night could Huáng Yùtíng add water to her field together with the family of Wáng Yàjūn, the village accountant, whose field was next to the one of Huáng Yùtíng. Around midnight the water finally found its way to their fields, because all the others had already stopped using it (HYT, 2011-06-04a:222–231,249–256).

Huáng Yùtíng complained that nobody was taking care of the irrigation works. She said that irrigation was very good to the east of the channel. The irrigation channel was in a better condition there because this was the place people and leaders from the outside inspected, as it was next to the road and was easily accessible. “Here, where no

one visited, who would repair [the irrigation system] for you?”⁴⁴ Huáng Yùtíng asked rhetorically (HYT, 2011-06-04a:232–246).

As mentioned in chapter 1, many on the left in China argued that the deterioration of rural social welfare and local public infrastructure, for example irrigation, was one of the new problems after decollectivization in the countryside (Day 2007:326, 2008b:57; Wang 2009:139). Intellectuals involved in the NRR movement therefore suggested focusing on public welfare. Hè Xuěfēng, for example, proposed that the state’s rural investment should focus not on individual households but on the public projects (Day 2007:334). Lǐ Chāngpíng saw the labor power of the Chinese people as a possible solution for such problems by mobilizing collective labor (Day 2007:330). Similarly Wáng Xímíng (王习明) argued that cooperatives, which operated in a market context, could only minimally increase the peasants’ income. Therefore, he hoped that “cooperatives may be able to take advantage of the countryside’s surplus labor-power to carry out public works such as building or repairing roads and irrigation systems” (Wang 2009:146). In the case of the village Shǔidào zhuāng, the cooperative did not address the crucial issue of irrigation in this way. The NRR projects involving economic cooperation were all market and money oriented projects.

Concerning the challenges of planting organic rice and wheat, we can summarize that the cooperative tried to help the peasant to address problems such as plant disease and pests when they became acute. However, the cooperative did not tackle the more fundamental question of repairing the irrigation channel.

In spite of these difficult prerequisites the rice always had enough water in 2011, Huáng Yùtíng told me when I came to the village again in autumn. Therefore she did not have to spray any agricultural chemicals (FN, 2011-11-12).

6.4 Yields and sales: concerns of the cooperative

Without using chemical fertilizer and agricultural chemicals, the yields of rice and wheat decreased (HYT, 2011-06-04a:32). The yields of ordinary rice on the eight-*mǔ* large field were more than 8,3 thousand *jīn*. With the change to organic cultivation the yields dropped to only 4,2 thousand *jīn*, Huáng Yùtíng told me (HYT, 2011-06-04a:159–160, 173–175). However, Huáng Yùtíng’s income was fixed and guaranteed. She appreciated that she did not have to care about losses caused by wind and rain

⁴⁴ 这边每人参观谁给你修? Zhèbiān méi rén cānguān shuí gěi nǐ xiū? (HYT, 2011-06-04a:239).

(HYT, 2011-06-04a:42–44). Nevertheless, in the second year of cultivating organic rice the yields were already higher, Huáng Yùtíng told me in November 2011. She explained that this time instead of four to five rice seedlings she had put seven to eight into the earth (FN, 2011-11-12).

When I asked Huáng Yùtíng what she knew about the sale of the organic rice and wheat, she said that she did not care about this as it was the affair of the village committee, especially of Wáng Wěi, who often went to other places outside of the village, for example to Běijīng for meetings. If they sold out, it was good, if they did not sell out, it was good as well as she was supposed to receive the money according to the contract (HYT, 2011-06-04a:38–40, 128–131).

Under the condition that Huáng Yùtíng planted the organic rice in accordance with the rules of the cooperative, she received the equivalent of the income of the highest yields of paddy per *mǔ* in the village, regardless of the actual yields of the organic paddy per *mǔ* (WW, 2011-06-08b:40–41; HQT, 2011-06-05:518).

In turn the entire harvest belonged to the cooperative. The cooperative then sold the organic rice for 8 and 9,8 CNY per *jīn* (WW, 2011-06-08b:43). This price sounded quite high to me. The Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice had sold the rice for 2,5 CNY per *jīn*. However, Wáng Wěi said that this was not a high price compared with other organic products of this kind (WW, 2011-06-08b:56).

The cooperative sold organic rice and wheat using the method of *gòu mǐ bāo dì* (WW, 2011-06-08a:255), which is similar to community supported agriculture. One morning at the beginning of June, I observed that a Chinese volunteer translator signed a *gòu mǐ bāo dì* contract. She came to the village together with an US American teacher, who visited the village about once a month to help the teachers and pupils of the village's elementary school awaken their potential as transformational global citizens, part of a project for building a sustainable society.⁴⁵ The translator contracted half a *mǔ* of organic rice. She signed the contract with Mǎ Zhìyǒng and gave him 1,000 CNY. Usually it was Wáng Wěi who signed such contracts with the consumers, Mǎ Zhìyǒng told me later on. After the harvest the translator would receive all the rice from the piece of land she contracted, for a price four times as high as the price for ordinary rice in the supermarket (FN, 2011-06-02).

⁴⁵ This US American teacher told me that Zhū Xiǎojiān attended one of her courses in Běijīng and then asked her to go to Shuǐdào Zhuāng because she felt that the cooperative projects in the village did not really work (FN, 2011-06-12).

Mǎ Zhìyǒng first claimed that “the peasants” (农民 *nóngmín*) would receive that money. He did not answer when I asked him whom he meant by “the peasants.” When I asked him if the cooperative, namely “the few of them”, got the income from the sales, he confirmed it without enthusiasm (FN, 2011-06-02).

When I talked with the Chinese volunteer translator, it turned out that she did not know who would receive the money she paid for the contracted land and would pay for the produce later on (FN, 2011-06-02).

If she, who had even visited the village herself, did not know, I guessed that the consumers in Běijīng also did not know what it meant in fact that “the peasants” would receive their money.

In May 2011 nearly all the organic rice from the last rice harvest was sold out, Wáng Wěi told me (WW, 2011-05-03:323). Nevertheless, in the first year the cooperative lost money with the organic rice project, Wáng Wěi complained. The yields were very low with only three hundred *jīn* of rice (or five hundred *jīn* of paddy) per *mǔ*, instead of up to one thousand one hundred *jīn* of rice per *mǔ* (WW, 2011-06-08b:50–54).

To sum this section up, I want to point out that the remuneration scheme of the organic rice project differed significantly from the Small Group for Ecological Rice. The yields of paddy had a direct influence on the income of the peasants who cultivated ecological rice in order to sell it to the cooperative (or to another trader). In the case of the organic rice the yields did not influence the income of the peasant at all. It was the cooperative’s income which depended on the yields of the organic rice. Yet, although the peasant did not share this direct interest in yields with the cooperative, the peasant managed to increase the yields in the second year, based on her experiences from the first year.

6.5 Feeling powerless: the peasant’s dissatisfaction with remuneration

According to the contract, Huáng Yùtíng should be paid an income equal to the highest yields of ordinary paddy per *mǔ* in the village. Based on the assumption that the yields of ordinary rice were about one thousand *jīn* per *mǔ* and that the price for one *jīn* was about 1,5 CNY, Huáng Yùtíng estimated that she could have generated an income of about 1,5 thousand CNY per *mǔ* by growing ordinary rice. However, she said that she only received 1,200 CNY per *mǔ* from Wáng Wěi. Thus her income was three hundred

CNY lower, she complained. Later she relativized her statement. If she had cultivated ordinary rice, she would have needed to buy agricultural inputs herself. For one *mǔ* the costs of agricultural chemicals were usually at least fifty CNY and the costs for chemical fertilizers were about one hundred and twenty CNY. Hence, these costs needed to be subtracted. Therefore, she finally concluded that her income for organic rice was almost equal to the ordinary income she could have generated otherwise (HYT, 2011-06-04a:154–170).

Huáng Yùtíng did not know any details of the sale of the organic rice that she had produced. She only knew that the price was as high as 10 CNY and thus four times as expensive as rice in the supermarket. She recounted that Mǎ Zhìyǒng nevertheless claimed that Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres made losses with the organic rice project. However, Huáng Yùtíng did not believe that they really lost money. She made some calculations and came to the conclusion that the village cadres should have been able to make profits (HYT, 2011-06-04a:181–200).⁴⁶

She added that Mǎ Zhìyǒng told her that it was not easy to sell a new product in the first year (HYT, 2011-06-04a:197–202). At first this sounded quite reasonable to me, however, if one urban consumer contracted half a *mǔ* of rice, then the village cadres only needed to find sixteen consumer households to buy their organic rice.

According to Huáng Yùtíng, Mǎ Zhìyǒng also stressed expenses such as processing and packaging rice, as well as printing the trademark. Then Huáng Yùtíng said again that she did not care about this and that she also did not ask for any details because asking such question made people unhappy, she explained. After that she immediately repeated the advantages the project provided for her, namely that it was better for her body as she did not have to spray agricultural chemicals (HYT, 2011-06-04a:197–202). She had already told me about this advantage before. I had the impression that by repeating it in this context she stressed that she did not interfere in the affairs of the village committee and focused on herself. On the other hand—and probably even more importantly—she explained to herself why she accepted an unequal deal, in

⁴⁶ Based on the knowledge that the yields were about 4,2 thousand *jīn*, and on the assumption that one hundred *jīn* of paddy were at least seventy *jīn* of rice after processing, the village cadres should have been able to sell about three thousand *jīn* of rice. As they sold the rice for 10 CNY per *jīn* the total income should have been more than 30 thousand CNY. The village cadres paid Huáng Yùtíng 9,600 CNY. She estimated that the costs for transportation and so on did not use up the remaining more than 20 thousand CNY. There should have been some profits for the village cadres, Huáng Yùtíng felt certain (HYT, 2011-06-04a:189–194).

which the other party, namely the village cadres, not only benefited a lot but also denied that they benefited from it.

When I returned to the village in November 2011 I met Huáng Yùtíng again. One of the first things she told me was that Wáng Wěi had not yet given her the money for the organic wheat and rice harvest. She complained that she had already asked him for the money several times. He always maintained that he did not have any money. However, she knew that they had already sold all of the wheat she had cultivated. She mentioned that the village cadres were selling her organic rice for a very high price in Běijīng, and that they even bought ordinary rice from outside of the village and sold it as organic rice, claiming that she had produced this rice. She had not observed this herself but nevertheless she seemed certain of it.⁴⁷ When I talked with her in June 2011, she did not raise this accusation and maintained that she did not care about how the village cadres sold the rice. In autumn I had the impression that she was more upset about the village cadres than in spring. She claimed that Wáng Wěi let money disappear into his own pockets. However, she noted that she could not do anything by herself if Wáng Wěi told her that he had no money to pay her. Huáng Yùtíng also said that she herself was not able to sell organic rice for such a high price in Běijīng. Therefore, she had no other option than letting the village cadres, and especially Wáng Wěi, sell her organic rice (FN, 2011-11-12).

Wáng Wěi on the other hand emphasized that, whereas the peasant had a fixed income, the cooperative had to bear the risks. He claimed that the cooperative made losses in the first year of the organic rice project (WW, 2011-06-08b:50–54). Wáng Wěi literally said about the contract: “For the common people that contract is an overlord provision, for us it is a grandson provision.”⁴⁸ By this he meant that the contract was advantageous for the peasant, who was in the high position of the overlord, but disadvantageous for the cooperative, which was in the low position of a grandson (WW, 2011-06-08b:36–38).

⁴⁷ In an interview, a council member of the former Rice Association accused the village cadres of having tricked many consumers by selling them ordinary rice as organic rice for a very expensive price. Hú Qǐhuá claimed that the cooperative sold about 18 to 28 *mǔ* of rice as organic rice (HQH, 2011-06-05:523–525). The Professional Cooperative planned to expand the organic rice project from eight to 20 *mǔ* as the neighbors, namely the family of the village accountant Wáng Yàjūn, also wanted to participate, Wáng Wěi communicated to me in May 2011 (WW, 2011-05-03:337–340). If it is true what Hú Qǐhuá and Huáng Yùtíng said, then the cooperative had already de facto expanded its sale of organic rice without, however, increasing the acreage.

⁴⁸ 那个合同对老百姓来说是一个霸王条款，对我们来说是一个孙子条款。 Nàge hétong duì lǎobǎixìng láishuō shì yí gè bàwáng tiáokuǎn, duì wǒmen láishuō shì yí gè sūnzi tiáokuǎn (WW, 2011-06-08b:30–31).

Interestingly both sides felt that the other side benefited more from the organic rice and wheat project. Moreover, while Wáng Wěi stressed the monetary benefit for the peasant, Huáng Yùtíng felt that the non-monetary aspects were beneficial for her. Concerning remuneration, she was not satisfied. However, she felt powerless and alone. She thought that there was nothing she could do to change the situation.

In fact she was not alone and some people had a different understanding of cooperation and tried to change the existing cooperative. I deal with this resistance in chapter 9. Before that let us turn to the small groups for lotus roots and crabs (chapter 7) and for happy pigs (chapter 8).

7 Lotus Roots and Crabs

In this chapter I describe the Small Group for the Integrated Cultivation of Lotus Roots and Crabs (藕蟹混养小组 *ǒuxiè hùnyǎng xiǎozǔ*). Whereas the small groups for ecological rice and for ecological minor food crops were examples of supply and marketing “cooperatives”, the Small Group for the Integrated Cultivation of Lotus Roots and Crabs (hereafter LC group) was roughly organized in a similar way to the Small Group for Organic Rice and Wheat, and thus it resembled more a production “cooperative”, if—considering its internal organization—it should be called a cooperative at all.⁴⁹ The cooperative directly organized and managed the production of lotus roots and crabs, as well as of organic rice and wheat. In the case of ecological rice and ecological minor food grains, the peasants produced ecological rice and ecological minor food crops more or less individually, whereas the cooperative only sold inputs such as seeds to the peasants and bought their outputs for further marketing and sale. The internal organization of the LC group is at the center of my attention here. In the first part of this chapter I give an overview of the project, focusing on its relations with the outside world, namely on lotus roots and crabs as commodities and gifts, as well as on state support. In the following parts I focus on the division of labor and on remuneration within the small group. Based on my empirical findings, I discuss in the third part the relations between the cooperative and the workers. As different people who worked at the LC group related differently to the shareholding village cadres, I use both the notions of class and patron-client to further our understanding of these relationships.

⁴⁹ I put the term “cooperative” in quotation marks here because there existed different opinions in the village on whether these small groups should be called cooperatives or not. In the way they were represented by the managing village cadres, these small groups were cooperatives. However, as we saw in the previous chapters, some villagers did not view these small groups as cooperatives according to their understanding of this term.

7.1 Outlining the Lotus and Crabs Small Group

Like the small groups for ecological rice, for ecological minor food crops, and for organic rice and wheat, discussed in chapters 5 and 6, the LC group was not officially registered as a separate cooperative but as part of the Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products (or Professional Cooperative; WW, 2011-05-03:41–42).

7.1.1 A new idea

In Wáng Wěi's narrative, he originally invested his own money to study the integrated cultivation of lotus roots and crabs, and took assistant professor Zhū Xiǎojiān with him. When he returned from the study, he gave a report on it to the leaders of the agricultural bureau and county government. These leaders thought that this kind of integrated cultivation might improve the lot of many peasants because many peasants cultivated lotus roots in the township. They proposed that there should be an experiment with the integrated cultivation of lotus roots and crabs in Shǔidào zhuāng, because it was Wáng Wěi who first learned about it and who found the venture appealing. Hence, Wáng Wěi explained, he and the other village cadres pioneered and launched the lotus and crabs project in Shǔidào zhuāng (WW, 2011-05-03:109–114).

As with the other projects in the village, Hú Qǐhuá, council member of the former Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice, contested Wáng Wěi's claim and stated that the integrated cultivation of lotus roots and crabs was instead his idea (HQH, 2011-05-07:773).

The lotus roots of the cooperative's small group were ecological. That meant that they did not use any agricultural chemicals and instead of chemical fertilizer they used organic fertilizer, namely manure from a farm outside of the village. Some peasants in the village told me that they grew lotus roots in a more or less ecological way. However, other villagers did use chemical fertilizers and agricultural chemicals for growing their lotus roots (FFP, 2011-05-29:1036).

7.1.2 Lotus roots and crabs as commodities and gifts

The LC group sold most of their lotus roots through the same channel the other peasants used for selling their lotus roots in the village. The peasants sold their lotus roots as commodities to the small peddlers, who came to the village with their three-wheelers (FN, 2011-04-23, 2011-04-25, 2011-04-27; FFP, 2011-05-29:793–810). Concerning the

price, the peddlers did not differentiate between ecological lotus roots and conventional lotus roots grown by other villagers (FN, 2011-11-11).⁵⁰ In April the peasants sold their last lotus roots of the season for 1,4 CNY per *jīn* to the peddlers (FN, 2011-04-23). In November the price was 1,6 to 1,7 CNY per *jīn* (FN, 2011-11-12).

A much smaller part of the lotus roots were sold to visiting urban dwellers during the ecological culture tourism festival (生态文化旅游节 *shēngtài wénhuà lǚyóu jié*) in autumn for a price much higher than the usual market price within the village, namely for 5 CNY per *jīn* (FFP, 2011-05-29:803).

The first ecological culture tourism festival took place in Shǔidào_{zhuāng} in 2009, the second in 2010. During the second festival the Professional Cooperative managed to sell its first crabs to urban dwellers. However, most of the crabs were given away as presents during publicity activities (WW, 2011-05-03:126–127). Through this the cooperative lost 1,000 CNY at the festival according to Wáng Wěi (WW, 2011-05-29:225).

In 2011 crabs were sold mainly to businessmen who came to the village to pick them up. They were sold for a price higher than the usual market price for ordinary crabs. One crab was sold for 10 CNY by the cooperative. On the market peddlers bought crabs for 40 CNY per *jīn* and it needed more than four crabs were needed to make up one *jīn*, Fāng Fēipéng told me. The businessmen usually bought between 30 and 80 baskets of crabs, thus spending between 300 and 800 CNY, as there were about ten crabs in one basket (FN, 2011-11-11).

7.1.3 The meaning of loss

In 2009, the first year of the project, the village cadres made no profit with raising crabs because they were not experienced in it. Birds, snakes and frogs ate the crabs when they changed their hard shell during their growth process. In 2010, the small group did better in raising the crabs than the year before (WW, 2011-05-03:114–126).

Although usually it was possible to make a lot of money only cultivating lotus roots, in 2010 the village cadres did not make profits with the LC group, due to several reasons, Wáng Wěi claimed. Firstly, it was necessary to dig ditches to provide an adequate water supply for raising crabs. These water ditches occupied at least ten *mǔ* of land and therefore influenced the yields of lotus roots. Secondly, they lost a lot of money with the crabs. Thirdly, the marketing channels had not yet been opened.

⁵⁰ Once I observed that the peasants' lotus roots were put on the same vehicle together with the ecological lotus roots from the cooperative (FN, 2011-11-14).

Fourthly, many lotus roots, worth more than forty five thousand CNY, were damaged by frost in winter (WW, 2011-05-03:132–143).

Fāng Fēipéng also mentioned that the village cadres lost parts of their harvest due to bad weather, however, according to Fāng Fēipéng, the problem was too much rain, not frost. Two incidents of heavy rain resulted in plant disease and, hence, less yields. According to Fāng Fēipéng, the harvest was reduced by more than one thousand *jīn* per *mǔ* (FFP, 2011-05-29:812–818).

Concerning the meaning of “loss of money” (赔钱 *péi qián*), I found it interesting that Fāng Fēipéng at once told me that, on one hand, despite the bad weather, the small group still earned money, and, on the other hand, that “last year everyone lost money.”⁵¹ Here the meaning of “losing money” is not absolute but relative. It does not mean that last year all the peasants earned no money by planting lotus roots. What Fāng Fēipéng meant was that the peasants lost money in comparison to what they might have earned without negative influences reducing their harvest (FFP, 2011-05-29:817–818).

Whereas Wáng Wěi generally claimed that none of the NRR projects of the village were profitable, and no second dividend was distributed, Fāng Fēipéng generally claimed that they “have profits for sure”, because “if there was no profit, who would do it?”⁵² On one hand, Fāng Fēipéng’s argument sounds perfectly reasonable. The Professional Cooperative was founded in 2008. If the village cadres who ran the Professional Cooperative made a loss all the time, why would they continue? Maybe even more importantly, how were they able to continue for already three years if their claim of permanent loss was true? On the other hand, Fāng Fēipéng’s statement perfectly fitted into the image Wáng Wěi had of the “common people” as being only motivated by financial gains. According to Wáng Wěi, the villagers did not follow the pioneering example of the village cadres: “The common people, they are realistic. They look; if no money is earned, they don’t follow at first. It is when you make money that everyone will automatically follow you.”⁵³ Wáng Wěi represented himself—in contrast to the common people—as being selflessly caring for the collective. However, if we move with Pierre

⁵¹ 去年都赔钱的。 Qùnián dōu péi qián de (FFP, 2011-05-29:817).

⁵² 肯定有利润的。……没利润谁赶呀？ Kěndìng yǒu lìrùn de ... Méi lìrùn shuí gǎn ya? (FFP, 2011-05-29:165–167).

⁵³ 老百姓呢，是很现实的。他看了没有赚钱，他们就先不跟嘛。就是什么时候你赚了钱了大家就会自然而然地跟你。 Lǎobǎixìng ne, shì hěn xiànsí de. Tā kàn le méiyǒu zhuànqián, tāmen jiù xiān bù gēn ma. Jiùshì shénme shíhou nǐ zhuànle qián le dàjiā jiù huì zìrán’érán de gēn nǐ (WW, 2011-05-03:128–130).

Bourdieu (1986) from a narrowly economic perspective to a broader view of different kinds of capital, we can view this apparently selfless pioneer behavior of the village cadres as not completely selfless, as we already did in chapter 5 in the subsection about the costs and benefits of gift giving. David Graeber rightly warns us against simply viewing every human action as being only about maximizing profit, as even Bourdieu, one of the most critical social scientists, does with his general science of the economy of practices. If critical theory is only looking for hidden structures of power, dominance, and exploitation everywhere, it becomes impossible to imagine a world without it, and hence criticism becomes pointless. However, Graeber's argument is not about not looking for power and exploitation at all (Graeber 2001:26–30). (In fact, not doing so would make imagining alternatives pointless.) Especially in cases of gift giving between unequals, where, furthermore, the gift-giver is not himself the producer of the gift, it seems perfectly reasonable to me to be skeptical about an alleged selfless act. Bourdieu's analytical tools offer a way to approach such cases. Moreover, while Wáng Wěi claimed that the villagers were acting in self-interest, the villagers claimed that Wáng Wěi acted in self-interest. Maybe the village cadres' stories about the constant losses of the cooperative were not true and self-interest in its relatively pure economic form did exist here too.

Returning to the concrete case of the lotus and crabs project, Fāng Fěipéng indeed claimed that the village cadres made a profit (not revenue, as he stressed) of more than 76 thousand CNY in 2010 (FFP, 2011-05-29:658–667).

Fāng Fěipéng did not know any exact numbers for the year 2009, however, he was still convinced that they made no losses in this first year: “Of course [they] did not lose money.”⁵⁴ He assumed that in 2009 they probably did not earn as much money as in 2010, when they saved money by using their own left over lotus roots for planting (FFP, 2011-05-29:783–791).

In autumn Fāng Fěipéng estimated that in 2011 the cooperative had revenue of between three to four thousand CNY per *mǔ* from selling lotus roots. After deducting the costs of production, profits of one to two thousand CNY per *mǔ* should still be left, according to his calculations. This amount should also be enough to make an overall profit with the lotus and crabs project, even if the cooperative again lost money with the raising of crabs because men armed with knives had stolen many of them (FN, 2011-11-14).

⁵⁴ 当然不赔钱。 Dāngrán bù péi qián (FFP, 2011-05-29:790).

Summarizing this subsection, there is one thing we can know for sure, namely that the village cadres claimed that the LC group was not profitable, but that villagers did not necessarily believe that this was true. Concerning the question of state support, the picture was similar.

7.1.4 State support

Fāng Fēipéng said he understood why Wáng Wěi and the village cadres claimed that they made no profits. Everyone would tell the outside that they made losses. No one would dare to announce with a loud voice that they had made money that year. From Fāng Fēipéng's perspective, this claim of loss was connected with the aim of receiving money from state projects. If Wáng Wěi had not said that he had lost money, he would not have received any money from the state, Fāng Fēipéng suspected (FFP, 2011-05-29:673–680): “If he says that he lost money, in the case of loss, there are definitely people who will give him the money that he lost, those from the project will give him subsidies for sure. Right?”⁵⁵

Not only Fāng Fēipéng but also Hú Qǐhuá claimed that the village cadres had received state support for the cooperative's LC group. According to Hú Qǐhuá, the state allocated funds to them because they claimed that all the villagers were involved in the lotus and crabs project. In fact the money the village cadres earned with the LC group was their profit, while the money they lost was the state's money, Hú Qǐhuá emphasized (HQH, 2011-05-07:773–779, 2011-05-27b:428–429).

Hú Qǐhuá made this claim about state support, although he did not know any details about it. However, he emphasized that all the people knew that the state gave money to the project. Hú Qǐhuá complained about the lack of transparency in the operation of both the Professional Cooperative and the village committee. In order to enable mass supervision, all the information about state funding should be publicized, he said, but the village cadres did not do so. Despite this news blockade, Hú Qǐhuá expected that after a while everyone would know what was going on (HQH, 2011-05-27b:431–437).

For example, Hú Qǐhuá heard other people saying—he acknowledged that he did not know for sure—that the state gave the village cadres money in a disguised form. By this he meant that they did not have to pay for certain services and inputs. For example,

⁵⁵ 他说我赔了，赔了肯定会有人给他赔那个钱，项目上肯定会给他补助的。对吧？Tā shuō wǒ péi le, péi le kěndìng huì yǒu rén gěi tā péi nàge qián, xiàngmù shàng kěndìng huì gěi tā bǔzhù de. Dui ba (FFP, 2011-05-29:679–680)?

an excavator constructed the irrigation channel embankment, as well as dykes and ridges between the fields. Private customers would usually have to pay for that service by hour. The village cadres did not have to pay for using the excavator. For Hú Qǐhuá this was the same as the state giving money to the village cadres. Furthermore, Hú Qǐhuá heard that the state subsidized the cooperative's lotus root seeds and that the agricultural bureau also contributed some money (HQH, 2011-06-07:761–769).

According to Hú Qǐhuá, there were also rumors that the state gave the LC group money, calculated on the basis of the surface area planted with lotus roots. Hú Qǐhuá estimated that in fact the lotus field only had a surface of about 30 to 40 *mǔ*, but that the village cadres reported that the small group cultivated 100 to 200 *mǔ* of lotus (HQH, 2011-06-07:779–789). I heard several different numbers concerning the acreage of lotus roots, ranging from Hú Qǐhuá's information of 30 *mǔ*, to Fāng Fēipéng's of 50 *mǔ* (FFP, 2011-05-29:530), up to one peasant's of 60 *mǔ* (FN, 2011-04-19). According to Fāng Fēipéng, the lotus and crabs group transferred 80 *mǔ* of land on the whole, but did not plant lotus roots everywhere (FFP, 2011-05-29:530). If the cooperative really reported more acreage of lotus roots, this was not an exception. For example, Wáng Wěi himself told me that the real acreage of minor food crops was lower than the number the cooperative announced to the public (WW, 2011-06-08b:133–134).

In the interviews Wáng Wěi did not mention that they had received any state support for the project. The only thing Wáng Wěi told me was that they had applied for a project for 2011 in order to expand. However, when I interviewed him in May 2011, the project had not been yet approved (WW, 2011-05-03:127–128). In a later interview in June, Wáng Wěi asked me to switch of my recorder, and told me that the project for the LC group was already approved, but that the money the state distributed allegedly disappeared in the pockets of the leaders before arriving at the cooperative (WW, 2011-06-08c:294–295; IR WW, 2011-06-08).⁵⁶

To summarize this subsection, we can state that there were two claims that the state's money which was supposed to support a collective, cooperative project was used by local officials for their private gain. Villagers leveled this charge against the village cadres, especially against the chairperson of the village committee. The chairperson of

⁵⁶ While some villagers accused Wáng Wěi of being corrupt, he in turn accused leaders above the village level of being corrupt. In the accounts of involved people, it is usually the other that is corrupt but almost never the self. This is one of the challenges of empirical studies on corruption.

the village committee himself blamed the next, higher-level officials. In the next part we turn from the LC group's relations with the outside world to its internal relations.

7.2 Village cadres as shareholders

On my first day in the village a peasant in military style clothing told me that four big peasants rented 60 *mǔ* of land from other people in order to grow lotus roots (FN, 2011-04-19). Only later on did I realize that he had told me about a project of the cooperative (FN, 2011-05-06).

Already in the first interview, Wáng Wěi told me that it was only the four village cadres who were involved in the lotus and crab project (WW, 2011-05-03:130). However, Hú Qǐhuá told me that earlier on Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres had made a different claim about the small group's members. In order to make the state allocate funds to the project, Hú Qǐhuá maintained that the village cadres told the outside that the LC group belonged to all the peasants in the village. Hú Qǐhuá recounted that he and his wife were surprised when students came to his home and asked how high a dividend they got from the integrated cultivation of lotus roots and crabs. Hú Qǐhuá and his wife told the students that they did not receive any money and that the project only belonged to the four village cadres (HQH, 2011-05-07:773–779, 2011-05-25:612–617). According to Hú Qǐhuá, even the wife of Huáng Guóqiáng, the only village cadre who was not involved in the LC group, complained that Wáng Wěi wanted the villagers to tell the outside lies about something that did not exist and that she could not say what she was expected to say (HQH, 2011-05-25:619–630). Hú Qǐhuá asserted that Wáng Wěi did not tell the outside that only village cadres and not the common people participated in the project because if he told them, people would start to ask themselves if Wáng Wěi was using his power to seek personal gain (HQH, 2011-05-25:657–662). When I informed Hú Qǐhuá that Wáng Wěi told me from the start that it was only the four village cadres' project, Hú Qǐhuá explained that it was definitely clear to Wáng Wěi that it made no sense to continue to tell lies because I had already stayed in the village for so many days (HQH, 2011-05-25:693–694).

In 2008 the four village cadres Huáng Jiànguó, Wáng Wěi, Wáng Yàjūn, and Chén Yùjiàn, invested money to pay 500 CNY per *mǔ* per year to transfer the land use rights to the LC group of the Professional Cooperative. According to Wáng Wěi, this land had the poorest quality of soil in the whole village (WW, 2011-05-03:89–109).

Nevertheless, not all of the peasants whose land was transferred immediately agreed to the village cadres' offer, Hú Qǐhuá told me. The village cadres indeed invested a lot of time and energy to get the land use rights in the name of the village committee, Hú Qǐhuá acknowledged (HQH, 2011-06-07:756–760). Despite the poor quality, Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres transferred this land because they wanted to set a pioneering example, Wáng Wěi explained. Huáng Jiànguó, the vice village party branch secretary of Shǔidào zhuāng, was the person in charge of the management of the LC group (WW, 2011-05-03:89–109).

In Wáng Wěi's narrative the village cadres tried to enlarge the project and include more peasants in this cooperative project, but in the end they did not manage to do so (WW, 2011-05-03:130). In contrast, Hú Qǐhuá told me that Wáng Wěi and the village cadres did not even organize a meeting in order to inform all the villagers about their plans of cooperatively cultivating lotus roots and crabs or to ask them to participate in this new small group of the cooperative (HQH, 2011-06-07:754–756). He even raised an accusation against the village cadres, namely that they did not want other villagers to participate in order to take all the profits themselves after the state had helped starting the project because the village cadres had pretended that the whole village was involved (HQH, 2011-06-07:769–774). Be that as it may, only the village cadres were shareholders of the LC group and the only ones who managed it.

7.3 One permanent worker...

7.3.1 ... for guarding, feeding and secret accounting

The LC group had one permanent worker, who lived and worked at the lotus and crabs field from April until December (FFP, 2011-05-29:494,615). The young man, who was called Fāng Fěipéng, had an oral agreement with the cooperative. In addition to the wage, they also specified the tasks Fāng Fěipéng had to fulfill. He told me that his main task was to prevent other people from stealing the crabs and the lotus roots.⁵⁷ His second task was to feed the crabs once every afternoon. Moreover, if people from the outside, such as leaders, journalists, intellectuals, students and urban dwellers, came to

⁵⁷ In November 2011 Fāng Fěipéng told me that many crabs had been stolen. One night two men entered the container where he was living next to the lotus fields and threatened him with a knife. He did not dare to do anything because they seemed to be drunk. At the same time there were two or three men outside collecting the crabs in the fields. When the men left in their car, Fāng Fěipéng saw the number plate and informed the police who managed to catch the robbers. However, the crabs were gone (FN, 2011-11-11).

visit the lotus and crabs project, Fāng Fēipéng was supposed to introduce and explain the project to them.⁵⁸ He was also asked to write a diary in order to document the advances and drawbacks in the cultivation process (FFP, 2011-05-29:480–484).⁵⁹

Besides these tasks, I also observed that he scared away birds with the sound of crackers, which he shot into the air with a slingshot in order to prevent them from eating the crabs. He also hindered other animals from eating the crabs. Once he caught a snake with his bare hands, I read in his diary. However, he did not kill it because this was not in accordance with the philosophy of the village, he believed (FN, 2011-05-25).

The planting of the lotus roots in spring, the weeding during the season and the digging of lotus roots in autumn were not included in Fāng Fēipéng's basic set of tasks. According to the oral agreement, Fāng Fēipéng was responsible for supervising the process of planting lotus roots. However, he could additionally participate in planting lotus roots himself. For this additional work he was paid as much as the other day laborers.⁶⁰ Similarly, in autumn, Fāng Fēipéng not only kept books about the amount of lotus roots unearthed and sold, he also dug out lotus roots himself in the morning, when he was not as busy with taking notes as in the afternoon (FFP, 2011-05-29:497–517, 647–654, 977–980).

In 2011 three of the village cadres asked Fāng Fēipéng to undertake another task. They suspected that the fourth of them, namely Huáng Jiànguó, who was responsible for accounting, was corrupt and was putting some of the project's money into his own pocket without writing it into his “bright”—as Fāng Fēipéng called it—account book (míngzhàngběn 明账本). Therefore, without Huáng Jiànguó knowing it, Fāng Fēipéng had a second, a “dark” or “secret” account book (ànzhangběn 暗账本) and recorded all the revenues and expenditures. Whereas Huáng Jiànguó still collected all the money of the small group, all the money went through Fāng Fēipéng's hands first. That way the other village cadres, namely Wáng Wěi, Wáng Yàjūn and Chén Yùjiàn, wanted to su-

⁵⁸ For example, during the ecological culture tourism festival Fāng Fēipéng had to prepare a banner, a very small ceremony and an angling competition in which urban dwellers tried to catch crabs. Then he introduced the lotus and crabs project, as well as the schedule of activities in the festival to the visitors, and answered their questions. Most of the questions of the urban dwellers concerned the raising of crabs, but not the cooperative. All in all this was not a lot of work for him, as the village cadres and Mǎ Zhiyǒng arranged everything else, and as the student volunteers from the agricultural universities helped with the rest of the tasks during the festival (FFP, 2011-05-29:690–705).

⁵⁹ Fāng Fēipéng also showed me his notes. Proudly he told me that many people, including intellectuals like Zhū Xiǎojiān and Wēn Tiějūn, lauded him for writing the diary. He showed me two empty notebooks, which someone had given to him as a present. Once he had received a dictionary too (FN, 2011-05-25).

⁶⁰ I focus on the day laborers in a subsection below.

pervise the doings of Huáng Jiànguó and prevent corruption (FFP, 2011-05-29:721–773). Fāng Fēipéng, on the other hand, seemed proud to be the second accountant of the project.

In the course of the year Fāng Fēipéng's work basically did not change. He only mentioned that there were more visitors in June and July than in the rest of the year (FFP, 2011-05-29:489–492). In autumn it was also Fāng Fēipéng's task to catch the crabs when consumers ordered them in advance. He would then prepare the crabs to be picked up by the consumers on the next day (FN, 2011-05-25, 2011-11-11).

Fāng Fēipéng was not involved in decision-making processes. Only once did he participate in a meeting in 2010. The village cadres managed the small group. His relationship to the village cadres was that he worked for them. He was the worker and the four cadres were his bosses, he told me. Huáng Jiànguó was the village cadre who stopped by the lotus field most often, sometimes even once a day and every day of the week. However, he had almost nothing to do there, Fāng Fēipéng noted. Huáng Jiànguó only checked the water level and asked Fāng Fēipéng if he needed money (FFP, 2011-05-29:871–902).

From April until December Fāng Fēipéng worked for the cooperative every day. During this time he had no holidays because he always needed to guard the crabs, he explained. From January to March he had no work and could do whatever he wished (FFP, 2011-05-29:860–867).

During the work period Fāng Fēipéng lived in a building container next to the lotus field. In one room there were two bunk beds and an electric fan. In the other half of the container materials for the cultivation of the crabs were stored. In this room he sprouted wheat used for feeding the crabs. With an electric hotplate Fāng Fēipéng could cook dishes for himself there. Outside of the container Fāng Fēipéng had planted some vegetables, such as eggplants and chillis. The container had electricity, but there was no toilet and no running water, so instead Fāng Fēipéng had to go into the fields if necessary. In summer he washed himself in the irrigation channel. In the cold season he went to the public bathhouse (zǎotáng 澡堂) in the county town once a week.⁶¹ In summer it was very hot in his container. Mosquitos bit him to death in summer because wet fields surrounded his home, he complained to me (FN, 2011-05-09, 2011-05-25, 2011-11-11).

⁶¹ Many peasants from the village went to bathhouses in winter, some once, others twice or three times a week because in their own bathrooms there was usually no heating system, Fāng Fēipéng explained (FN, 2011-11-11).

Fāng Fěipéng's wage was "only 500 CNY per month," according to Wáng Wěi (WW, 2011-05-03:147). In an informal conversation Fāng Fěipéng first told me that he felt that his wage was very low (FN, 2011-04-22). However, later on, contrary to Wáng Wěi's information, Fāng Fěipéng claimed in an interview that he received a wage of 1,200 CNY per month. He said that his wage was high considering that it was work in the village because even in the county town Dàhé the average wages were only about 800 to 1,000 CNY (FFP, 2011-05-29:78–100,466–467).⁶² In this case Wáng Wěi's information was closer to reality than Fāng Fěipéng's.⁶³

In autumn 2011 Fāng Fěipéng told me that he had not yet received his wage for the year because the season was not yet over. He explained that he did not want to immediately receive his wage every month like in 2010 when he had immediately spent most of this money. In order to be able to save some money this time, he asked the village cadres to pay him at the end of the year. If he needed money during the year, he had to ask the accountant Wáng Yàjūn for it. The money Fāng Fěipéng got from the cooperative in order to pay for his living expenses (like food) and consumer goods (like his new mobile phone) was then subtracted from the wage he was supposed to receive in the end of the year (FN, 2011-11-11).

Fāng Fěipéng was not the first permanent worker of the LC group. In 2009 the son of Wáng Wěi's elder brother worked there. According to one peasant, he earned more than Fāng Fěipéng, namely 900 CNY per month (FN, 2011-11-13). Apparently Fāng Fěipéng knew this. He thought that Wáng Wěi's nephew received a higher wage because of his close relationship to Wáng Wěi. Nevertheless, Fāng Fěipéng was willing to work for 500 CNY per month (FN, 2011-11-14). To better understand his decision, I summarize his life story at this point.

7.3.2 From the village to the city and back to the village

Fāng Fěipéng was about 20 years old when I met him in 2011 (FN, 2011-04-22). He did

⁶² Fāng Fěipéng told me that during the year the cooperative gave him money to cover his living expenses. For example, the village cadres gave him money for buying food in the village. According to Fāng Fěipéng, these living expenses amounted to 200 CNY per month. Additionally to that, he said, he received a wage of 1,000 CNY per month from the cooperative (FFP, 2011-05-29:78–100,466–467).

⁶³ I could not think of any reason why Wáng Wěi would not tell the truth concerning this issue. In all the other issues he emphasized the high costs of the cooperative in order to prove that the cooperative made no profit. Furthermore, Wáng Wěi—especially in the earlier interviews—stressed the advantages the cooperative offered to the peasants. Fāng Fěipéng, on the other hand, maybe exaggerated in this case in order to create a good impression on me, the interviewee. When I returned to the village in autumn 2011, Fāng Fěipéng told me that his wage was in fact 500 CNY per month (FN, 2011-11-11).

not spend his early childhood in Shǔidào Zhuāng but in another village. His father died when Fāng Fēipéng was still very young. His mother then married another man and moved with Fāng Fēipéng to Shǔidào Zhuāng, where Fāng Fēipéng went to school (FN, 2011-05-25). Fāng Fēipéng's family was among the poorest in the village. They only had the land use rights for about two *mǔ*. Additionally, his mother and his stepfather cultivated four *mǔ* of land from relatives who lived and worked outside of the village in a city. On their fields they planted wheat, rice and maize (FFP, 2011-05-29:3–32, 459–460).

Fāng Fēipéng only attended school until the age of 15. He said that he was not very good in school. Together with some schoolmates he looked for wage labor in the cities because they could earn more money there, Fāng Fēipéng recounted. Through a local intermediary, they found work in a toy factory in Guangzhou in the Guangdong Province, where other villagers already worked as migrant workers. Fāng Fēipéng and his schoolmates were still considered children, as they had not yet reached the age of 16. Thus companies with better working conditions and better pay did not hire them because these companies refused to use child labor. Sometimes Fāng Fēipéng worked only eight hours, but most of the time he worked twelve hours a day every day of the week because work was organized in only two and not in three shifts. In the dormitory of the factory he shared a room with four bunk beds with seven other workers. At the end of each month they received their wage on time. Fāng Fēipéng was paid a basic wage of 1,000 CNY plus an additional piece wage. If he and his three colleagues, who worked together at one machine, managed to exceed the set production target, they received an additional bonus. In this way he could earn up to 4,000 CNY per month. In the factory he did not witness any cases of worker resistance. Open resistance was forbidden according to the contract. Those who were dissatisfied simply quitted their job and left the company. Fāng Fēipéng worked at the factory for three years and only visited his parents in the village once a year at the Chinese New Year. He thought that this was a waste of money, as the trip was very expensive and he could not earn money during those days. However, with the age of 18 he returned to Shǔidào Zhuāng in 2007 because of health problems due to standing at the machine all day long. He also complained about the bad air in the city. His leg was swollen, probably thrombosis. Immediately after his return his condition worsened. He was lucky that he returned because in the city there was no one who would have looked after him, he said. He had to stay in the hospital for about one month. The doctor instructed him not to do any hard work for a

long time. Fāng Fēipéng stayed at home lying in bed for more than one year and for three years he did not do any heavy work (FFP, 2011-05-29:249–455).

In 2010 the village cadres asked Fāng Fēipéng if he wanted to work for the cooperative because they knew about his illness and that his family was the poorest in the whole village, Fāng Fēipéng explained. He decided to do this work because at that time he was not yet able to do any other kind of work due to the problem with his leg. Through his work for the cooperative at the lotus and crabs project he could earn a little money while continuing recreation at the same time (FFP, 2011-05-29:459–478).

Fāng Fēipéng enjoyed working for the cooperative in the village. He liked it more than working as a migrant worker in the city because he was not monitored as closely as in the factory. He could do the things he liked to do, and he did not have to do the things he did not want to do (FN, 2011-04-22; FFP, 2011-05-29:828–830).

Furthermore, his current work for the cooperative was not as exhausting as the work in the toy factory. The wage he earned in the city was higher, however, higher living expenses, Fāng Fēipéng noted, diminished this advantage (FFP, 2011-05-29:833–834).

In the interview in the end of May 2011, Fāng Fēipéng told me that he would prefer to plant lotus roots himself and earn as much money as the village cadres do now. He was self-confident and said that he would even be able to take better care of the fields than them because he thought that it was easier for one person to manage than for more. He knew exactly when to weed and when to use organic fertilizer so that his lotus roots would grow even better. Fāng Fēipéng viewed his time as the worker of the LC group as a learning opportunity.⁶⁴ Later on he himself would be able to buy organic fertilizer, pesticides and herbicides for his own ecological lotus roots. However, the only problem was that he did not have enough capital to do so, Fāng Fēipéng explained. He had already thought about how he could manage to borrow capital from his father's elder brother for next year. To participate in the mutual financial aid cooperative was not an option for him, because he did not want to pay interest and therefore preferred to borrow from relatives. If he had enough capital, he would also cultivate crabs, if not, he would only plant lotus roots (FFP, 2011-05-29:992–1047).

⁶⁴ He did not only learn by doing. During his time at the cooperative Fāng Fēipéng also started to like reading. In school he did not read a lot, but now he liked reading newspapers and books. He started reading because he considered himself too backward. Now he could use the internet and communicate with girls on QQ, a very popular free instant messaging service in mainland China (FFP, 2011-05-29:1065–1083).

In November 2011 Fāng Fēipéng's plans for the future had already changed. He did not want to continue to work for the cooperative if the wage continued to be as low as 500 CNY. Only if they offered him 1,000 CNY would he think about staying, he told me. He wanted to go to the cities again to find work, although the work there would be more exhausting and dangerous than in the countryside at the lotus field. This time he wanted to go to Inner Mongolia and not to Guangdong. Other villagers who worked in Inner Mongolia had told him that there he could earn at least 1,000 CNY per month if he worked at a construction side. Concerning working hours, he did not care about a 12-hour day because working for the LC group meant that he sometimes had to stay at his container for the whole day—in summer in order to guard the crabs when they were big enough to be worth stealing, and later on in autumn in order to guard the dug out lotus roots when they were easily accessible to thieves because they were piled up in front of his container before they were sold (FN, 2011-11-14). While writing this in spring 2012, I have wondered whether Fāng Fēipéng was still working for the Professional Cooperative in the village, as a migrant worker in Inner Mongolia or cultivating his own lotus roots in the village, or maybe doing something else.

7.4 Day laborers...

The LC group hired day laborers mainly for planting lotus roots in spring and for digging them up in autumn.

7.4.1 ... for planting lotus roots

In April 2011 it took ten day laborers, including Fāng Fēipéng, about two weeks to plant all the lotus roots on about 50 *mǔ* of the transferred land belonging to the lotus and crabs group.⁶⁵ The cooperative paid the day laborers a wage of 70 CNY per day, Fāng Fēipéng said. The day laborers came from Shǔidào_{zhuāng}, as well as from neighboring villages. The four members of the cooperative, that is the four village cadres, did not participate in this work (FN, 2011-05-27; FFP, 2011-05-29:510–551).

Later I found out that it was mainly women who planted the lotus roots, and that men and women were not equally paid for doing the same work. Fāng Fēipéng told me that he was paid 70 CNY per day, while women were only paid 50 CNY. Fāng Fēipéng

⁶⁵ In 2010, his first year of work at the cooperative, Fāng Fēipéng did not participate in planting the lotus roots but only started work later on (FFP, 2011-05-29:610–611). Therefore, he was not able to give me any information on the planting process the previous year.

explained this by stating that everywhere in China it was like that. He continued that men would not do this work if they were paid less. However, in the concrete process of hiring it was not the peasants who asked the cooperative for paid work. The cooperative asked the peasants if they wanted to work for them. It was thus the village cadres' decision to hire mainly women and not men for planting the lotus roots. Furthermore, the women were not randomly chosen. It was predominantly those women who also helped packaging the rice for the cooperative (FN, 2011-05-31).

7.4.2 ... for digging up lotus roots

The lotus roots were unearthed again in October and November (FFP, 2011-05-29:623). Huáng Jiànguó first checked with Fāng Fēipéng and then decided if and when to sell the lotus roots, Fāng Fēipéng told me. Huáng Jiànguó then informed an intermediary from Shǔidào zhuāng. This villager knew the market and where to sell the lotus roots. He organized a vehicle and a driver. The next step was that either this intermediary or Huáng Jiànguó organized the day laborers for digging (FN, 2011-11-14).⁶⁶ According to the oral agreement, Fāng Fēipéng was responsible for recording the amount of lotus roots unearthed and sold. However, in the morning he had time to dig out lotus roots himself. In this way he managed to earn an additional forty to fifty CNY per day (FFP, 2011-05-29:647–654). In contrast to the planting of lotus roots in spring, the day laborers were not paid per day but instead per *jīn* of dug up lotus roots. The piece wage per *jīn* was 0,3 CNY.⁶⁷ On one day one person dug up between 400 to 600 *jīn*. Thus it was possible to earn up to 200 CNY (for 666 *jīn* of lotus roots) per day, Fāng Fēipéng told me (FN, 2011-05-27). According to Fāng Fēipéng and my own observations in November 2011, it was mainly but not exclusively men who dug up lotus roots for the cooperative.⁶⁸ In this case, men and women were paid the same piece wage. The day laborers were not working together in the lotus field. Every one was working for himself and had his own pile of dug up lotus roots. At the end of the day Fāng Fēipéng weighed the piles. Those who unearthed more lotus roots earned more money. In the evening Huáng Jiànguó paid

⁶⁶ The day laborers told me that “those from the production brigade” (大队他们 *dàduì tāmen*)—thus referring to the village committee, and hence viewing the shareholders of the project not in their position as members of the Professional Cooperative but in their position as village cadres—asked them to work in the lotus field (FN, 2011-11-13).

⁶⁷ In autumn the wage per *jīn* was 0,4 CNY, according to the men who worked for the cooperative (FN, 2011-11-13).

⁶⁸ For example, on November 14 nine men and three women were working at the lotus field (FN, 2011-11-14).

the day laborers and Fāng Fěipéng did the secret bookkeeping (FN, 2011-05-31; 2011-11-13; 2011-11-14).

Most peasants in the village dug up their lotus roots themselves. However, there were some villagers who paid other people for doing this work. Interestingly, Fāng Fěipéng did not mention the availability of money (for example, from wage labor in the cities) as a reason, but of skills instead. He explained that these villagers let other people do it because—from his perspective—these peasants did not know how to carefully dig up the lotus roots without damaging them (FN, 2011-05-27). In 2010 Fāng Fěipéng also dug up lotus roots for other peasants to earn some additional money (FFP, 2011-05-29:905–907).

From this section we can summarize the following points. Firstly, there was a tendency to divide labor according to gender. It was mainly women planting and men digging up lotus roots. Secondly, day laborers were paid immediately after a day's work. This stood in contrast to the permanent worker who was paid at the end of the month in the first year and at the end of the year in his second year working for the small group. This was not an exception in the practice of the Professional Cooperative. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the woman who cultivated organic rice and wheat for the Professional Cooperative was also not paid immediately but only later on. Furthermore, peasants who sold their paddy or minor food crops to the cooperative, who were hence considered as members by Wáng Wěi, the chairperson of the Professional Cooperative, were also not paid as soon as they delivered their paddy to the cooperative. Thirdly, these day laborers were not necessarily villagers of Shǔidào-zhuāng but also came from other places of Dàhé County. Hence, not all of the day laborers had a relationship with the shareholders and managers of the small group that exceeded their rather impersonal relationship of buyers and sellers of labor power. However, there were also some day laborers who not only related with the shareholders and managers in their position as employers but also in their position as village cadres. Fourthly, Fāng Fěipéng was both permanent worker and day laborer.

7.5 Volunteer duty at the lotus field

So far I have dealt with paid work in the lotus and crabs project of the Professional Cooperative. However, there was also unpaid work in this small group. Fāng Fěipéng referred to this work as “volunteer duty” (义务 yìwù; FFP, 2011-05-29:559).

In the morning of the day when the crabs were put into the lotus field, Mǎ Zhìyǒng and I were invited to have breakfast at Wáng Wěi's family home. Afterwards we went to the fields of the LC group. Mǎ Zhìyǒng, Fāng Fēipéng and Zhèng Guīhuā, the wife of Wáng Wěi, and I prepared a fence that surrounded three of the six lotus fields of the cooperative. The fence was made out of thin bamboo canes and plastic, was about half a meter high and prevented the crabs from running away, and the snakes and frogs from entering the crabs' habitat. We also repaired the small earth dykes between the wet fields. After a while the village cadre Chén Yùjiàn also arrived at the lotus fields. He first showed Fāng Fēipéng where to repair a hole in the irrigation channel. Then Chén Yùjiàn also joined us preparing the fence. Next to Fāng Fēipéng's container, two men used a motorized water pump to add water to the lotus fields. Later the village cadres, Wáng Wěi and Wáng Yàjūn, arrived with the small red minibus. They had bought crabs in Píngyuán city. Now everyone stopped work and helped to put the crabs into the water. Afterwards we continued building the fence around the wet fields. Wáng Wěi and a man in a black suit also helped us. For lunch Wáng Wěi, Wáng Yàjūn, the man with the black suit, Mǎ Zhìyǒng and I went to a cheap restaurant in the neighboring village next to the big street. Zhèng Guīhuā, Wáng Wěi's wife, and Fāng Fēipéng did not join us. Zhèng Guīhuā left the fields with her electro bike (FN, 2011-05-09). Later she told me in an informal conversation that she ate at home on that day (FN, 2011-05-14). I knew from other meals with the village cadres that their wives usually did not eat together with them if they invited their friends for the meal. Only sometimes did they join us towards the end of the meal (FN, 2011-06-10). Fāng Fēipéng also did not eat with us. In an interview he explained that he could not come along because otherwise no one would have stayed at the lotus field to watch the crabs (FFP, 2011-05-29:579).

When we finished our meal at the restaurant, the village cadres bought Chinese dumplings for Fāng Fēipéng. When we returned to the fields, Fāng Fēipéng, Zhèng Guīhuā and two other women were still preparing the fence. Fāng Fēipéng quickly ate the dumplings and continued his work. Wáng Wěi took a shovel and showed his wife, the two women and Fāng Fēipéng how they should straighten the embarkment of the irrigation channel next to the lotus fields. Mǎ Zhìyǒng, who received a call from Zhū Xiǎojiān, and later on Wáng Wěi, left the scene, while the women and Fāng Fēipéng continued to work at the irrigation channel (FN, 2011-05-09).

On that day (nearly) all of the labor was unpaid labor, or “voluntary duty” (yìwù 义务), as Fāng Fěipéng put it. Only those who worked in the afternoon were hired by the cooperative for 25 CNY each (FFP, 2011-05-29:554–577).

When we talked about voluntary duty, Fāng Fěipéng told me that his favorite activity was physical labor. Sometimes it made him feel uncomfortable if he was not working on a job. In this respect he was different from his schoolmates, Fāng Fěipéng emphasized. According to him, both his male and female schoolmates were all very lazy. Already in primary school he was hardworking and very often it was him who cleaned the classroom. Even now did he sometimes voluntarily clean the new building of the village committee (FFP, 2011-05-29:911–923).

Fāng Fěipéng explained that the village cadres themselves only worked at the lotus fields if there was a lot of work to do, for example when the lotus roots were planted or dug up. However, after a few requests it turned out that most often it was not the village cadres themselves who came to work voluntarily and without payment at the lotus field. Rather the village cadres Wáng Wěi and Chén Yùjiàn sent their wives to the field.⁶⁹ Those two women helped the day laborers and Fāng Fěipéng planting lotus roots on one or two days (FFP, 2011-05-29:593–606). In comparison with the duration of the whole planting process, which lasted about two weeks, this contribution by family members of the village cadres was rather small. Paid workers, either permanent or temporary laborers, did most of the work.

7.6 Relations of class or patron-client relations?

To summarize this chapter I discuss the relations between the cooperative and the different workers with the concepts of class and patron-client relations. Is the relationship between the shareholders of the cooperative/buyer of labor power/village cadres and the workers/sellers of labor power/villagers best understood as a class relation between capitalists and workers or as a patron-client relation?

7.6.1 Class relations

In Nicos Poulantzas’ (1975) Marxist understanding, classes are groups of people that are defined through their place in the production process. He differentiates between

⁶⁹ I got very similar information about the participation of village cadres and their wives in the lotus and crabs project from Wáng Wěi’s wife, Zhèng Guìhuā, in an informal conversation about two weeks before the interview with Fāng Fěipéng (FN, 2011-05-14).

class places and class positions. This differentiation is not to be confused with the often-mentioned distinction between economic class situation (“class in itself”) and political-ideological class position (“class for itself”). Individuals can occupy objective class places that are determined by economic as well as (and this is the difference to the concept of “class in itself” as pre-political) by political and ideological factors. These places are already political and ideological as they already involve class struggle. They are objective in the sense that they exist independently of the will of the individual that occupies the place. In contrast, class positions refer to concrete situations of class struggle in which a social class might take a class position that is not in accordance with the objective interests determined by its class place. The Marxian concept of class is a relational concept, in contrast to models of social stratification and status groups. Inequality, or different levels of income, does not make people into members of different social classes. Rather inequality is the effect of social class on individuals, the effect of class places that are occupied by these individuals. Hence, social inequalities can only disappear with the disappearance of social classes (Poulantzas 1975: 14–17).

Within the production process of the LC group, the members of the cooperative, that is the four shareholders in the small group, were in the place of cooperating capitalists controlling the means of production and buying the labor power of one permanent worker and of several day laborers. Individual villagers, for example Fāng Fēipéng, and people from other nearby villages occupied the places of workers within the production process. However, while the relationship between the day laborers from other villagers with the village cadres ended as soon as they had finished a day’s work, this was not the case with the permanent worker Fāng Fēipéng and the day laborers from the village.

7.6.2 Patron-client relations

Many anthropologists have found that in the countryside “vertical” links across class boundaries often prevent the formation of horizontal linkages between those sharing the same place in the production process. In these cases, links of kinship, religion, ethnicity or nation tended to be more powerful than links of class. Hence, ethnographers rarely used the concept of class to analyze such relationships. Rather they developed other notions such as networks, cross-cutting ties, and patron-client relationships (Hann 2009:99).

Patrons are politically superior and clients inferior. Patrons control “access to political, economic or cultural resources that the clients want or need. The means by which

the client gains access to them is not through appeals to formal bureaucracy, but by the manipulation of personal relationships of reciprocity” (Mitchell 2009:416) Clients honor their patrons by way of gift giving or political support. In return, patrons give their clients access to certain resources: “It is therefore a personal relationship of exchange that although asymmetrical, is assumed to be mutually beneficial.” (Mitchell 2009:416)

As the worker Fāng Fēipéng and the village cadres were living in the same village, they also had a personal relationship. Their relationship can be considered as a relationship between patron and client as well. Wáng Wěi offered Fāng Fēipéng his job at the LC group in a situation when Fāng Fēipéng was not able to find another job due to his health problems. Furthermore, when Fāng Fēipéng talked with me about his wage, he also told me that his family had received 800 CNY from Wáng Wěi. It was the rural minimum living guarantee (nóngmín dībǎo 农民地堡) granted to his family by the provincial government after applying for it with the help of the village committee (FN, 2011-11-11). Giving their clients access to rare resources is typical for patrons. In turn Fāng Fēipéng was a loyal client. He offered what he called “voluntary duty” to his patrons. Not only did he sometimes work for free at the lotus field, he sometimes also cleaned up the building of the village committee. Probably he also offered political support to Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres in the village elections. A few weeks before the elections he told me that he was allowed to vote this time (FN, 2011-11-11). However, he did not tell me for whom he wanted to vote.

7.6.3 Capitalists/patrons and workers/clients

Many studies of clientelism treated class and patron-client relations as mutually exclusive (Rothstein 1979:32). In the 1970s Marxists argued that patron-client relationships are not purely personal relations. From their perspective they were structural, as well as related to class. Some even argued that patronage was a class relationship backed up with an ideology of mutual benefit (Mitchell 2009:417). Frances Rothstein (1979) emphasized that in the dependent capitalist development in Mexico, clientelism was based on class. Michal Bodemann (1982:147) pointed out that in rural Sardinia clientelism was not only based on the economic position of the patrons, “but also to a specific form of political power which is defined by the patron’s relationship to the state.”

Indeed, the relations between the cooperative and those of its workers that came from the same village were neither purely unstructured and impersonal market mediated relationships nor purely personal patron-client relationships. Wáng Wěi’s and the other

village cadres potential for being patrons was partly based on their class place as cooperative capitalists in the LC group and partly based on their political position as village cadres and, hence, on them being the connection to the state apparatus at the local level.

For the next chapter about the Happy Pig Small Group, one part of which, namely the Happy Pig Farm, is also a production cooperative-like project, we can keep this discussion about class/patron-client relations in mind.

8 Happy Pigs

Another sub-project of the Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products (or Professional Cooperative) was the so-called Small Group for Raising Happy Pigs (快乐猪养殖小组 *kuàilèzhū yǎngzhí xiǎozǔ*). I explain the meaning of “happy pigs” below. This project, and especially the different stories that exist about it, could easily fill up a whole chapter. However, due to restrictions of time and space, I only summarize the main characteristics of this project here. Considering it from the point of view of grounded theory methodology, it can also be argued that it should be omitted here because of theoretical saturation. The main codes and concepts I identified in the material about the Happy Pig Small Group (hereafter HP group) had already been developed in the coding process from the material about the other projects of the Professional Cooperative. I will first introduce the project and then summarize the similarities and differences to the other NRR projects in the village.

8.1 The meaning of “happy” in happy pigs

First of all, what made “happy pigs” happy—or what made them different from conventionally raised pigs? The idea for raising happy pigs developed as an answer to the growing problem of food safety (食品安全 *shípǐn ānquán*) in China. There have been many food scandals in China recently and consumers have started to worry about eating unhealthy food. One of the villagers, who was raising pigs, namely Hú Qǐhuá, a council member of the former Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice, expected consumers to be eager to buy food that did not cause any health problems and to even be willing to pay a better price if they knew for sure that the food was safe. Hence, he developed the idea of raising healthy, happy pigs, without using any dangerous chemicals. Therefore, he did not use industrially produced pig feed (饲料 *sìliào*) that often contained additives (添加剂 *tiānjiājì*) and that made pigs grow faster. Of course he also did not use lean meat powder (瘦肉精 *shòuròujīng*), a substance that lowers the fat content

in order to make it look more attractive for the consumer. The use of lean meat powder is illegal in China but, nevertheless, widespread, even though it is poisonous to humans (HQH, 2011-05-06b:33–59). Instead, Shǔidào zhuāng's peasants only used maize, wheat bran, wild edible herbs, leftover food or the like for feeding the happy pigs three times a day (WW, 2011-05-03:312–316). The peasants wrote a diary about their happy pigs in order to raise their sense of responsibility and to show the consumers how they raised their happy pigs (WW, 2011-05-03:257–261). A pig raised in the conventional way is fed industrial pig feed once a day and could be sold and slaughtered after about three to four months. Raising a happy pig took much longer, namely almost one year. Hence the production costs as well as the risk of disease among the pigs, and hence the risk of financial loss, were higher for the peasants (HQH, 2011-05-27b:153–160).

8.2 Inclusion and exclusion (1): Hú Qǐhuá and the happy pigs

In 2009 Hú Qǐhuá started to grow happy pigs in the pigsties in his courtyard. Before Chinese New Year 2010, assistant professor Zhū Xiǎojiān helped him selling his happy pigs in Zhèngzhōu to urban consumers for a higher price than the usual market price for conventional pig meat (HQH, 2011-05-06b:26–31).

Wáng Wěi liked the idea of growing happy pigs and set up a small group for growing happy pigs as part of the Professional Cooperative. He designated Hú Qǐhuá as the person in charge (负责人 fùzérén) of the small group (HQH, 2011-05-06b:77, 2011-05-25:81–85, 445–456, 2011-06-05:243–250; WW, 2011-05-06:174; FN, 2011-11-14). In 2010 Hú Qǐhuá and seven other households participated in the HP group and raised about fifty happy pigs. These seven households included three village cadres, namely Wáng Yàijūn, Chén Yùjiàn and Huáng Guóqiáng, as well as Huáng Guóqiáng's younger brother and three other families from the Huáng clan. The small group was organized as a marketing cooperative. The peasants raised the happy pigs individually. The cooperative sold the happy pigs to urban consumers (HQH, 2011-05-06b:438–441, 2011-05-25:318–384; WW, 2011-05-03:182–183).

In 2011 a second part, namely a new Happy Pig Farm (hereafter HP farm), was added to the HP group with about seventy happy pigs. It was organized in a similar way to the other production cooperative-like small groups in the village. Six households raising about fifty pigs still participated in the marketing cooperative-like part of the HP group (WW, 2011-05-03:204–214, 247–248). Two households no longer raised happy

pigs as part of the small group. Huáng Guóqiáng's family participated in the new HP farm and stopped raising pigs in their own courtyard (HGQ, 2011-05-27a:281–285). Wáng Wěi excluded Hú Qǐhuá, the initiator of the project, from the small group (HQH, 2011-05-06b:71–96, 2011-05-25:48–102, 550–550, 2011-05-27b:182–189).

The members of the HP group did not give me one single reason for Hú Qǐhuá's exclusion. Instead everyone, except those who told me that they did not know about it, gave me a different reason (CYJ, 2011-05-29:350–361; HQH, 2011-05-27b:2–53; HGQ, 2011-05-27b:281–337; WYJ, 2011-05-25:732–745). One of the reasons seemed more plausible than the other ones to me. According to Wáng Wěi, Hú Qǐhuá could no longer participate in the small group because he did not share his resources with the cooperative. By resources Wáng Wěi meant Hú Qǐhuá's personal contacts with urban consumers, which Hú Qǐhuá was able to establish when Wáng Wěi let him go in his place to meetings concerning the cooperative in the city. According to Wáng Wěi, Hú Qǐhuá used these contacts in order to sell his ecological products and also some of his happy pigs for a higher price than he could have fetched selling them to the peddlers on the market (WW, 2011-05-06:174–192). When I told Hú Qǐhuá about this charge, he asked in reply, what else other than trying to sell them by himself he should do with those happy pigs the cooperative did not manage to sell (HQH, 2011-05-25:595–599)? Some members of the HP group did not know—or at least claimed that they did not know—why Hú Qǐhuá was excluded (HQH, 2011-06-05:1163–1167). Even one of the two persons who supposedly succeeded Hú Qǐhuá in this position in charge of the HP group, said that it was a decision made by the leaders, namely by Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres (HYM, 2011-05-16:140–148). The other members of the small group were apparently not involved in this decision. Hú Qǐhuá himself claimed that Wáng Wěi kept him from participating in the small group by not informing him about the meetings. Hú Qǐhuá further maintained that Wáng Wěi excluded him because Hú Qǐhuá told people from the outside, for example students like me, the truth about the so-called cooperative. This displeased Wáng Wěi, Hú Qǐhuá explained, and thus Wáng Wěi excluded him in retaliation (HQH, 2011-05-06b:71–96). Furthermore, Hú Qǐhuá claimed that Wáng Wěi excluded him because otherwise Hú Qǐhuá would have led everyone from the small group to use the 200 thousand CNY from the state together. In this manner he would have hindered the village cadres from appropriating the money for themselves (HQH, 2011-06-05:252–255, 560–564). Be that as it may, Hú Qǐhuá was no longer involved in the HP group when I was in the village.

8.3 Inclusion and exclusion (2): marketing or production cooperative?

As mentioned above, we can differentiate between the marketing cooperative-like part of the small group and its production cooperative-like part. In the marketing cooperative, production was carried out by the individual peasants in their courtyards in the pigsties that had previously been used for raising pigs in the conventional way. The only difference was the method used for feeding the pigs (HQH, 2011-06-05:1083–1088). In the agricultural slack seasons the members of the small group met every week in order to exchange their experiences on raising their happy pigs (WW, 2011-05-03:254–255, 2011-06-08b:362–364). The peasants did not share the risk of raising the happy pigs (HGQ, 2011-05-27b:267–268; HYM, 2011-05-16:167–180). In 2010 all the happy pigs of one of the village cadres suddenly died. He had to bear the financial loss alone. He even returned the booking fees to the consumers (CYJ, 2011-05-29:85–99).

In the marketing cooperative-like part of the HP group there was a clear division of labor. The peasants raised the happy pigs. The Professional Cooperative—that is the village cadres and most prominently Wáng Wěi—were responsible for marketing and selling them (WW, 2011-05-03:236–237).

In the production cooperative-like part of the small group the pigs were raised by one worker in a newly constructed stable at the eastern edge of the village. When I first visited there were only pigsties similar to those in the courtyards of the peasants. Only in autumn was there a new type of building at the HP farm, namely a stable based on the ferment bed (发酵床 fājiào chuáng)⁷⁰ model of a pig stable at the Little Donkey Farm in the suburbs of Běijīng (FN, 2011-11-12, 2011-11-14).

Only five people invested in the new HP farm. The other peasants did not want to invest in a new building because they thought that they had enough space to raise pigs in their own courtyards. Three of the shareholders were village cadres, namely Wáng Wěi, Wáng Yājūn and Huáng Guóqiáng. Furthermore, one old school friend of Wáng Wěi from a neighboring village and one friend of Huáng Guóqiáng, a villager from Shǔidào Zhuāng who worked and lived at the HP farm, bought a share in the HP farm. They expected to receive 200,000 CNY from the state because they had applied for a project. They were supposed to receive the money after they had invested 200,000 CNY

⁷⁰ Instead of concrete the ground of the new pigsty was made out of dry maize stalks, sawdust, rice chaff, and a special kind of ecological fungus that prevented bad smell.

themselves, and if the stable they built met certain requirements and if they bought at least 150 pigs (WW, 2011-05-06:66–96,136–140).⁷¹ However, in November 2011 the money had still not appeared (FN, 2011-11-13, 2011-11-14). According to Hú Qǐhuá, the officials at county and township level did not dare to give money to Wáng Wěi any longer because they thought that such an act would be under close supervision due to the ongoing anti-corruption investigations against Wáng Wěi at that time (FN, 2011-11-14).

Initially the five shareholders planed, in accordance with the requirements of the state project, to raise more than one hundred and fifty pigs at the new farm, however, as there were not as many orders as they expected, they only bought between sixty and seventy little pigs (SYL, 2011-05-13:151–153; WW, 2011-05-03:182–183,204–214). Villagers who were already growing pigs in their courtyards in a conventional way told me that they were not asked if they wanted to participate in the HP group of the cooperative but that they were interested in doing so (PYH, 2011-05-10:353–384, 2011-05-15:46–77,161–165).

Wáng Wěi explained to me that the cooperative was a stage that everyone in the village could use for selling their pigs. It would be unfair if he and the other pioneers used the resources of the cooperative themselves and only sold their own pigs, increased the size and raised even more pigs on their own. He stressed that they let those households participate which could not sell the happy pigs themselves (WW, 2011-05-06:15–20). Wáng Wěi also told me that villagers wanted to participate in the small group to raise happy pigs in their courtyards and sell them through the channel of the cooperative, but the cooperative did not have the capacity to sell so many pigs, so these villagers could not participate. He emphasized that it was not the case that they did not let them participate. The cooperative simply did not have the capacity to do so at the moment. In the future, when the trademark was established, more peasants would have the possibility to raise happy pigs (WW, 2011-05-06:117–129,156–157). However, apparently the Professional Cooperative had the capacity—or at least Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres participating in this sub-project had thought so at the beginning—to sell the large number of additional pigs bred in the new pig farm. Why was this possible, while it was allegedly impossible to sell those pigs that could have been raised by

⁷¹ Wáng Wěi tried to persuade the responsible officials to lower the requirements. He told me that 150 pigs was already a very low number. Usually the state only supported projects with at least 500 pigs. Moreover, the five shareholders only invested 100 thousand CNY instead of the 200 thousand CNY required (WW, 2011-05-06:88–94,136–140).

peasants who were already raising pigs in the conventional way? Wáng Wěi told me that he had explained to a villager that the village cadres had to build the HP farm because they could not say no if some leaders wanted to invest money on behalf of the peasants (WW, 2011-05-06:120–123). Hú Qǐhuá suspected that the real reason for this choice—pro new pig farm and against letting other villagers participating—was that Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres themselves wanted to receive the money from the state project and, therefore, constructed the new pig farm (HQH, 2011-05-06b:441–458, 2011-05-25:232–303,550–555). While Wáng Wěi and the other shareholders claimed that the other peasants were informed about the project but not willing to take the risk to invest in this pioneering project (CYJ, 2011-05-29:368–370; WW, 2011-05-06:70–73,142), other villagers claimed that they were never asked to do so and never informed about the project (PYH, 2011-05-15:161–165). While it may be true that peasants were reluctant to invest a lot of money in this project out of fear of losing their invested money, almost no investments would have been necessary from those peasants if they had changed from raising pigs in the conventional way to raising them as happy pigs. There was no need for them to construct new pigsties in their courtyards, as they already existed (PYH, 2011-05-15:188–191). However, I was told that the visiting urban consumers apparently did not believe that the happy pigs were happy in the old concrete style pigsties in the peasants' courtyards (HGQ, 2011-05-27a:125–127; FN, 2011-05-12).

8.4 The division of labor at the Happy Pig Farm

Within the production cooperative-like section there was also a division of labor. Officially Huáng Guóqiáng was the person in charge of the HP farm (WW, 2011-05-06:101–102). In practice the village cadres Wáng Wěi and Wáng Yàjūn and Wáng Wěi's schoolfriend from the neighboring village were also involved in the management. The fifth shareholder, Sūn Yúnlóng, who worked at the HP farm, emphasized that the difference between a cooperative and a company was that in the cooperative everything was explored and studied together and discussed with each other at meetings (SYL, 2011-05-18:384–387). However, he did not view himself as being in the same position as the other shareholders. He was the one doing the work for them (SYL, 2011-05-13:1093–1098). He was responsible for carrying out everyday tasks at the HP farm, for example feeding the pigs and cleaning the stable. Sūn Yúnlóng had a friendship connec-

tion with Huáng Guóqiáng, but he did not know Lín Hǎibō at all before the project started (SYL, 2011-05-13:1082–1091). That he was not in the same position as the other four shareholders became clear to me when I had dinner with them. Sūn Yúnlóng was not invited when Wáng Wěi, Wáng Yàjūn, Lín Hǎibō and Huáng Guóqiáng had dinner together (FN, 2011-05-10). During such occasions they, of course, also discussed matters concerning the HP farm.

Whereas Sūn Yúnlóng was responsible for everyday tasks, sometimes the other shareholders also participated in some extraordinary tasks. Wáng Wěi and the other shareholders helped in giving injections to their happy pigs because Wáng Wěi was a veterinarian. For the everyday work Sūn Yúnlóng initially received a wage of 1,700 CNY per month, later on 2,000 CNY when the number of animals and hence the workload increased (SYL, 2011-05-13:151–168, 931–950; FN, 2011-11-12).⁷² He estimated that it would be possible to hire someone to do this work for a little more than 50 CNY per day, but he would not trust someone else to raise the pigs. The other shareholders could be sure that he was giving his best raising their pigs, because he was a shareholder himself (SYL, 2011-05-13:180–185). When asked why he and not the others did the everyday work, Sūn Yúnlóng explained that they already had their own money and that they were busy, for example, Lín Hǎibō was trading with grain, Wáng Yàjūn was village accountant and involved in other parts of the Professional Cooperative, and Wáng Wěi, the village party branch secretary, was busy all the time anyway (SYL, 2011-05-13:1015–1025).

In contrast to the other shareholders Sūn Yúnlóng's share consisted not only of money because he did not have that much.⁷³ Instead, his wage and the maize that his family had cultivated and was used as input on the HP farm were calculated as his part of the investment (FN, 2011-11-12, 2011-11-14). Before working for the cooperative, Sūn Yúnlóng had been working in different cities as a migrant worker. He liked staying in the village, but he also liked to work in the cities because he could earn much more money there. If the HP farm did not work out he planned to work in a city again in 2012 (SYL, 2011-05-13:11–118, 443–473, 836–844).

In case of profits these were supposed to be shared among the shareholders as a dividend. According to Sūn Yúnlóng, the other four shareholders would be able to con-

⁷² According to Huáng Guóqiáng, another shareholder with whom Sūn Yúnlóng had the closest relationship, Sūn Yúnlóng initially received only 1,500 CNY and later on 1,800 CNY (FN, 2011-11-14).

⁷³ Hú Qǐhuá doubted if Sūn Yúnlóng was a shareholder, too. He thought that Sūn Yúnlóng only worked for the other ones (HQH, 2011-05-27a:96–103).

tinue even if they made no profit with the project in the first year. This was not true for himself as he was short of money (SYL, 2011-05-13:722–726). Hence, concerning financial risks he also had a different perspective to the other shareholders. For example, he preferred to grow pigs using the conventional method at the new pig farm because it was not as risky as growing happy pigs (SYL, 2011-05-13:1031–1038; FN, 2011-11-12). However, the other shareholders did not share this perspective with him and they did not grow any conventional pigs (FN, 2011-11-14).

8.5 Selling happy pigs

Turning to the relations of the HP group with the outside, I observed an allocation system similar to the *gòu mǐ bāo dì* contracts of the Small Group for Ecological Rice, namely a form of community supported agriculture. Wáng Wěi signed the contracts with consumers in the name of the Professional Cooperative. The consumers booked happy pigs in advance by choosing specific pigs of specific peasants (or of the HP farm later on). A handful of urban dwellers came to the village to attend the happy pig booking activities on April 30. On that day student volunteers came to the village in order to help. The consumers had to pay a booking fee of 500 CNY per happy pig and agreed to buy the pig meat for a price twice or two-and-a-half times as high as the usual market price later on, before Chinese New Year (HQH, 2011-05-25:518–521; WW, 2011-06-08c:116–118; FN, 2011-04-30). The peasants on the other hand promised to grow the pigs using the happy pig method. The high price seemed like a big advantage at the first glance, however, the peasants emphasized the higher costs and risks of raising happy pigs (HYM, 2011-05-05:153–167). During the happy pigs activities I had the chance to talk some consumers. They told me that they bought this expensive meat only for the special occasion of New Year, when they invited friends for a meal. The meat was not supposed to be for everyday consumption, and some did not even want to eat the meat themselves but wanted to give it as a special present to other people (FN, 2011-04-30).

Before the Chinese New Year 2011 some peasants of the HP group—not only Hú Qǐhuá—individually sold the happy pigs that had not been preordered by consumers through the channel of the cooperative. However, the other peasants only managed to sell their remaining happy pigs to people who came to the village because they had heard about the happy pigs project (HQH, 2011-06-05:1105–1140; FN, 2011-06-03). Only Hú Qǐhuá had enough social capital of a special kind, namely connections to urban

dwellers who were wealthy enough to buy such expensive products, in order to individually sell his pigs and other products directly via personal contacts. They knew him because he had made publicity for the happy pigs in the name of the cooperative previously (HQH, 2011-05-06b:479, 2011-05-25:557–573; WW, 2011-05-06:175–176). The other peasants depended on the Professional Cooperative, especially on Wáng Wěi, who had risen in political office due to the NRR projects in the village, for selling their happy pigs at a high price to well-off urban consumers (HQH, 2011-05-06b:463–482, 2011-05-25:327–328; WW, 2011-05-03:261–263, 2011-05-06:4–14).

For marketing and selling the happy pigs the members of the small group had to pay a service fee of ten percent of the sales revenue to the Professional Cooperative (WW, 2011-05-03:251–253, 282–293, 2011-05-06:42–64). According to Wáng Wěi, all of this money was used to cover the expenses of the marketing and sales activities. In 2011 Wáng Wěi wanted to establish a new system according to which he, Mǎ Zhìyǒng and Wáng Yàjūn would receive a wage for their marketing work (WW, 2011-05-03:295–299).

8.6 Decision-making in the Happy Pig Small Group

Although there were many meetings of the members of the HP group as already mentioned above, these meetings were mainly about raising pigs. Only sometimes it was about decision-making, or the confirmation of prepared decisions. Usually Mǎ Zhìyǒng, the student volunteer, prepared the meetings in consultation with Wáng Wěi (WW, 2011-06-08b:366–367). Chén Yùjiàn, one of the village cadres, and Huáng Yǒumín, an older, ordinary villager who was a council member of the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid, were responsible for the individual households involved in the HP group, Wáng Wěi told me (WW, 2011-05-06:101–102, 173–174). Wáng Wěi decided how many happy pigs the individual peasants were allowed to raise using the happy pig method and to sell through the channel of the cooperative (HQH, 2011-05-25:416). Nevertheless, in spring 2011 participating peasants bought more pigs than proposed by Wáng Wěi (HYM, 2011-05-16:99–104; WW, 2011-05-03:265–272, 2011-05-06:132–136). However, in November 2011 one member told me that they had to change raising some of their pigs with the conventional method because the cooperative was not able to sell as many pigs as they had bought in spring—in fact it was even less pigs than proposed by Wáng Wěi first (FN, 2011-11-14). Important decisions about prices were

often prepared by Wáng Wěi, Zhū Xiǎojiān and Mǎ Zhìyǒng, for example in informal conversations before and after the happy pig activities, when we had meals at the home of Wáng Wěi together with the journalist from CCTV, the state television broadcaster in mainland China, which stayed in the village for one week to make a report about the cooperative's happy pig project (FN, 2011-04-27, 2011-05-01).

8.7 The Happy Pig Small Group in comparison

To summarize this short chapter I briefly compare the HP group to the other small groups of the Professional Cooperative.

As already mentioned above, the HP group consisted of two parts in 2011. One part was organized like a marketing cooperative, similar to the small groups for ecological rice and ecological minor food crops. The new additional part was organized like a very small production cooperative, similar to the Small Group for Organic Rice and Wheat and the Small Group for the Integrated Cultivation of Lotus Roots and Crabs. As in the case of the other sub-projects of the Professional Cooperative, it was contested in the village whether or not these projects could be called “cooperative” at all.

In the case of the marketing cooperative-like part of the HP group, the division of labor was—as in the other projects of this kind—roughly between owning, managing and selling village cadres, making up what was called the “cooperative” on the one side, and producing individual peasants, making up the members of the cooperative on the other side. However, there was one difference. In the case of the small groups for ecological rice and ecological minor food crops, the peasants first sold their products to the cooperative and afterwards they received the market price plus the initial dividend. In contrast, in the case of the HP group, the peasants did receive the money directly and then had to pay a service fee to the cooperative.

In the case of the production cooperative-like section of the HP group, the division of labor was—as in the other projects of this kind—roughly between village cadres, who owned and managed, on the one side, and working peasants on the other side. However, this conclusion has to be refined in two aspects. Officially there were two men involved in the ownership and management of the HP farm who were not village cadres. The first person was nevertheless closely connected to the village cadre as an old schoolmate and friend, even though he lived in another village. The second person that was not a village cadre but, nevertheless, officially included in the ownership and

management of the HP farm, was the worker who raised the pigs at the HP farm. Like the village cadres, he was one of the shareholders of the HP farm, contributing to it with capital, his wage and material inputs. However, informally he was not as involved in the circle of the village cadres as the old schoolmate of Wáng Wěi.

In the other projects of the Professional Cooperative I found cases of a gender division of labor. As the cooperative sold the happy pigs primarily before Chinese New Year, I was not in the village at the right time to observe the slaughtering and packaging process. Concerning the feeding of pigs, I found both men and women doing this work in the individual households. Even in the case of the HP farm it was not always Sūn Yúnlóng doing this work. Sometimes his mother cared for the pigs when he was not at home (FN, 2011-11-12).

Although officially other persons than Wáng Wěi were in charge of the two parts of the HP group, like in the other small groups, informally, major decisions were made by Wáng Wěi or according to his proposals, like the decisions concerning how many happy pigs the individual household were allowed to sell via the marketing channel of the cooperative, the price of the happy pigs, or Hú Qǐhuá's exclusion from the HP group.

As Wáng Wěi had managed to become well-known and to rise in political office due to the NRR projects in Shǔidào zhuāng, he had built many relationships to other officials and hence increased his social capital. Now he could use this social capital to sell special products for a higher price to people who could afford it. The other members of the HP group were dependent on the Professional Cooperative, personalized in Wáng Wěi, to sell the ecological and healthy products they produced. Through selling the peasants' products the reputation of the Professional Cooperative, and hence of Wáng Wěi, further increased. Although formally the members of the small group could participate in decision-making or the confirmation of decisions in the weekly meetings, they had good reason to do this without upsetting Wáng Wěi. There was only one person who had enough social capital himself and hence managed to sell ecological products for a higher price directly to urban dwellers using personal contacts, namely Hú Qǐhuá. He was among the few who dared to speak out openly against Wáng Wěi and his practices. Although officially he was one of the persons (together with Chén Yùjiàn) in charge of the HP group, Wáng Wěi excluded Hú Qǐhuá from it. Hú Qǐhuá viewed the situation like this: "He wanted to kill a chicken to scare the monkey. Or one can say, he

wanted to kill the monkey to scare the chickens”,⁷⁴ Hú Qǐhuá corrected himself, apparently having in mind that he was in a more powerful position than the other members of the HP group.

So far all the NRR projects examined seemed to be controlled by Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres. There was however an act of peasant resistance on my first day in the village. It was the day of the election of the council of the Mutual Financial Aid Cooperative. The next chapter deals with this event.

⁷⁴ 他就是耍杀鸡害猴。或者说杀猴害鸡。 Tā jiùshì yào shā jī hài hóu. Huǒzhě shuō shā hóu hài jī (Hú Qǐhuá, 2011-05-06b:465).

9 Mutual Financial Aid

In order to complete the picture of the NRR projects in the village Shǔidàozhuāng, I briefly introduce the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid (资金互助社 *zījīn hùzhùshè*, hereafter Financial Cooperative or FC) at this point before turning to a more theoretical discussion of my empirical findings about the NRR experiments in economic cooperation in the next chapter. In this chapter I do not focus on the operations of the FC in detail, as this would open up a completely new field of discussion.⁷⁵ Therefore, I discuss only one aspect of the FC, namely decision-making, by describing two important events, namely the election of the council of the FC and a meeting where new statutes for the FC were discussed, and by comparing the FC in terms of decision-making and resistance with the other economic cooperatives in the village.

I start this chapter with a short introduction to the history and operations of the FC. Then I describe the election and the statutes meeting. Finally, I compare the FC with the economic cooperatives in the village concerning decision-making and resistance and ask what causes these differences.

9.1 Outlining the Financial Cooperative

The Financial Cooperative was founded in 2004 as the Cooperative for Economic Development. Zhào Yùgāng, who was also a council member of the former Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice (or Rice Association), was its first chairperson. Later on Chén Mùgēn replaced him in this position in an, according to Hú Qǐhuá, irregular election (HQH, 2011-06-05:850–868). Chén Mùgēn was an older villager who was also the chairperson of the seniors' association. He was in a position between Wáng Wěi and the village cadres on the one side and the council members of the former Rice Association on the other side (FN, 2011-04-20). In 2006 the name of the Financial Cooperative

⁷⁵ A comparison between this new formalized form of financial cooperation in the village and cooperative borrowing practices between relatives, friends and neighbors, as well as a comparison between the Financial Cooperative and conventional banks, would be especially interesting and fruitful.

was changed to Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid (HQH, 2011-05-27b:467). Besides Chén Mùgēn the council was made up of Hú Qǐhuá, Zhào Yùgāng, Gāo Shùnkāi, three council members of the former Rice Association, and Huáng Yǒumín, the person officially in charge of the happy pig group after Hú Qǐhuá's exclusion.

At the beginning about fifty members bought shares for 200 CNY each. Some villagers invested more money in the FC, for example Wáng Wěi 1,000 CNY, Wáng Wěi's brother 500 CNY, and Hú Qǐhuá 600 CNY. People from the outside also invested money in the FC in order to support it. For example the intellectuals Wēn Tiějūn and Hán Déqiáng invested 5,000 CNY and 450 CNY respectively. Students from the agricultural university bought shares worth 600 CNY. All together the FC's funds that could be used for borrowing made up 22,950 CNY.

The members had to pay interest for loans depending on the duration of the borrowing period. No interest had to be paid for short term borrowing of less than ten days (HQH, 2011-06-05:923–925). The maximum possible borrowing period was one year.

The interest payments made up the profits of the FC. One part, namely 30 percent of it, was used for collective accumulation as a kind of insurance in the case that a borrowing member and its two guarantors were not able to pay back the loan. Another part, namely 70 percent, of the profit was used for the collective good and distributed as a dividend to the members (HQH, 2011-06-05:894–898). For the period from 2009 to 2011 the dividend amounted to 33,7 CNY per share.

Most members used loans from the FC either for agricultural production (more than 80 percent of all loans issued by the FC) or for family affairs like funerals, weddings or tuition fees (HQH, 2011-06-05:918–923). However, the big problem was that the FC's funds were limited and that members could only finance small agricultural investments through loans from the FC (HQH, 2011-05-06b:290–291, 2011-06-05:930–947, 1170–1172).

Another problem was that, according to Hú Qǐhuá, the FC only existed in name, even though it operated and issued loans. By this he meant that the members were not involved in the operation of the FC. Since Chén Mùgēn was chairperson of the FC there has only been one meeting per year, when a few CNY were distributed to the members as a dividend. Many members said that after investing the first 200 CNY there had been no further activities. The members no longer viewed the cooperative as their cooperative but as the cooperative of the council members because there were no more meetings and studying sessions (HQH, 2011-06-07:612–621).

In April 2011 about fifty member households bought additional shares of 1,730 CNY each. Some villagers, for example Wáng Wěi and Hú Qǐhuá bought more than one share. In total the villagers invested 100,000 CNY in order to get an additional 100,000 CNY from the state. This state money was not supposed to be paid out to individual households. It was a kind of interest-free loan from the state to the cooperative without a defined time limit. The FC was only allowed to use this money for granting loans to its members (FN, 2011-04-20). However, when I returned to the village the FC was still waiting for the money from the state to come through (FN, 2011-11-14). During that waiting time the FC had put the money on a bank account and did not issue any loans.

9.2 Majority shareholders or elected representatives?

9.2.1 The election

On my first morning in the village, the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid held the election of its council. At that time I did not yet know about the conflict-laden relationships within the village. From conversations with members of the FC and from my photos, I know that Wáng Wěi and most of the other village cadres were not present at the meeting due to conflicts with the council members of the former Rice Association, namely Hú Qǐhuá, Gāo Shùnkāi and Zhào Yùgāng, who were all council members of the FC as well. According to Hú Qǐhuá, the village cadres did not show up at the election because they had the feeling that they would not be elected to the council and that they would lose face (HQH, 2011-06-05:577–578).

However, the village cadres had held a preparatory meeting with the NRR intellectual Xiè Yǒngmó the previous evening. The following morning at about nine o'clock, one hour after the meeting was supposed to start, about twenty to thirty people gathered at the new building of the village committee. Chén Mùgēn, the chairperson of the FC, Hú Qǐhuá, the vice-chairperson, and the NRR intellectual Xiè Yǒngmó were sitting in front of the assembly. Men were sitting in the front of the room, women at the back. After a short introduction by Chén Mùgēn, Hú Qǐhuá explained the statutes and the new state supported project to the members for about one hour. From time to time Xiè Yǒngmó added some explanations. When he did so, he did not speak to the members in the audience directly, but to Hú Qǐhuá instead. Both men and women asked questions after Hú Qǐhuá's talk. Later on Xiè Yǒngmó made a short five-minute statement about increasing the scale (规模化 guīmóhuà) of operation of the FC by increas-

ing the funds from about 20,000 CNY to 200,000 CNY. He also stressed the advantages of the cooperative over conventional banks. After two more very short statements by Hú Qǐhuá and Mǎ Zhìyǒng, the student volunteer, the election process started (FN, 2011-04-19).

One council member, namely Huáng Yǒumín, read aloud the names of the members of the FC. Another council member, namely Zhào Yùgāng, distributed little bits of papers to these members. Each member was allowed to write five names on the paper. When they were doing this, some people were talking to each other about whom to choose. Then the bits of papers were collected in a cardboard box. In front of all attendees one villager took out the papers from the cardboard box and read out the names. From time to time other members were looking over his shoulder. Another villager, who was not a council member of the FC, wrote the names down on a big piece of paper and added one stroke to the character 正 (zhèng) for each announcement. In the end about twenty names were written on the paper. Those with the most votes had more than five zhèngs next to their name. As one zhèng is made up of five strokes this means that they received more than 25 votes each. When the result of the election was announced, not all of the attending members were still present. At the end washing powder was distributed to all member households irrespective of how many shares in the cooperative they held (FN, 2011-04-19).

The election did not bring a change in the cast of the cooperative's council. All five council members were re-elected. Hú Qǐhuá received 50 votes, Zhào Yùgāng 49, Chén Mùgēn 45, Huáng Yǒumín 39 and Gāo Shùnkāi 34 (HQH, 2011-05-06b:248–260). Although Hú Qǐhuá won the election, he did not want to serve as the chairperson of the council because of his conflicts with Wáng Wěi. Hence, as in the case of the last election, Chén Mùgēn assumed the role of the chairperson without having the most votes (HQH, 2011-06-05:998–1000). According to Xiè Yǒngmó, Chén Mùgēn took a position between the fronts (FN, 2011-04-20). However, it was mainly Hú Qǐhuá who had managed the FC since 2004 (HQH, 2011-06-05:534–536). In 2006 Zhū Xiǎojiān, the intellectual who initiated the NRR projects in the village, proposed that the FC should pay him a wage of 50 CNY per month. Hú Qǐhuá, however, refused because from his point of view working for the cooperative was not about money. It was about being voluntarily willing (HQH, 2011-06-05:909–911). From Hú Qǐhuá's point of view it was essential for a cooperative to operate strictly according to its own rules, even if this sometimes upset affected members, for example in the case of penalty payments if a

loan was overdue. Otherwise a cooperative did not work, he stressed (HQH, 2011-06-05:969–982). In fact, Hú Qǐhuá himself thought that it made no difference if Chén Mùgēn was officially the chairperson of the cooperative or not, as long as Hú Qǐhuá was the one responsible for the accounts, he could protect the money of the members of the FC (HQH, 2011-06-07:60–64).

According to Hú Qǐhuá, the members were only willing to participate in increasing the scale of the FC if Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres did not collect the money the members invested. Many people said that they would only buy new shares if Hú Qǐhuá and the other council members in the FC took care of that money. The members said that they would ask Hú Qǐhuá and the others to get their money back if the council members of the FC handed it over to the village cadres. According to Hú Qǐhuá, the villagers thought that Wáng Wěi had destroyed the Rice Association and that they were afraid that the same fate would befall the FC if it was taken over by Wáng Wěi and the village cadres (HQH, 2011-05-06b:233–245,368–374).

The village cadres wanted to be in the council of the FC, but the members did not let them, Hú Qǐhuá said. With the exception of Chén Yùjiàn, who got two votes from his uncle, none of the other village cadres received a single vote (HQH, 2011-05-06b:248–260, 2011-06-07:113–118).

However, Xiè Yǒngmó and Mǎ Zhìyǒng told me that there was an inconsistency in the election as one member had voted for six absent members (FN, 2011-04-19). It turned out that this member was Hú Qǐhuá. When I asked him he told me that he thought there was nothing wrong with it. He only voted on behalf of other people who had asked him to do so. Two of his friends were busy pollinating their apple trees and had no time to participate at the meeting on that day. Furthermore Hú Qǐhuá helped one illiterate, who participated in the meeting but who was not able to write the names on paper himself. Hú Qǐhuá also filled out two ballot papers in behalf of the wife of Wáng Wěi's elder brother, who also participated in the meeting but who was not able to fill out the ballots herself because her grandson was crying and she had left the assembly room with him. Hú Qǐhuá himself also had two and not only one ballot. Everyone who had bought more than one share in the FC got a second ballot. Wáng Wěi also belonged to this group of ten members who had two votes. Altogether Hú Qǐhuá filled out seven ballots. He put his deed in perspective by mentioning that he was not the only one who

had filled out ballots in behalf of others. Chén Mùgēn also filled out five ballots.⁷⁶ Xiè Yǒngmó, the NRR activist, and Mǎ Zhìyǒng, the student volunteer, did not tell me that Hú Qǐhuá was not the only one who voted on behalf of others. From Hú Qǐhuá's point of view the election was regular. He claimed that the village cadres only lamented alleged irregularities in the election because they were not elected themselves. He made clear that it was not him who distributed and counted the ballots. Moreover, although he filled out seven ballots, how could he possibly control all of the other attending members, Hú Qǐhuá asked rhetorically. From his perspective the election result was clear. Wáng Wěi had lost the trust of everyone. Furthermore, Hú Qǐhuá accused the village cadres of holding irregular village elections themselves (HQH, 2011-05-06b:318–362, 2011-06-05:575–576, 2011-06-07:118–123).

Hú Qǐhuá further criticized the alleged plans of the village cadres to become members of the FC's council. According to Hú Qǐhuá, the village cadres proposed that those who invested the most money should serve as the council members. However, the common people did not let them do it this way, Hú Qǐhuá emphasized. They said that no matter how much someone invested, the council members were to be chosen by the members. Hú Qǐhuá and the other council members guided (带领 dàilǐng) the resistance against the village cadres' proposal and the aforementioned election was held (HQH, 2011-05-06b:264–285, 2011-06-05:564–574).

After the election Hú Qǐhuá and Zhào Yùgāng put the newly invested money on an account of a branch of the Rural Credit Cooperative (信用社 xìnyòngshè).⁷⁷ They used Hú Qǐhuá's name and let Zhào Yùgāng choose the password. This way a single person was not able to withdraw money from the account. From Hú Qǐhuá's perspective Wáng Wěi was already defeated. He lost the election and was not in control of the money.

⁷⁶ In the meeting with the researcher and peasant advocate Lǐ Chāngpíng described below, the members of the Financial Cooperative agreed on his proposal that only one vicarious vote per member should be allowed in future (FN, 2011-04-28).

⁷⁷ The Rural Credit Cooperative made up for the vast majority of total rural deposits and loans. Since 1996 the credit cooperatives were supposed to serve household finance, whereas the Agricultural Bank of China had focused on commercial loans and the Development Bank of China on agricultural policy loans. From 1996 to 2003 the credit cooperatives were managed indirectly by the central bank. Afterwards the provincial unions, who were effectively controlled by the provincial governments, took over the management of the credit cooperatives (Ong 2009:313).

9.2.2 The meeting with Lǐ Chāngpíng

However, as Hú Qǐhuá went on to explain, Wáng Wěi had not yet given up. Wáng Wěi and Zhū Xiǎojiān invited Lǐ Chāngpíng to the village to introduce new statutes for the FC in a meeting. Hú Qǐhuá guessed that Wáng Wěi hoped that a famous person like Lǐ Chāngpíng would finally be able to persuade the members of the FC to accept Wáng Wěi's proposal of major shareholders (大股 dàgǔ) automatically constituting the council, a proposal that would, in Hú Qǐhuá's opinion, change the cooperative into a shareholding system. One or two days before the assembly in the village, Wáng Wěi and Chén Mùgēn met with Lǐ Chāngpíng in the county town to prepare the meeting (HQH, 2011-06-05:722–740).

The meeting was supposed to start at eight o'clock in the evening, but again only a few members of the FC arrived on time. More than half an hour later Wáng Wěi opened the meeting and introduced Lǐ Chāngpíng as former cadre, who was now doing research on rural China in Běijīng. This time all of the village cadres were present. Hú Qǐhuá was sitting on the opposite side to Wáng Wěi. Between 25 and 35 members of the FC attended the meeting. As in the other meeting there was a tendency for men to sit in front and women to sit at the back of the room. Most of the time during the meeting Lǐ Chāngpíng was reading out and explaining the individual paragraphs of the statutes of another financial cooperative. From time to time he asked the attendant members if they agreed. Most of the time, especially with self-evident parts, no one disagreed; occasionally someone articulated understanding or agreement when Lǐ Chāngpíng asked the group. Sometimes members wanted amendments to be made, sometimes discussions started. For example Hú Qǐhuá confidently suggested that the FC should be independent of the cooperative association, while Wáng Wěi wanted that it was part of it. They agreed on independent cooperation (独立合作 dúlì hézuò), a compromise suggested by Lǐ Chāngpíng. Occasionally Wáng Wěi said that on this evening everyone could say something if they wanted. Thereupon silence followed. Concerning the question of different kind of members, Wáng Wěi wanted to introduce the category of major shareholder members (大股社员 dàgǔ shèyuán). Hú Qǐhuá announced his disagreement on this point. There were also some discussions among the members concerning other forms of memberships. Lǐ Chāngpíng stopped these discussions and said that they would skip this point for the moment and that they could continue the discussions later on. After about one hour the first members left the meeting. Some time later all the

women had already left and only the men were left. Lǐ Chāngpíng nevertheless continued with his explanations of the paragraphs of the statutes that concerned what to do with the cooperative's profits, who was allowed to borrow how much money for how long, and about how high the interest rate should be. Around midnight fourteen men were still present, more than two or three of them asleep or at least listening with their eyes closed. About one hour later Zhū Xiǎojiān arrived with two students and Lǐ Chāngpíng had gone through all parts of the statutes. The remaining members signed the notes that Mǎ Zhìyǒng had taken on big posters during the meeting. Hú Qǐhuá first did not want to do it but was persuaded by Zhū Xiǎojiān and accepted it with some reservations (FN, 2011-04-28).

Although Lǐ Chāngpíng supported the share-holding system, Hú Qǐhuá suspected that originally it was not his idea. Hú Qǐhuá had met Lǐ Chāngpíng before and at that time Lǐ Chāngpíng was not proposing that the major shareholders should be on the council of a financial cooperative. Anyway, even with the help of Lǐ Chāngpíng, Wáng Wěi did not manage to get a majority of the members to support his proposal, Hú Qǐhuá stated as a summary of Wáng Wěi's intervention. Furthermore a final decision at the meeting would have been irregular, as only twelve members—less than a quarter of all members—were left at the end of the meeting, Hú Qǐhuá pointed out (HQH, 2011-06-05:797–821).

A few years ago Hú Qǐhuá had met Lǐ Chāngpíng at the Agricultural University of China in Běijīng. Lǐ Chāngpíng had given him his card and a book as a present. When Lǐ Chāngpíng came to the village in 2011 he immediately remembered Hú Qǐhuá. In retrospect Hú Qǐhuá told me that he did not challenge Lǐ Chāngpíng fiercely during his presentation, even though Lǐ Chāngpíng supported Wáng Wěi's proposal, because this would have been impolite. Furthermore Hú Qǐhuá suspected that if the villagers had known more details about Lǐ Chāngpíng, they would have told him everything about what was going wrong in the village. However, Hú Qǐhuá did not tell them because he thought that it was better if Shǔidào zhuāng solved its own problems without help from the outside. Moreover, Lǐ Chāngpíng would have been put in an uncomfortable position between the village cadres and the villagers. Zhū Xiǎojiān and Wáng Wěi had invited Lǐ Chāngpíng and the villagers would have told him bad things about them. In this manner Zhū Xiǎojiān and Wáng Wěi would have lost face. These are the reasons Hú Qǐhuá gave me to understand why he did not trigger such a situation during the meeting. The next day Gāo Shùnkāi had arranged to meet Lǐ Chāngpíng to talk about the vil-

lage's and the cooperative's affairs anyway. However, the meeting never took place. The next morning Zhū Xiǎojiān hurriedly left the village together with Lǐ Chāngpíng (HQH, 2011-06-05:741–795).

Hú Qǐhuá complained that after this last meeting with Lǐ Chāngpíng, Chén Mùgēn, the chairperson of the FC, refused to hold another meeting, even though Hú Qǐhuá and other council members urged Chén Mùgēn to do so. If there had been another meeting, the members of the FC would have had an opportunity to express their aspirations and a common opinion could evolve. In Hú Qǐhuá's eyes the opinion of everyone was the strength of all the members. In this way not only Hú Qǐhuá or the council members, but also all the members of the cooperative could oppose Wáng Wěi. In such a situation Wáng Wěi would not be able to win, Hú Qǐhuá reasoned (HQH, 2011-06-07:627–635).

Concerning the question of the role of the chairperson of the cooperative's council, Hú Qǐhuá took a rather contradictory perspective. On one hand, Hú Qǐhuá complained that without the chairperson initiating a meeting there was nothing he and the other council members could do. On the other hand, as mentioned above, Hú Qǐhuá himself chose not to serve as chairperson and even said that it made no difference if Chén Mùgēn was chairperson or not.

When I came to the village again in autumn 2011 nothing had changed concerning the FC. There had been no meeting and the accumulated money was still lying in the bank account. Although the result of the election indicated that the members of the cooperative did not trust their village head anymore, and that they opposed his proposal of introducing a share-holding system in the cooperative, this act of rightful resistance had not revitalized the FC so far.

9.3 Decision-making and resistance in comparison

The election of the council of the Financial Cooperative can be viewed as a highly visible act of resistance against Wáng Wěi and the village cadres taking control of this NRR project. Why was there no, or at least no visible, collective resistance against Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres controlling the other supposedly cooperative and self-managed NRR projects in the village? If we compare decision making in the different projects we find the following similarities and differences that help to answer this question.

9.3.1 Official and informal decision-making

Although Wáng Wěi was officially—be it through election as he claimed or through self-announcement as some villagers claimed—in charge of the Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products (or Professional Cooperative) and of the village's Peasant Cooperative Association, he was not officially in charge of the different sub-projects of the Professional Cooperative. Officially Wáng Yàjūn was said to be in charge of the Small Group for Ecological Rice, Huáng Jiànguó was responsible for the Lotus and Crabs Small Group, Huáng Guóqiáng managed the Happy Pig Farm, Huáng Yǒumín and Chén Yùjiàn were allegedly in charge of the other part of the Happy Pig Small Group, namely of the individual households raising the happy pigs. Officially Wáng Wěi was also not in charge of the Financial Cooperative. Insofar there was no difference between the Financial Cooperative and the other economic cooperatives in the village.

There was, however, one difference concerning who was officially in charge of the different NRR projects. Not Wáng Wěi but, nevertheless, the other village cadres were officially responsible for the small groups of the Professional Cooperatives. Only in the case of the Happy Pig Small Group was one of the two persons in charge not a village cadre, namely Huáng Yǒumín. In contrast, no village cadres were officially involved in the management of the Financial Cooperative.

If we turn from official leadership position to informal decision-making within the projects, it should have become clear in the preceding chapters that Wáng Wěi played a central role in the management decisions of the different small groups although this was officially not his role. In the case of the Financial Cooperative officially Chén Mùgēn was responsible as he was the chairperson of the council, but informally Hú Qǐhuá, who was at least council member of the Financial Cooperative, claimed to have played a central role in the operation of the Financial Cooperative. Wáng Wěi, who was not elected to the council of the Financial Cooperative, nevertheless tried to intervene by inviting Lǐ Chāngpíng to the village. It was Wáng Wěi and not one of the council members who took the role of facilitator at that meeting. Thus, concerning the question of informal influence, there was apparently some but not a big difference between the small groups of the Professional Cooperative and the Financial Cooperative.

9.3.2 Opportunity and potential resistance

The most obvious difference between the Professional Cooperative and the Financial Cooperative concerning decision-making was that there was no election held in the Professional Cooperative during my time in the village. Furthermore, the responsible persons of the different small groups were not chosen through election at all. Only the council of the Professional Cooperative was to be reelected in 2012, five years after the last election in 2008. Thus the opportunity for resistance to materialize in such a visible way simply did not exist in the case of the other NRR projects during my time in the village.

In the case of the Financial Cooperative there existed mistrust and a potential of resistance because there was something the members could lose, namely the money they invested to buy new shares in the Financial Cooperative. The question arises whether there was potential for resistance, or mistrust in Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres, in the small groups of the Professional Cooperative.

Concerning the small groups for ecological rice and minor food crops, many villagers simply did not view these small groups as their cooperative but as the business of the village cadres or just as another trader to whom they were selling their rice. They were almost not involved in the operations of these small groups. There was, at the most, one general assembly per year. Moreover, members were not connected to the small group through an investment (only some of them had made a small investment of 20 CNY per mu in the first year of the Rice Association in 2005) or a membership fee. Almost nothing was at stake for them. Hence, the potential for resistance was probably smaller than in the Financial Cooperative. There was however something at stake for three council members of the former Rice Association, namely Gāo Shùnkāi, Hú Qǐhuá and Zhào Yùgāng. At the foundation of the Rice Association they had invested a few thousand CNY. Hence, they complained that Wáng Wěi and the village cadres had appropriated the material and immaterial property of the former Rice Association by illegal means.

In the case of the Happy Pig Farm, the small groups for lotus and crabs and for organic rice and wheat, the individual workers/clients showed some mistrust in Wáng Wěi and the village cadres,⁷⁸ especially concerning the alleged losses of these NRR pro-

⁷⁸ I discussed the relations between the managing village cadres and the working villagers as both class and patron-client relations in chapter 7.

jects, and they were not completely satisfied with their wages. However, they only saw individual action as a possibility for change, if they saw any at all. The workers/clients at the Happy Pig Farm and at the lotus field thought about moving to the cities again if they were not satisfied with remuneration. This was not an option for the worker/client at the organic rice and wheat field. She simply wanted to continue to work for the village cadres because of the non-monetary advantages of the cultivation of organic produce. She thought that alone she could not change anything. In comparison the members of the Financial Cooperative had a common interest and were not as individualized as these three workers/clients in the three separate small groups of the Professional Cooperative.

The situation with the household members of the Happy Pig Small Group was again different. The members of this group were growing happy pigs individually, but they were not as individualized as the workers in the just mentioned small groups. There was more member involvement in that group than in any other during my stay in the village. A meeting was held nearly every week if there was not a lot to do in agriculture. The peasants in the Happy Pig Small Group did not complain to me about the village cadres. They only told me about the limited benefits and the higher risk of growing happy pigs in comparison with the conventional breeding method. However, they had good reasons to be careful with expressing complaints because they depended on Wáng Wěi for the sale of their happy pigs. With the exclusion of Hú Qǐhuá from the Happy Pig Small Group, Wáng Wěi had set an example concerning this question. In comparison to the members of the Happy Pig Small Group, the members of the Financial Cooperative did not depend on Wáng Wěi in this way because there was nothing to be sold to wealthy urban consumers on the market.

In this chapter I identified several factors that help to explain why there was visible resistance against the leadership of Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres in one NRR project but not in the others. These factors were opportunity, involvement, individualization and dependence. I pointed out that the opportunity for such a visible act, such as in the election of the council of the Financial Cooperative, did not exist in the small groups of the Professional Cooperative. The responsible persons were not elected and the next election of the council of the Professional Cooperative was some time away. Concerning the underlying question of latent dissatisfaction and mistrust, as well as potential resistance, I identified involvement, especially in monetary terms, as a central factor for the existence or lack of concern and resistance. Furthermore, where there

was dissatisfaction, individualization prohibited the individual workers of three small groups from thinking about the possibility of collective action to change the present situation. When the peasant producers were not individualized, dependence on Wáng Wěi for selling their products hindered them from raising their voices if there was indeed any dissatisfaction with the leadership of the village cadres. These insights from intra-village comparison of NRR projects can be used for further comparison with other examples of experiments in NRR in China. Several Chinese language reports exist on different NRR projects written by NRR intellectuals and activists. However, a comprehensive review of these texts would go beyond the scope of this diploma thesis. Furthermore, my experience with the NRR project in this village made me cautious about the possibility of NRR activists painting too much of an idealistic picture of their own NRR projects when presenting them to the outside world. Critical voices from the village could go unheard. Acts of resistance could remain invisible. In the next chapter I put the results from my empirical research under a broader perspective of the anthropology of cooperatives.

10 Anthropological Perspectives on Cooperatives

In this chapter I analyze my empirical data presented in the preceding chapters. For my analysis I use theoretical approaches that were popular in anthropological studies of cooperatives in the 1970s and 1980s, namely a substantivist perspective inspired by Karl Polanyi, and a Marxist political economy perspective. The former focuses on the sphere of exchange, the later on the sphere of production. I complement my analysis with David Graeber's (2001) anthropological theory of value in order to understand processes not covered by the other two approaches.

I then discuss the concept of "ephemeral association" developed by anthropologist Gabriela Vargas-Cetina (2005) that approximately fits the NRR projects I studied. However, I have objections to her perspective of viewing these ephemeral associations as new forms of cooperatives. Instead I propose to view these organizations not as new forms of cooperatives but—building on Marc Edelman's (1999) concept of "imagined organizations"—as "imagined cooperatives". In this context I also disagree with Vargas-Cetina's dismissal of "prospective anthropology", proposed by June Nash and Nicholas Hopkins (1976), on theoretical as well as on political grounds.

10.1 Developments in the anthropological study of cooperatives

Anthropologists discovered rural cooperatives and collectives as a new field of study in the 1960s. In 1969 anthropologists, sociologists and economists organized a conference focusing on rural cooperatives as innovations in production and distribution. Empirical evidence from ethnography pointed out the challenges of transforming individualistic peasants or existing collective organizations into efficient and successful new cooperatives (Worsley 1971). Another conference concerning cooperatives, collectives and nationalized industry initiated by June Nash and Jorge Dandler, was held in 1972 and resulted in another volume published in 1976 (Nash et al. 1976). The questions focused

on the connections between local practice and the development projects from the nation-state (Vargas-Cetina 2005:231–232).

In the 1970s and 1980s most anthropologists studied rural cooperatives from the perspectives of political economy and institutional economics. These studies showed that while state support was often necessary for small collective organizations, state involvement often led to corruption in cooperatives. At that time cooperatives continued to be viewed as self-contained units. Members were involved in the cooperatives for a long time and the organization was understood as a community (Vargas-Cetina 2005:232).

In the face of the neoliberal focus on privatization and marketization, state intervention and support for cooperatives has decreased since the 1980s. Many small producers in the rural and urban area found themselves alone in the market and without old safety nets. They organized themselves in various types of cooperative organization and were supported by middle-class volunteers and NGOs. Anthropologists felt uneasy about the rush towards privatization in the 1980s and turned the focus of ethnography to working collective resource management systems that benefited its members. The increasing role of NGOs and advocates that now supported cooperative organizations in place of the state became the focus of anthropological studies only in the 1990s and at the start of the 21st century. Furthermore, studies by June Nash showed how cooperative organizations in Chiapas became involved in struggles, for example for indigenous rights, that went beyond mere economic objectives (Vargas-Cetina 2005:233-234).

10.2 Substantivism and the sphere of distribution

Karl Polanyi differentiated between two meanings of “economic”, namely the substantive and the formal:

The substantive meaning of economic derives from man’s dependence for his living upon nature and his fellows. It refers to the interchange with his natural and social environment, in so far as this results in supplying him with the means of material want satisfaction.

The formal meaning of economic derives from the logical character of the means–ends relationship... It refers to a definite situation of choice, namely, that between the different uses of means induced by an insufficiency of those means. (Polanyi 1957:243)

Polanyi argued that only the substantive meaning of economy is useful for comparative economics because formal economics is only applicable to the market system as one special kind of economy (Isaac 2005:15).

On the other hand the Formalists, for example Scott Cook and Harold Schneider, argued that microeconomic models concerning the key concept of maximization were universally applicable. First it seemed as if the Formalists had won the arguments of the 1960s and 1970s. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, some anthropologists argue that the debate between Formalists and Substantivists had remained unresolved (Isaac 2005:18–21):

Those who start by looking at society as a whole are left like the Substantivists, trying to explain how people are motivated to reproduce society; those who start by looking at individual desires end up, like the Formalists, unable to explain why people chose to maximize some things and not others. (Graeber 2001:12)

Basic concepts employed by Karl Polanyi, for example reciprocity and redistribution, are nevertheless widely used in contemporary economic anthropology even though they are generally not attributed to him, exactly because they are now so commonly used. Hence, Barry Isaac argues that “the demise of substantivism was more apparent than real.” (Isaac 2005:22)

All economies have mechanisms of distribution. Karl Polanyi argued that only capitalist market economies are first and foremost integrated through exchange on price-setting markets. Other economies are primarily integrated through other forms of distribution, namely through reciprocity, redistribution, and householding (Isaac 2005:16).

Overall market exchange plays a dominant role in contemporary China. However, other forms of distribution are still existent and relevant for our understanding of social relations. The intention of the NRR projects was to consciously replace (some but not all) market relations with cooperative relations at the local level. In this section I use Polanyi’s notions of different kinds of distribution to analyze the empirical data presented in the preceding chapters in order to have a better understanding of the de facto effects of the NRR experiments in the village.

10.2.1 Market exchange

The cooperative sold its products on the market, either directly to urban consumers, to supermarkets, or other companies that for example in turn gave the products as promotional gifts to its customers.

However, these market exchanges were not always pure forms of impersonal trade. Gudeman (2005) views economy as containing two realms, namely that of community and that of market. Both realms are existent in every economy, each has many

variations and both are complexly intertwined. He emphasizes that even though markets are about impersonal trade, these exchanges “may be mixed with communal ties... Although trade may be modelled as an independent transaction, in practice it is surrounded by communities that enable it.” (Gudeman 2005:95–96). Many of the urban consumers who bought the cooperative’s products not only related with the cooperative for the short and limited relation of an market exchange, but were part of a community interested in the three rural issues.⁷⁹ By buying the cooperative’s products they wanted to contribute to the solution of these problems.

On the input side the members of the marketing cooperative-like parts of the Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products (or Professional Cooperative) bought the means of agricultural production either directly on the market or the Professional Cooperative bought the input and sold it to the individual member households.

The production cooperative-like small groups bought labor force on the local labor market. The village cadres, who controlled these small groups, hired villagers or people from surrounding villages either as permanent or as temporary workers. As pointed out in chapters 5 and 7 some of these market relations between buyers and sellers of labor power were not impersonal but rather personal relations between patrons and clients or even between husbands and wives.

10.2.2 Reciprocity

David Graeber (2001), replacing Marshall Sahlin’s terms “generalized reciprocity” and “balanced reciprocity”, proposes to view reciprocity as relatively open or closed:

Open reciprocity keeps no accounts, because it implies a relation of permanent mutual commitment; it becomes closed reciprocity when a balancing of accounts closes the relationship off, or at least maintains the constant possibility of doing so. (Graeber 2001:220)

Graeber points out that the timeless relations of open-ended, communist reciprocity can easily transform into hierarchical relations of patronage and exploitation. Balanced forms of closed reciprocity can easily turn into either competition or forms of exchange, very close to less cutthroat forms of barter or trade (Graeber 2001:118–225).

In chapters 4 and 5 I mentioned that the cooperative, most often in the person of Wáng Wěi, sometimes gave products from the cooperative as presents to officials, journalists, and intellectuals. In this manner Wáng Wěi created non-contractual relations

⁷⁹ The three rural issues are the peasants, rural society, and agriculture. For more details see chapter 1.

with them, which he could use to receive state support, media attention, and support from intellectuals, but also to improve his social status and to rise in political office. On the spectrum of reciprocity this form of gift giving is located closer to closed reciprocity than to open-ended communism.

Within the cooperative but rather autonomous from it, I observed another kind of reciprocity, namely mutual aid between neighbors and friends, as noted in chapter 6. Huáng Yùtíng, the women growing organic wheat and rice for the cooperative, helped her neighbor and friend planting rice seedlings and vice versa. Even though there was no accounting, their exchange of labor was rather balanced (using Sahlin's term) or closed than open (using Graeber's terms).

In the case of the village cadres' wives packaging rice for the cooperative (hence, for their shareholding husbands) as described in chapter 5, these market relations were based on community (Gudeman 2005), namely on the household. Obviously the relationship between village cadres and their wives did not end when the employer-employee relationship between them stopped. Viewed from the perspective of community, this market exchange of money against labor power appears as another form of exchange, namely reciprocity. Furthermore, even though accounting was used, this case seems to be indeed much closer to open reciprocity than the two mentioned above.

Open reciprocity is an individual form of from-each-according-to-his-abilities-to-each-according-to-his-needs communism. This open-ended responsibility usually exists between close kin or other people with very close relationships, Graeber points out: "[They] will do whatever they can to help the other, not because they expect repayment, but simply because they know that in a similar crisis, the other *would* do the same" (Graeber 2001:18–19). Asked why she and the other women did this work, Wáng Wěi's wife told me that they did it "because no one else was doing it" (FN, 2011-06-02). If we interpret this statement about doing the packaging work along the just mentioned theoretical lines, it becomes clear that the (low) wage was not the main motivation for doing the work. Packaging needed to be done; otherwise the cooperative was not able to sell the rice. (If the rumors about fake ecological rice from outside the village were true, the need for someone with very close relations to the village cadres would be even more accentuated.) The wives helped their husbands because they needed their help and not because they expected to be repaid. Yet, as mentioned above, such relations of open reciprocity can turn into hierarchical relations of exploitations quite easily and sometimes it is hard to tell (both for analyst and actor) when the one definitely turns into the

other (Graeber 2001:225). The hourly wage for the packaging work was rather low and, in contrast to managing the cooperative, the packaging work did not seem as empowering or fulfilling. However, my empirical data on this concrete question of how the wives of the village cadres viewed this relationship is insufficient to discuss it in more detail without ending up in pure speculation. I discussed the problem of the researcher's position within the field in the chapter about methods and it seems reasonable to expect that female researchers would have been able to find out more on this issue.

10.2.3 Redistribution

Another form of exchange that is central for understanding the dynamics and the development of the cooperative projects under study is redistribution. In his official position as village party branch secretary and chairperson of the village committee, Wáng Wěi (and to a much smaller extent the other village cadres) had access to resources which they could redistribute (or promise to redistribute, for example before elections) among the peasants of the village. Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres could allow the villagers or their children to have another child. They could allocate the villagers land for a house for their children. They could help the villagers to receive the minimum living security from the state. Although the money came from the state, it was the village committee that reported to higher administrative levels which households should receive state support. The village cadres could also promise to help organize a room for a villager's elderly relative in an old people's home, who would not be endowed to it otherwise, and so on.

This possibility of redistribution was the basis of patron-client relationships that in turn formed the community base of market relations between the village cadres as buyers and some of the villagers as sellers of labor power, as discussed in chapter 7. More generally this control over redistribution was one influence on the reaction, or rather non-reaction, of the majority of the villagers to the village cadres' *de facto* privatization of the market-oriented cooperative projects in the village.

10.3 Political economy and the sphere of production

So far we have focused only on the sphere of exchange but, from the perspective of political economy, value is not produced in this sphere. Value is generated in a different sphere to the sphere in which it is exchanged, realized and distributed (Robotham 2005:49). Hence, I shall now turn to the sphere of production. In this section I put for-

ward the thesis that, through the cooperative projects, a capitalist mode of production entered the village and led to relations between capitalists and workers (with the above made specification that these were not pure relations of buyers and sellers of labor power, but also relations between patrons and clients) within the village.

10.3.1 Modes, relations, means and forces of production

One central concept in political economy is that of “mode of production”. Marxist anthropologists have developed several different kinds of modes of productions based on their empirical data. A mode of production is made up of the “relations of production” and the “forces of production”. Relations of production are about who controls the “means of production”. From the point of view of political economy, this is the key to understanding economy and society (Robotham 2005:43). As Chris Hann (2005:111) points out, “managerial power and access to information are in some respects more critical than ownership *per se*.” This is why in the preceding chapters I focused on the division of labor and who is involved in management decisions.

The forces of production include the “means of production”, namely the “objects of labour” (e.g. land and raw materials), the “instruments of labor” (e.g. tools), as well as the most important force of production, namely “human labor power”, the ability to work (Robotham 2005:44), or more generally “a human being’s capacity to transform the world, their powers of physical and mental creativity” (Graeber 2001:55).

Another important component of political economy is the Marxian labor theory of value, according to which value is created through labor (Turner 2008). If more value is produced than is needed for the reproduction of labor power, a surplus arises. Each mode of production with an internal class division has a characteristic form of extraction of this surplus: “Indeed, it is the very growth of an economy which has the capacity to produce a regular surplus that leads to class division.” (Robotham 2005:44).

10.3.2 Modes of extracting surplus and social formations

In the capitalist mode of production the capitalist class controls the means of production and labor power is commodified. Like all other commodities, it can be now bought on the market for a price that circles around its value, that is the value of labor socially necessary for its (re-)production. Capitalists buy the workers’ labor power on the market and pay them a wage. In return capitalists can extract the labor of the workers. Through their work, workers reproduce the value of their own labor power, replace the existing

stock of capital, and produce surplus value for capitalists, who appropriate this surplus as profit (if they successfully manage to sell the commodities produced by the workers on the market) and accumulate it as capital. However, the working day is not split up into separate sections and not labeled accordingly. Hence, it appears as if capitalists are paying workers for the entire value of their labor: “The organisation of the production process conceals the manner in which the surplus is extracted.” (Robotham 2005:47)

This is a very short summary of Karl Marx’s theoretical examination of the generative mechanisms of a “pure” capitalist mode of production. However, Marx pointed out that, in the complex process of social production capitalists who extract the surplus from the workers are only the first appropriators of surplus value but not necessarily the ultimate owners of it. They have to share the surplus with other capitalists, landowners, merchants, and so on. Hence, surplus value splits up into various forms such as profit, interest, merchants’ profit, or rent (Marx 2005:589).

Furthermore, in reality each social formation or society is made up of several modes of production, with one mode being the dominant one. This is expressed in the vocabulary of political economy with the term “articulation” of modes of production (Robotham 2005:53). Capitalist social formations are made up of a mixture of modes of productions; for example of capitalism, petty commodity production and household production, articulated in a way that capitalism dominates. In the case of the village studied here, these three modes of production can be detected. Many villagers migrate to the cities to work as wage laborers in capitalism. Those staying in the village produce agricultural products (mainly) on their own land (mainly) with their own labor. These products are in part produced for their own consumption (household production) and in part for sale on the market (petty commodity production).

As just mentioned, surplus value appropriated by capitalists has to be shared with other groups in many cases, for example with merchants if capitalists need their help in order to realize the value, which was produced in the sphere of production by the workers under the control of the capitalists, in the spheres of exchange and distribution. According to the labor theory of value, the merchants (and their workers) do not add any additional value to the product. However, their connecting work between producers and consumers may be needed in order to make the realization of the already produced value possible. If capitalists do not manage to sell their commodities, the complete value of the commodities (which includes the surplus value produced by the workers) is lost. Hence, they can concede to share the surplus with others.

Social scientists influenced by political economy and following the theory of an Asiatic mode of production, claimed to have identified a distinctive African mode of production, too. In this mode of production surplus was extracted through trade as well as through tribute. The relations of production within the lineage, clan or village group remained unchanged when this kind of extraction started (Robotham 2005:45–46).

Similarly, merchants can appropriate surplus value produced by petty commodity producers like Chinese peasants if they do not have the capability to sell these products to the consumers directly. This is what NRR intellectuals want to change when they propose marketing cooperatives as one possible solution to the three rural issues.

10.3.3 New surplus in the village

I start my argument about the introduction of class relations within the village as a consequence of the NRR projects by the observation that additional surplus became available in (or was returned to) the village. As noted above, the growth of an economy and the production of regular surplus is the basis for class division (Robotham 2005:45). This argument from political economy is rather a statement about macro than about micro developments. Nevertheless, under the condition of keeping in mind that the micro processes described below are happening within a bigger picture, as provided in chapters 1 and 3, it seems fruitful to apply it to what happened in the village under study.

Through the initiation of the NRR projects in the village, two additional kinds of surplus became available in the village. Firstly, parts of the surplus produced by the peasants, which would otherwise have been appropriated by peddlers, merchants, and supermarkets outside of the village, were detained in the village. Secondly, the state gave financial support to cooperative projects. This money stemmed from surplus produced somewhere outside of the village.

10.3.4 Controlling the means of exchange

Here I treat the marketing cooperative-like parts and the production cooperative-like parts of the NRR projects separately. I start with the former, namely the Small Group for Ecological Rice (and the former Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice or Rice Association), the Small Group for Ecological Minor Food Crops as well as the household part of the Happy Pig Small Group. Officially the ownership of means of production remained unchanged in these marketing cooperative-like parts of the NRR projects in the village. Land as an object of labor was still collectively owned, that is

under the control of the local administration, with peasants having long-term land use rights and the right to transfer these rights to others. The households still privately owned instruments of labor. What changed was that agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, and agricultural chemicals were (partly) purchased together. Nevertheless, once bought, these objects of labor were private properties as well.

What changed with the new marketing cooperative-like small parts was that they replaced peddlers, merchants, supermarkets, and other traders. Now the cooperative was in control of the means of exchange, e.g. certifications, registrations, its own trademark, as well as packaging machines and materials, which had to be acquired first. Officially the cooperative, and hence the surplus otherwise extracted by traders and the support granted to the cooperative projects by the state, should be controlled by its peasant members. The members handed over their decision making power for a fixed period of time to an elected council of the Professional Cooperative. Peasants told me about manipulations of these elections. Moreover, those responsible for the small groups were not elected at all but appointed by Wáng Wěi, the chairperson of the Professional Cooperative, who was also the village party branch secretary and the chairperson of the village committee. Backed up with these official positions and the redistributive power connected to them, Wáng Wěi was able to effectively control the Professional Cooperative (together with the other village cadres) without facing open resistance from most members. Most villagers viewed the Professional Cooperative just as another trader. Apparently it made no big difference for them who extracted the surplus they produced.

However, some members resisted Wáng Wěi and the village cadres extracting surplus from their labor. According to these peasants, the Professional Cooperative made (merchant) profits. According to the village cadres they did not manage to make profits because they could not operate as effectively as other bigger and more established merchants. The resisting villagers were the founders and council members of the former Rice Association, the forerunner organization of the Professional Cooperative. They had invested not only money but also creative energy into the marketing cooperative. In contrast, most of the other peasants who sold their agricultural products to the Professional Cooperative had almost no additional expenses from being a member of the marketing cooperative. This explains why some villagers made an effort to resist Wáng Wěi's control of the marketing cooperative while others did not.

However, on a more basic level it is important to note that there was resistance against the extraction of surplus in the village, whereas there had not been such resis-

tance before the existence of the marketing cooperative. The establishment of the marketing cooperative-like projects in the village made possible this kind of contention surrounding surplus. Before that the extraction of surplus had not been as visible and therefore not a field of contention. Peasants not only knew how much they sold their agricultural products for, but also for how much the cooperative sold it to urban consumers. Concerning the alleged costs of packaging, marketing, and selling, peasants did not always trust the statements from the village cadres and made their own calculations and estimations.

10.3.5 Controlling the means of production

In the production cooperative-like parts of the Professional Cooperative, namely the Happy Pig Small Group, the Lotus and Crabs Small Group and the Small Group for Organic Rice and Wheat, the means of production were, with the exception of land, officially owned by the cooperative. As already mentioned, the land was collectively owned in rural China. However, the individual households held the land use rights and transferred them to the Professional Cooperative. The cooperative shared parts of its surplus with these few individual households in the form of rent paid out in money or in kind. The pigsty of the Happy Pig Farm was built on the land of one of the shareholding village cadres, namely Huáng Guóqiáng. Organic wheat and rice was planted on the land of a working villager, namely Huáng Yùtíng. Lotus and crabs were cultivated on the land of peasants who were otherwise not involved in the operation of this small group. The members of the small group owned the other means of production collectively, for example the pigsty, pigs, maize, seeds, crabs and fertilizer. If the value of the products that were produced by permanent workers and day laborers could be realized in the sphere of exchange, the surplus was to be controlled by the four to five members, mainly but not exclusively village cadres, of each of these three small groups. Furthermore, as in the case of the marketing cooperative-like part of the Professional Cooperative, it was these managing members, especially Wáng Wěi in his position as village party branch secretary and chairperson of the village committee, who also controlled the second kind of additional surplus, namely the money the state gave as support to the cooperative projects.

Only in the case of the Happy Pig Farm was the worker at the same time (at least officially) one of these shareholding members. However, informally all three production cooperative-like small groups were controlled by the village cadres under the leadership

of Wáng Wěi. There existed a separation between shareholding village cadres on the one side and workers on the other. Even the one worker, who was officially on the same level as the other members of the Happy Pig Farm, did not view himself as being in the same position as the village cadres (SYL, 2011-05-13:1093–1098). Although from a quantitative point of view the low number of only three permanent workers and the handful of day laborers for planting and harvesting might seem negligible, this qualitative change in the relations within the village as a consequence of the NRR projects is nevertheless remarkable, as it seems contrary to the intentions of these supposedly co-operative projects. With these projects class relations between capitalists and workers, between buyers and sellers of labor force, entered this village.

To be sure, there had been members of both classes—of course more workers by far—connected to households within the village before. In most households there was at least one migrant worker. On one hand, both Fāng Fēipéng, who worked at lotus field, and Sūn Yúnlóng, who worked at the Happy Pig Farm, had worked as a migrant worker *outside of the village* before. On the other hand, Wáng Wěi had had his own company together with a friend *outside of the village* before he assumed his office as village party branch secretary and chairperson of the village committee. Therefore, class division with the village was nothing new. However, direct relations between capitalist and workers within the village were something new.

One might object to this claim by pointing out that even before the NRR projects some villagers had bought the labor power of other villagers. Indeed, some villagers paid other villagers to work for them. The claim made here is not that there had been no paid labor within the village before the advent of the NRR projects. Day laborers could be found both on the small construction sides within the village, as well as in the fields, planting rice seedlings or excavating lotus roots for example. There is one important difference between these day laborers and the small groups' permanent workers and day laborers. In the case of house building it is clear that the villagers paid others to work for them not in order to sell their house on the market with a profit later on, but in order to live in it after completion. Even though wages were involved, these were not capitalist relationships as it was not about extracting surplus from the workers. In the case of work in the fields, the difference is subtler. As mentioned above, different modes of production make up a social formation. Hence, sometimes it is not possible to draw a clear line between different modes. Peasants usually consumed a small part of their harvest themselves within the household, but sold the remaining part on the market. Hence,

one might argue that villagers who bought the labor power of other villagers to work on their fields did this in order to benefit from the surplus value produced by their labor when the harvest was later sold and the value realized on the market. However, the peasants I talked to told me that they paid other villagers (or people from neighboring villages) to work for them as a substitute for family members who were working in the cities at the same time and who could not help with the cultivation or harvest on the fields. In contrast, the small groups of the Professional Cooperative produced with the goal of selling the products on the market and to get a return on the invested money. It was not about hiring someone as substitute for family members working in the city. Hence, I argue that it was the NRR projects that led to the development of capitalist class relations *within* the village.⁸⁰ Using the terms of Nicos Poulantzas (1975) already introduced in the last part of chapter 7, new class places were socially produced in the locality of the village through the establishment of the production cooperative-like parts of the Professional Cooperative.

The production cooperative-like small groups were foremost imagined, for example by Mǎ Zhìyǒng, the student volunteer who assisted Wáng Wěi in the management of the Professional Cooperative, as a collective of investors that was, especially in the initial phase, to be managed by capable individuals rather than democratically by all members, as this was considered more effective. It was not viewed as problematic that only a few capable people owned and managed the cooperative at that time, as later on, if successful, more peasants would be allowed to join as shareholders with entitlements to a dividend. In this conception, the question of who did what kind of work was of no concern. It could be members or non-members, Mǎ Zhìyǒng told me (MZY, 2011-06-03:260–350). However, within the village there existed different conceptions of what a cooperative should be and how it should be organized. Hú Qǐhuá, council member of the former Rice Association and initiator of the happy pigs, who was excluded from this small group later on, imagined, for example, the creation of different social relations through the establishment of cooperatives. His social imagination challenged the version of a cooperative that meant the creation of class places for capitalists/members of the cooperative (understood as shareholders in the “cooperative”) on the one side and of workers on the other (FN, 2011-11-11). Even though these alternative social imaginings

⁸⁰ If one considers the relations between peasants who pay other peasants to work for them as substitutes for absent household members as initial class relations between capitalists and workers, the production cooperative-like NRR projects furthered the development of capitalist class relations in the village.

have not been realized so far, they, and therefore the potential for the creation of new social relations, exist.

10.4 Social action and value

Terence Turner argues that most Marxist anthropologists created only a slightly different version of Substantivism. Both Polanyi's followers and those influenced by Marx's political economy simply analyzed the "way in which a society materially provisions itself". The former put the focus on different modes of exchange, the later on different modes of production. However, Turner questions if this sort of material production is indeed what is most important to the social systems examined. Instead, Turner suggests starting from the question of value. Based on "Marx's insight that value ultimately measures the importance not of objects, but of actions" (Graeber 2005:350), Turner thought about "how to apply a Marxian theory of value to societies without a market" (Graeber 2001:68).

10.4.1 Graeber's anthropological theory of value

David Graeber (2001, 2005) develops an anthropological theory of value that contains important elements of Terence Turner's approach as well as an idea from Nancy Munn's phenomenological approach, namely that value emerges in action. According to Graeber,

value is the way our actions take on meaning or importance by becoming incorporated into something larger than ourselves. But almost always, this can only happen through some kind of material medium, a token of value like money. Fetishism occurs when we assume that the value comes from the token, rather than ourselves. (Graeber 2005:451)

Different material tokens (or material performances) measure value through presence/absence, through ranking, or through proportionality. What is measured is the importance of the expended creative energies (Graeber 2001:75–76). The importance of action is usually realized through material tokens at another place than where it was produced (Graeber 2005:452).

Taking this anthropological theory of value as a theoretical starting point turns our attention from the mere production of material products and services to the question of why people who could do almost anything do what they are doing (Graeber 2001:47). Why are the village cadres continuing the cooperative projects in the face of (alleged) constant monetary loss? Why are the council members of the former Rice Association

still bound to the idea of establishing a “real” cooperative in the village in the face of the limited monetary benefits it provided so far? Below I answer these questions by taking my two main informants as exemplary figures of these two groups.

10.4.2 Non-monetary tokens valuing cooperative social action

Wáng Wěi, village party branch secretary, chairperson of the village committee and of the Professional Cooperative, portrayed himself as pioneer of cooperation. In his narrative the village cadres selflessly take the lead and shoulder the losses until the cooperative develops further and makes profit. Then the villagers, depicted by Wáng Wěi as rational profit maximizing actors who do not care about the collective, will follow automatically (WW, 2011-05-03:109–130). The question formulated above about what makes the village cadres continue with the cooperative projects is not easily answered, as I cannot tell which of the two stories was closer to reality. Village cadres told me that they lost money with the cooperative projects. Other villagers told me that the village cadres made profits. De facto profits would be a good reason to continue. However, the possibility existed that the value of creative energy expended on action in NRR experiments could be realized in material tokens others than money, as we can see in the case of Hú Qǐhuá.

As already mentioned above, tokens of value cannot only be objects but also material performances. In the interviews Hú Qǐhuá mentioned several events when he was able to realize values that had been generated through action in connection with the NRR projects in the village. Hú Qǐhuá told me that in the initial stage of the NRR projects in the village one intellectual, namely the well-known economist Hán Déqiáng, invited him along with Gāo Shùnkāi, the chairperson of the former Rice Association, for a meal in Běijīng after they had presented a report about the Rice Association. Hán Déqiáng did this because he appreciated that those two and the four other investors in the Rice Association took the risk and were willing to let everyone participate if successful, without demanding a dividend due to their investment (HQH, 2011-05-27a:522–549). The value that was realized in this case was concrete; hence, it was not mediated by some abstract material token like money but by something rather special and incommensurable, namely a meal. The value was not measured in form of proportionality or ranking, but rather through the presence (in contrast to the absence) of this material performance. While the value was generated through action in the village, it was realized somewhere else, namely in Běijīng city.

Another time Hú Qǐhuá wrote a report about his work in the financial cooperation and about one idea concerning the improvement of its operation. After the NRR intellectual Jiāng Bǎilín had read this text, he gave Hú Qǐhuá a call and greeted him with “teacher Hú” (HQH, 2011-06-05:1198–1201). Hú Qǐhuá also told me that he once met Lǐ Chāngpíng at the Agricultural University of China in Běijīng. Lǐ Chāngpíng gave him a book as present and Lǐ Chāngpíng’s wife gave him their visiting card (material objects as a token of valuing Hú Qǐhuá’s active involvement in the NRR projects). When Lǐ Chāngpíng came to the county town in 2010 and to the village in 2011, a few years after their first encounter, Lǐ Chāngpíng showed that he still remembered Hú Qǐhuá (HQH, 2011-06-05:762–765).

In addition to the field of NRR intellectuals and activists, the value of social action in connection with the cooperative projects was also realized in the field of media. Positive news reports about the cooperative efforts made the value produced by the actions of the participating members material in a way that could be preserved. Hú Qǐhuá once told me that Wáng Wěi could try to delete him from the history of the cooperative projects of the village, but that he could not succeed because there already existed media reports with his name and the names of the other council members of the former Rice Association (HQH, 2011-06-05:869–872).

These tokens of esteem that realize the value created through the active involvement in the cooperative projects may offset a lack of realization of value in its monetary form. For example, Hú Qǐhuá did not want to receive a wage for his work in the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid (or Financial Cooperative; HQH, 2011-06-05:909–911), although he later on explained to me that the economic conditions of his household did not improve from 2004 to 2006 because he was so busy with affairs of the Rice Association and the Financial Cooperative (HQH, 2011-06-05:1024–1051). Based on this information from Hú Qǐhuá, it seems plausible that, if the village cadres’ claims about losses were true, such kind of realization of value in the form of material tokens other than money might help to explain why the village cadres would continue in spite of unfavorable financial prospects. To prove this hypothesis one would, apart from clarifying the question of monetary loss or profit, need to carry out participant observation not only inside of the village, as I have done, but also outside of it. It would be necessary to leave the village together with members of the cooperative as encounters between them and NRR intellectuals, NRR activists and their NGOs often take place in

training sessions outside of the village.⁸¹ The roles played by NGOs and advocates are now increasingly at the center of attention in the anthropology of cooperatives.

10.5 Ephemeral associations: new cooperatives?

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina points out that the situation of cooperatives in different parts of the so-called developing world is similar today:

The connection between rural and urban organizations (including cooperatives) and the market is now handled ... mostly by non-governmental organizations, small entrepreneurs, private foundations and individual volunteers who take it upon themselves to support indigenous peoples, rural producers and poverty-stricken people everywhere. (Vargas-Cetina 2005:239)

In this situation, Vargas-Cetina argues, many grassroots organizations in Mexico transformed themselves into what she calls “ephemeral associations”.

Ephemeral associations are highly flexible and their structure, membership and goals change continuously. Membership in these associations is fully voluntary and members do not expect that these organizations last indefinitely. Internal governance structure is not strong and authority figures are contextual. Furthermore, these associations are, to a high degree, dependent on communications technology (Vargas-Cetina 2005:247 n. 1).

As empirical examples of such ephemeral associations, Vargas-Cetina describes the House of Weavings and other organizations of women weavers in highland Chiapas. These organizations served their members as marketing cooperatives (Vargas-Cetina 2005:241–245). Here I compare the features she mentions with my own empirical data.

A young weaver and draughtsman managed the organization like a private store. The relation between him and most weavers, including the members, was more like a patron-client relation than a relation between a democratically elected leader and his constituency. The organization did not run on a participatory basis and the weavers

⁸¹ In my research I focused on the processes within the cooperative and within the village. Hence, I have not written about the role of NGOs in the NRR projects in Shǔidào Zhuāng so far. My interviewees did not seem to assess their role as relevant enough to talk about them. In the interviews they rather mentioned the role played by single NRR intellectuals and by student volunteers from certain universities. However, there were at least three NGOs in contact with the NRR projects during my time in the village (MZY, 2011-06-03:109–154). Wáng Wěi only talked to me about an NGO once when I had my voice recorder switched off. He told me that he, as a council member of the NGO, should not say this but the utility of one NGO that was supposed to help solving the sales problem was zero (IR WW, 2011-06-08). Mǎ Zhìyǒng, the graduate with a degree in economics who supported Wáng Wěi in the management of the Professional Cooperative, was paid not by the Professional Cooperative but by the Chinese Academy of Sciences, as part of a project for mutual help between the city and the countryside. The academy in turn had received the money for this project from an organization or institution from Canada (MZY, 2011-06-03:83–104).

were not involved in important decisions. There were no general assemblies on a regular basis, and hence members tended to develop no sense of collective belonging. Membership was free as no membership fee was collected and no strict member list existed. Some members preferred to sell their textiles to private stores. Members obtained many benefits from selling their handicrafts to the organization. The organization organized programs for both members and non-members. The weaver organizations received help from altruistic individuals, government programs, and national and international foundations. Furthermore, in-house advisers, NGOs or both, helped in the operation of the organizations. Depending on these advisers' ideals they could direct the organization to participate in, or restrain from, attending political demonstrations. Overall the House of Weavings kept its promise of improving the life of its members. However, looking at it more closely, it was not a cooperative in the classical sense at all. Nevertheless, all these organizations called themselves "cooperatives" and invoked the spirit of cooperation and collective work (Vargas-Cetina 2005:242–244).

Most of these features might as well be used to describe the different marketing cooperative-like NRR projects in the Chinese village I studied, especially the small groups for ecological rice and ecological minor food crops. While most features are also true for the marketing cooperative-like part of the Happy Pig Small Group, it was different from the two other small groups and the weaver organizations as there were regular meetings, member participation and the possibility to develop a sense of collective belonging. However, as in the other projects, Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres made the main decisions. One difference between the three small groups and the Mexican weaver organizations was that the former only provided limited benefits to its members. Another difference was that Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres' patron-client relations with the members/villagers were based on both their position in the cooperative as well as on their position in the village party branch and in the village committee. Moreover, the Professional Cooperative did not participate in political demonstrations.

To sum it up, some similarities, namely the free membership in the Small Group for Ecological Rice or the invention of new projects like the Lotus and Crabs Small Group, the Happy Pig Small Group and the Happy Pig Farm, on one hand, and the abandonment of old projects like the Professional Cooperative for Edible Mushrooms, on the other hand, provide reasons to argue that the NRR projects in Shǔidào_{zhuāng} can be understood as ephemeral cooperatives as well. However, there were some stable and

permanent elements in the NRR projects that contradict the image of a continuously changing organization. For example, the members of the Happy Pig Small Group or the Lotus and Crabs Small Group were relative stable. Furthermore, the marketing of rice seemed to be a constant in the NRR projects in Shǔidào zhuāng. Last but not least, one authority figure, namely Wáng Wěi played a central role in the projects since the start. If one considers Shǔidào zhuāng's cooperative projects as ephemeral association, one needs to add that it is so in a less flexible and fluid form than the example given by Vargas-Cetina, but it nevertheless approximates it.

10.6 “Not a cooperative at all”

Moreover, my own data allows a rough conclusion about the NRR projects in the Chinese village that is very similar to Vargas-Cetina's (2005) about the weaver organizations in Mexico, namely that the organizations called itself a “cooperative” even though it did not look like a cooperative in the classical sense any more.⁸²

In the 1970s June Nash and Nicholas Hopkins imagined the anthropological study of cooperatives as one part of a “prospective anthropology” that is concerned with “understanding the social forms into which we may be about to move”. They thought that cooperatives were especially interesting because they involved an “element of willful control of one's own social forms” (Nash and Hopkins 1976:4). That was before the neoliberal turn. In the early 21st century, after more than thirty years of neoliberalism, after the alleged end of history and the final victory of capitalism and of the market, and after the repetitive claims of certain people that there is no alternative, Gabriela Vargas-Cetina proposes to drop the idea of a “prospective anthropology”. In the face of the increasing velocity of postmodernity, she claims that there is no other possibility: “our theoretical intentions now have to be humbler; where Nash and Hopkins wanted to look into the future, we find ourselves trying to grapple with the constantly changing present.” Nash and Hopkins thought that it makes sense to keep in mind “the distinction between what is theoretically imaginable and what is concretely possible” (Nash and

⁸² Rather it approximated in reality what Mǎ Zhìyǒng's vision of ideal cooperatives looked like, namely a shareholding company (股份制公司 gǔfēnzhì gōngsī) of all peasants from the village (MZY, 2011-06-03:264). The main difference between this vision and reality was that so far only the village cadres and two of their friends were shareholders in the shareholding cooperative. In fact, the idea of shareholding cooperatives is nothing new in China. It developed in the 1980s when peasants found that some collective properties could not easily be divided physically. Shares were issued to everyone on equal terms instead of selling these collective properties. Furthermore, some proportions of collective shares were held by outside private organization or state institutions (Zhao 2011:691).

Hopkins 1976:29). Hence, they proposed to use an ideal-type model of a cooperative for heuristic purposes (Nash and Hopkins 1976:27). Obviously the theoretical move proposed by Vargas-Cetina has political consequences as well. Studying cooperatives would be no longer about imagining possible social relations that are different from what exists in the present. This creative tension would be lost.

In fact, some villagers in Shǔidào zhuāng had an ideal-type model of a cooperative in mind. Otherwise they could not possibly call the cooperative of the village cadres a fake (HQH, 2011-05-06b:218). Of course we do not know if these peasants would be able to realize a cooperative, a social form in accordance with their imaginations.⁸³ Be that as it may, if only one part of the people involved in an organization claim that it is a cooperative and others claim that it is a fake one, why would a researcher prefer the one over the other in a social setting where the meaning of cooperative is contended?

Vargas-Cetina and I agree that the objects of our research called themselves cooperatives but that “they were structured and operated following very different principles from those supporting classical cooperatives” (Vargas-Cetina 2005:229). She takes the position that the ephemeral association she investigated should, nevertheless, be regarded as a cooperative, albeit in a new form. By doing this she follows, at least implicitly, the categories of those who dominate the organization. Her argument is based on the idea that the meaning of cooperative has changed. On the other hand, one might argue that one is in fact dealing with an organization that is not a cooperative, but that is nevertheless called a cooperative by some of those social actors involved in it. This perspective implicitly follows the perspective of other social actors in the field who claim that the cooperative is a fake. This perspective is based on the assumption that the meaning of cooperative has not changed.

The perspective I propose to adopt here is based on critical realism (Bhaskar 1998, 2008; Danermark et al. 2002; Sayer 1992), and the idea that a difference exists between the concepts people (of course including social scientists) have about reality and reality itself. This perspective is closer to that of those peasants who claimed that the cooperative is a fake. However, I refrain from using the term “fake” because it implies intention. As what people think, say and do is different it is hard to judge whether

⁸³ Maybe they would end up with a similar ephemeral organization if their nominal cooperative was orientated to the market, faced with tough competition, and hence in need of individuals, groups, or organization in order to connect them with consumers or to acquire support from the outside, be it the state, private foundations, NGOs, or benevolent individuals.

or not the village cadres really wanted to build a cooperative, as they claimed themselves, or not, as other villagers claimed.

My perspective harks back to early anthropological research on cooperatives that was interested in cooperatives because they may contain new forms of social relations (Nash et al. 1976). As mentioned in the introduction, I undertook this study out of my political interest in solidarity economy as practical experiments in self-organization that might point into a future society without hierarchy and without exploitation, a society where the good life is possible for everyone. The early studies about cooperatives were clear about the possibility that “institutions are subject to manipulation and exploitation” (Nash and Hopkins 1976:7). Some of these studies analyzed how cooperatives were used and misused for personal advantage or for systematic oppression, as the social scientists studying the cooperatives were interested in the pitfalls and promises of certain forms of consciously created social relations.

Vargas-Cetina points out that the House of Weavings in Mexico “has kept its promise to better the life of its members, although when looked at closely it is not a cooperative at all” (Vargas-Cetina 2005:244). The relations between those who run the marketing organizations and those who produce may appear as patron-client relations, as Vargas-Cetina points out (Vargas-Cetina 2005:243–244). Without the help of those running the marketing organizations, weavers and peasants would not be able to sell their respective textiles and rice for such high prices. It may appear as if both sides profit from this relationship. However, the assessment changes if one, similar to the Marxist critique of patron-clients relationships in the 1970s, analyzes the patron-client-like relationship between those who run the marketing organization and the producers as interwoven with class. Rothstein argues that favors given by patrons to clients are payoffs that are supposed to avoid more payoffs (Rothstein 1979:33).

By analyzing the NRR projects in Shǔidào zhuāng through the analytical lenses of substantivism, political economy, and David Graeber’s anthropological theory of value, questions of power and exploitation as well as of the reproduction and transformation of social structures through action come to the fore.

Such an analysis can show that the help of those who run the marketing organization is in fact based on the preceding work of weavers and peasants. The former is ultimately dependant on the later, not vice versa as it may appear at the first glance. Through their creative actions, weavers and peasants generate value in the sphere of production that is later realized by those who run the marketing organization in the

sphere of exchange. In the sphere of exchange, abstract exchange value is realized in the abstract material token money on the market and the more concrete social values are realized in the community of benevolent individuals, activists and intellectuals, who value the fact that weavers or peasants organized in cooperatives create new cooperative social relations in the production and exchange process. Both in the case of the weavers in Mexico and the peasants in China, the value is usually realized in the cities as this is the place where the wealthy urban consumers live who can afford to buy their niche products. The city is also the place where the supporting intellectuals and NGOs are situated, who value cooperation. One part of the value that is now materialized as money, or in more concrete material tokens or material performances of recognition, are returned to the weavers and peasants in the countryside. Those who control the marketing organization appropriate the other part of the value that was produced by weavers and peasants. They accumulate these material tokens, both money and reputation, that will enable them to successfully realize the values produced by weavers and peasants in the next circle of production on the market and in the community of supporters. At first sight it might seem as if weavers and peasants benefit from their relation with those who run the organizations. In fact, ultimately, it is the other way around.

In Shǔidào¹zhuāng, where those who dominated the organization still lived in the village, the place where the values were produced, some peasants thought that the village cadres benefited from the organization and not the peasants. However, not all, but some of them started to resist the village cadres extracting value (both exchange value and more concrete social values) they produced. Traders had extracted value from the peasants before the establishment of the cooperative in the village, and they are still doing so. However, none of the peasants seemed to think about resisting this kind of exploitation. Those who extracted a big share of the surplus, and these were not the small peddlers who came to the village but wholesalers and supermarkets, were out of reach of the peasants. With the establishment of the new organization this changed. Those who appropriated the value produced by the peasants in order to realize it in the sphere of exchange were now more visible and feasible. This spatial change, in combination with the organization's claim to be a cooperative, opened new possibilities for struggles concerning the appropriation of value. Some peasants started to challenge the cooperative and those who dominated it, with the alleged aim to transform it into what they referred to as "real cooperatives" (真正的合作社 zhēnzhèng de hézuòshè). The "real cooperative" these Chinese peasants aspired to was a cooperative in the classical

sense (HQH, 2011-05-27a:12–24). Contrary to Vargas-Cetina's observations in Mexico, they were still inspired by the notion of utopian community: "We should consider the cooperative as our own family, the members of our cooperative are, in fact, all of the same family."⁸⁴ In fact, the NRRM explicitly aims at reviving community spirit (Pan and Du 2011:455). Whether or not the peasants in Shǔidào zhuāng succeed in transforming the ephemeral organization in this direction, and do not simply reproduce it by only replacing the individuals who dominate the organization at present, remains an open question.⁸⁵

10.7 Imagined cooperatives

In his study about rural social movements in Costa Rica, Marc Edelman coined the term "imagined organizations" to refer to the

existence of "organizations" without members that nonetheless subsist through mutually reinforcing exchanges between donors (and sometimes urban-based social scientists) and "leaders." ... The mere fact (yes, fact!) that an organization is not all (or even anything) that its "leaders" claim does not necessarily mean that they cannot transform themselves into something else and, paradoxically perhaps, be a fount of commitment, creativity, and solid, practical ideas about development. (Edelman 1999:40)

Instead of viewing the ephemeral organizations, called "cooperative" by those who dominate it, in Shǔidào zhuāng as new forms of cooperatives, Edelman's notion of "imagined organization" points to a difference between what people involved imagine an organization to be and what the organization is, while at the same time recognizing the very real effects of these imaginations. However, to characterize both the marketing cooperative-like and production cooperative-like small groups of the Professional Cooperative in Shǔidào zhuāng more accurately, I alter Edelman's term a little. I use the term "imagined cooperatives" to refer to the kind of organizations I described and analyzed here. There are four central features. An imagined cooperative is a nominal cooperative, (1) referring to the organization's self-representation as a cooperative as well as to the imaginings the organization's leaders, involved activists, donors and other outside

⁸⁴ 我们应该把合作社当成自己的家，我们合作社的社员其实都是一家人。Wǒmen yīnggài bǎ hézuòshè dāngchéng zìjǐ de jiā, wǒmen hézuòshè de shèyuán qíshí dōu shì yī jiārén (HQH, 2011-06-07:595–596).

⁸⁵ While Hú Qǐhuá accused Wáng Wěi of using the cooperative for their personal gain, Wáng Wěi accused Hú Qǐhuá of using the contacts he had built through the cooperative to urban consumers for his personal advantage by selling his products directly to them and not through the channel of the cooperative (WW, 2011-05-06:174–192).

supporters have about the organization. An imagined cooperative is a non-cooperative, (2) referring to unequal and exploitative relations, for example class and patron-client relations, between those involved in the organization. This is what social scientists can discover under the surface of a nominal cooperative. It is about social relations and not about judging whether or not the nominal cooperative is a cooperative in legal terms. Both “non” and “nominal” (3) do not indicate what the term “fake” would indicate,⁸⁶ namely a judgment that those involved in the organization necessarily use the term “cooperative” consciously to deceive others. The two terms “non” and “nominal” keep the question of intention open. It might be the case or not. The actors involved may or may not try to build a cooperative in its classical sense. Moreover, an imagined cooperative is a potential cooperative, (4) referring to the possibility that (potential)⁸⁷ members, based on the internal contradiction of the imagined cooperative being both a nominal cooperative and a non-cooperative, start to struggle to transform it under certain circumstances. Note that I do not argue that this potential exists based on a contradiction between reality and a concept that exists out of space and time. Rather this contradiction (and hence the potential for transformation) is real if the existing imagined cooperative with its unequal social relations is different from members’ imaginings of what a cooperative ought to be. These imaginings might be influenced by different factors such as social movements like the NRRM, by state policies like the new law on cooperatives from 2007, or by social scientists studying imagined cooperatives.

⁸⁶ Vargas-Cetina warns us against making the “mistake to see the organizations as trying to take on fake new features” in order to meet the characteristics sought by donors and supporters (Vargas-Cetina 2005:246).

⁸⁷ In the case of the happy pig group, as mentioned in chapter 8, other peasant households than those already involved could not become members, while at the same time the Happy Pig Farm as a new project was established. Furthermore, the small group for lotus roots and the Happy Pig Farm were comprised of village cadres (and their friends) but no more members.

11 Conclusion

*The Chinese people are like tofu, the state like an iron hook.
People with good intentions attempt to use this hook to help the tofu,
but this causes only harm, so no help at all would be better.*

Liàng Shùmíng quoted in Pan and Du 2011:458

I looked for cooperation, but what I found was competition, conflict and (rumors about) corruption. This is how I might, in one sentence, summarize my research on the supposedly cooperative NRR projects in a Chinese village. Of course, this is overstated. I also found forms of cooperation in the village.

I undertook this study because I was interested if there were any practices or initiatives in China that were similar to solidarity economy projects, with their focus on self-management and cooperation, in other parts of the world. Indeed, the NRRM promotes cooperation in the countryside as an alternative to utopian marketization and privatization (see chapter 1).

In this diploma thesis I focused on NRR projects in one Chinese village in a poor county in the Hénán Province. Following a modified version of grounded theory methodology, I used interviews and participant observation as methods of data collection and already started with data analysis during the process of data collection. Furthermore, I used existing anthropological theories and concepts to make sense of my empirical material (see chapter 2).

My main interests were the internal organization of those NRR projects that focused on economic cooperation, their connection to the outside world, as well as the chances, risks, and limitations of these experiments in NRR.

11.1 Internal Organization

In this section of the conclusion I summarize who is (not) participating, who is involved in decision-making, as well as how work is divided and remunerated in the NRR projects in the village.

Initially the NRR intellectuals had formulated a rule according to which village cadres were not supposed to participate in the leadership of the cooperative. However, since the initiation village cadres have been involved in the NRR projects in the village under study (see 4.1). As they were the local link to the state, the village cadres had redistributive power that formed the basis of patron-client relations between village cadres and peasants (see 7.6).

Many peasants were involved in the marketing cooperative-like Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice (or Rice Association) in the initial phase, and there was more participation in meetings and training sessions than later on. However, from the beginning the council members, namely those who made the initial investment, were more involved in the operation of the Rice Association than ordinary members (see chapter 4.1). Later on in the small groups for ecological rice and minor food crops, being a member basically meant selling products to the cooperative. Relatively few peasants had a deeper involvement with the cooperative (see 5.2.1). The cooperative, namely those who sold the products to wholesalers, companies, and supermarkets, or directly to urban consumers, was more or less identical to the members of the village committee (see 5.2.2).

In the Happy Pig Small Group the village cadres, influenced by state money, made a decision in favor of a production cooperative-like Happy Pig Farm, instead of letting more households participate in the marketing cooperative-like part (see 8.3).

In the production cooperative-like small groups of the Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products, mainly village cadres were members, to be understood as shareholders. Peasants from Shǔidàozhuāng or neighboring villages were hired as permanent workers or day laborers (see chapter 6 to 8).

Officially different village cadres were responsible for different small groups, however, informally Wáng Wěi, the party secretary and chairperson of the village committee, had a big influence on many decisions (see 8.6 and 9.3.1).

There existed a gender division of labor within the cooperative. The husbands were managing and their wives were working, for example packaging rice and minor food crops or working at the lotus fields (see 5.4 and 7.5). Furthermore, the village cadres were managing and the peasants were working (see chapter 6 to 8).

In the production cooperative-like small groups, the working peasants sold their labor power to the cooperative. If the products were successfully sold on the market, the shareholders of the cooperative, almost exclusively the managing village cadres, could

appropriate the surplus value produced by the working peasants (see chapter 6, chapter 7, 8.4 and 10.3).

In the marketing cooperative-like small groups the peasants sold their products to the cooperative and received a limited monetary benefit in the form of the so-called initial dividend (see 4.1, 5.2.1 and 5.5).

While other villagers claimed that the shareholders of the cooperative made profit with the NRR projects and benefited from state support, the village cadres claimed that they made no monetary profit at all. As pioneers of cooperation they only opened the marketing channel and the other peasants would be able to benefit later on when the cooperative had the capacity to sell the agricultural products of more peasants. Be that as it may, what is important to note here is that the reader should not imagine the village cadres as very rich; in comparison with the urban middle class in China, they are not wealthy.

In the marketing cooperative-like small groups the control of the means of exchange, and in the production cooperative-like small groups the control of the means of production, were essential for (potentially) appropriating the values produced by the peasants and were usually materialized in the city, into money or other material tokens of appreciation (see 10.3.4, 10.3.5, 10.4 and 10.6).

11.2 Connections to the outside world

Here I turn to the role played by outside actors and their connections to the NRR projects in the village. First of all, it is very likely that without the influence of NRR intellectuals, the cooperatives would not have been established in the village (see 4.1).

Through the establishment of the NRR projects, new surplus became available in the village. Firstly, the state supported cooperative projects through rewards and tax exemption. NRR intellectuals and activists tried to channel money from the state (the iron hook in the introductory quote from Liang Shuming) to the NRR projects they initiated among the peasants in the village (the tofu). Secondly, through cutting out other intermediaries, surplus, which they had previously appropriated, became available to the cooperative. NRR intellectuals also played a crucial role in establishing contacts between the cooperative on the one side and urban consumers and other companies on the other (see 4.2, 7.1.4, 7.6.2, 8.5, 10.2.3 and 10.3.3).

One striking example of what kind of influence the availability of potential monetary support from the outside had on the NRR project in the village was the establishment of the Happy Pig Farm. Peasants who already raised conventional pigs had pigsties in their own courtyards and only needed to change the method of feeding in order to be able to raise happy pigs. However, instead of using these already existing resources Wáng Wěi felt that they could not reject the offer made by the state. Furthermore, urban consumers did not feel that the happy pigs were really happy in the concrete pigsties in the courtyards. In the end only five shareholders invested in the new Happy Pig Farm as the other peasants did not want to take the risk of the investment (see 8.3).

11.3 Chances, risks and limits

The competition the cooperative faced on the market was tough (see 4.2). The benefits for the ordinary peasants were limited, even in comparison to the low income from wage labor as migrant workers in the city, and connected with risks (see 4.1, 5.5, 6.5 and 7.1.3). In this case NRR intellectuals who warned against promising that the peasants could significantly raise their monetary income through market-oriented economic cooperation were right (see 1.3.4). In the case of the Small Group for Organic Rice and Wheat, the peasant who cultivated rice and wheat for the cooperative stressed the non-monetary benefit of not using agricultural chemicals for her body (see 6.1).

The village cadres, especially Wáng Wěi, controlled the cooperative. The village cadres thought that this was a good thing; other villagers thought that it was not (see 4.3). Through the NRR projects existing unequal relations were reinforced and inequalities reproduced. Patron-client relations between village cadres and peasants had existed before the NRR projects were initiated. Different villagers had occupied different class places outside of the village, some as owners of their own business, more as migrant workers (see 7.6). With the production cooperative-like projects, new direct class relations within the village were established (see 10.3.5). The marketing cooperative-like projects partly replaced intermediaries like wholesalers and supermarkets. These small groups of the cooperative now had the possibility to extract the surplus value other traders had extracted from the peasants before, albeit a little less as the cooperative paid the peasants the initial dividend. Furthermore, the village cadres claimed that the cooperative had a hard time realizing this surplus value as money on the market (see 10.3.4).

Those peasants who had invested work and money in the Rice Association resisted the village cadres' control of the economic cooperatives; others did not. In the case of the Financial Cooperative, resistance against the village cadres controlling the NRR projects became apparent when they were not elected to the council (see 9.2). This was not the case in the other projects. There was not such a opportunity for potential resistance to materialize like during the election of the council of the Financial Cooperative. Moreover, I identified several factors such as involvement, individualization, and dependence on patrons as explanation for potential resistance (see 9.3.2). Hú Qǐhuá's exclusion from the Happy Pig Small Group demonstrated that Wáng Wěi could decide whom to exclude from the cooperative, and hence from the possibility of selling the products for a better price to urban consumers (see 8.2).

According to the village cadres and the NRR intellectuals involved, the organizations discussed here were cooperatives. Some villagers said that it was a fake cooperative. In chapter 10 I proposed to view the NRR projects in the village that focus on economic cooperation as "imagined cooperatives" with the following characteristics: They were nominal cooperatives and imagined as cooperatives by those who dominate them and by those who support them. They were non-cooperatives in the sense that patron-client and class relations existed between those involved in the organizations. Furthermore, the NRR projects were potential cooperatives due to the tension between what the imagined cooperatives were at that moment and what some (potential) members of the organizations imagined a cooperative to be. There existed different concepts of what a cooperative ought to be, either a shareholder cooperative or a cooperative in the classical sense (see 10.5, 10.6 and 10.7).

11.4 Dealing with the challenges to cooperation

The peasants who viewed the existing imagined cooperative as a fake have to face the same challenges to cooperation if they want to transform the organization. Some of these challenges were external, some, however, were internal to the organization of the existing imagined cooperative. It would probably not be enough to change the leadership of the organization in order to transform it into a "real cooperative" like some peasants imagined.

If the cooperative continues to produce for the market, competition would still be tough, benefits limited in comparison to incomes from wage labor in the cities, and the

risk of not being able to sell (niche) products for a good price would still exist. Hence, some intellectuals in the NRR movement propose economic cooperation that is not oriented to the market, for example public work to improve the material condition of the village (see 1.3.4). However, if the peasants choose to produce for the market, there are some things they might want to change in order to arrive at cooperation.

As I showed in my analysis there was outside support both from the state and from non-state actors. The state supported the NRR projects with rewards and tax exemption. Urban intellectuals, social activists and benevolent individuals supported the NRR projects with social capital (for example, contacts to journalists, companies, or officials in order to channel state support to the NRR projects) as well as through buying the cooperative's products. Involved NRR intellectuals told me that it was not possible for them to speak with all the peasants. Instead they chose to speak to the leaders (领袖 *lǐngxiù*) in the sense of models, namely to those peasants whom they expect to be able to guide the other peasants. In the NRR projects focusing on economic cooperation there existed a division of labor between managing village cadres and working peasants. Wáng Wěi, who was the village party branch secretary, the chairperson of the village committee as well as of the cooperative, controlled most of those links to the state as well as to the urban intellectuals and other benevolent individuals. Informally he influenced many of the cooperative's decisions.

From my perspective, the abolition of this division of labor within the cooperative projects is necessary for them to be successful. To officially have the right to elect a council or even to have a direct say in decision-making (instead of electing a leadership) is probably not enough. Concerning informal decision-making, it seems to be crucial who did empowering tasks such as managing and especially who controlled the contacts to the outside and, hence, to outside resources. The power of my two main informants stem from these contacts, both Wáng Wěi's power to control the NRR projects that focused on the market (this was not the case in the Financial Cooperative, which was not oriented towards the market to sell something) and Hú Qǐhuá's power to resist as he could use these contacts to sell niche products without the cooperative. Other peasants did not have this power as they depended on Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres. Therefore, I suspect that if Hú Qǐhuá (and the other members of the former Rice Association) simply replaced Wáng Wěi and the other village cadres, this unequal distribution of power would still exist. A possible solution would be the rotation, or even distribution, of crucial tasks such as the contact to officials, intellectuals and businessman,

among all members of the cooperative. If one focuses on the division of labor in connection with decision-making, one gets back to the basic meaning conveyed in the English word cooperation as well as in the Chinese word *hézuò* (合作), namely “to work or to do together” rather than “to own together”.

If self-management and cooperation could be realized through the abolition of the division of labor within the cooperative NRR projects in the village, indirect effects might offset the direct, limited benefits these projects could offer the peasants in a monetary form, within the bigger context of global capitalism. If new social relations came into existence in the village, they would probably open up new imaginings about possible social relations in other places as well. Probably, as many peasants are migrant workers too, these counter-imaginings of cooperation would migrate to the cities and connect new rural reconstruction to the social struggles of (migrant) workers in the cities.

11.5 Further research on New Rural Reconstruction

Some authors argue that the new cooperative movement in China, referring to a movement broader than the NRR movement, namely to the recent increase of peasant professional cooperatives, “influenced the re-organization of the economic structure, increased the income of farmers and influenced judicial legislation” and that the emergence of the new cooperative model “has once again proven itself to be the most sustainable model in times of rural crisis” (Zhao 2011:697–698). Although from my own political perspective, I wish I could share this assessment, some of these conclusions seem to stand on a weak empirical base. While it is of course undeniable that a new National Cooperative Law was passed in 2007, I propose caution regarding claims about tangible benefits for the peasants. Of course my empirical findings about limited benefits for peasants might be an exception. However, my two main informants, two fierce adversaries concerning the cooperative projects within the village, shared the view that many of China’s new professional cooperatives did not benefit the peasants, and that in many cases private enterprises only changed their name in the wake of the new law on cooperatives (WW, 2011-05-15a:279–285; FN, 2011-04-23). If this was really the case, and becoming a professional cooperative was mainly about changing the name of an organization, then one could hardly claim that the cooperative movement influenced the reorganization of

the economic structure. Therefore, lacking more in-depth empirical evidence, I suggest being cautious about such general conclusions.

Concluding from my own research experience, it is probably not enough to stay at a village for a few hours, or even a few days, to conduct interviews with leaders of the cooperative, village cadres, other local officials or those who initiated the projects if one wants to find out about what is really going on in the cooperative and the village.⁸⁸ Hence, I want to emphasize the need for empirical studies about the new cooperatives that are not only based on questionnaires and interviews with leaders of the cooperative,⁸⁹ but that are in-depth, including informal conversations with villagers as well as participant observation. Informal talks with villagers, like the ones I had during my first two weeks in the village (see 2.2), may seem pointless if they cannot tell you anything about the village's cooperative. However, is this not already important information about an organization that is supposed to benefit its members and to be self-organized by them? Probably the best way to study new peasant professional cooperatives and NRR projects would be, as in many other fields in social sciences, a combination of in-depth qualitative methods with quantitative methods.

In contrast to the above mentioned positive evaluation of the new cooperative movement, the results of my research rather fit into the critical overall picture about the state policy drawn by the Research Group on 'Constructing a New Socialist Countryside' as quoted by Pan and Du (2011:458):

In the allocation of this program's resources, most state guidance has already been reduced to guidance in the interest of state ministries, not the maximization of public interest. Rural elites have taken advantage of state policies to benefit themselves. Such policies thus do not contribute to improving the status of 'peasant subjects,' and they may lead to new problems such as exacerbating the class polarization of rural society by helping 'big peasants to eat small peasants,' and by supporting the development of capitalist enterprises masquerading as 'peasant cooperatives.'

⁸⁸ Many quantitative studies about peasant professional cooperatives, for examples those of Zhang et al. (2009), Deng et al. (2010), Jia et al. (2010), and Bijman and Hu (2011), are based on interviews with village cadres and leaders of cooperatives. I mention these articles here as examples of interview- and questionnaire-based research on new cooperatives in China. By doing so, I do not have the intention of judging the quality of these specific articles or denying the usefulness of such quantitative studies. These studies were informed by different research questions to my own. While these studies focused on formal organizational characteristics and functional activities, I turned my attention to social relations, to the division of labor and decision-making processes, to questions of value, power and exploitation.

⁸⁹ Jia et al. themselves note that future quantitative studies about *peasant* cooperatives need to include interviews with *peasants* (Jia et al. 2010:9). This would definitely be an important and necessary step. However, short-term stays with quick questionnaire interviews in order to cover a great number of peasants are maybe not enough. Some peasants might be cautious in telling what they really think about the cooperatives if one keeps in mind the possible class and patron-client like relation between leaders of cooperatives and their members which I have described and analyzed here. Building trust takes some time.

Based on interviews with leaders of cooperatives Jia et al. already found several “empty-shell” cooperatives that did not provide services to its members but still received support from the government (Jia et al. 2010:4 n. 12). However, the cooperative projects I studied would have not fallen into this category. Rather it would have fallen under the category of cooperatives where the founding members held most of the cooperative’s shares. Researchers found that in most cooperatives “share-ownership is concentrated in the hands of the founding members, with the chairman the largest shareholder” (Bijman and Hu 2011:109). It seems reasonable to me to suspect that the class and patron-client relations I identified within the cooperative projects can be found in many of these cooperatives as well.

This does not mean denying the existing potential of the cooperative model and the new cooperative movement to become a sustainable model for dealing with the three rural issues. As I have argued in the theoretical chapter, imagined cooperatives, like the ones I studied in Shǔidàozhuāng, have the potential to be transformed to cooperatives in the classical sense under certain circumstances if peasants struggle for it.

Short Descriptions of Involved Persons

All names below are fictitious and not the real names of the persons involved.

Chén Mùgēn

Chairperson of the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid and the seniors' association.

Chén Yùjiàn

Village cadre, responsible for the Happy Pig Small Group, member of the Happy Pig Small Group, shareholder in the Small Group for Ecological Rice, the Small Group for Ecological Minor Food Crops, and the Small Group for the Integrated Cultivation of Lotus Roots and Crabs, member of the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid.

Fāng Fēipéng

Worker in the Small Group for the Integrated Cultivation of Lotus Roots and Crabs.

Gāo Shùnkāi

Council member of the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid, former village cadre, former village accountant, chairperson of the former Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice, council member of the former Cooperative for Economic Development.

Hú Qǐhuá

Council member of the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid, previously responsible for the Happy Pig Small Group, former member of the Happy Pig Small Group, council member of the former Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice and of the former Cooperative for Economic Development.

Huáng Guóqiáng

Village cadre, responsible for the Happy Pig Farm, shareholder in the Happy Pig Farm, member of the Happy Pig Small Group, member of the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid.

Huáng Jiànguó

Village party branch cadre, former village cadre, responsible for the Small Group for the Integrated Cultivation of Lotus Roots and Crabs, shareholder in the Small Group for Ecological Rice, the Small Group for Ecological Minor Food Crops, and the Small Group for the Integrated Cultivation of Lotus Roots and Crabs, member of the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid.

Huáng Yǒumín

Council member of the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid, responsible for the Happy Pig Small Group, member of the Happy Pig Small Group.

Huáng Yùtíng

Worker in the Small Group for Organic Rice and Wheat, member of the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid.

Lín Hǎibō

Shareholder in the Happy Pig Farm from a neighboring village.

Mǎ Zhìyǒng

So-called student volunteer, graduated in Economics, assisting Wáng Wěi in managing the cooperative projects.

Péng Yùhùi

Member of the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid.

Sūn Yúnlóng

Worker at the Happy Pig Farm.

Wáng Wěi

Village party branch secretary, chairperson of the village committee, member of the Standing Committees of the People's Congresses of Dàhé County as well as of Píngyuán Municipality, chairperson of the Peasant Cooperative Association, and the Professional Cooperative for Ecological Agricultural Products, shareholder in the Small Group for Ecological Rice, the Small Group for Ecological Minor Food Crops, the Small Group for the Integrated Cultivation of Lotus Roots and Crabs, and the Happy Pig Farm, member of the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid, husband of Zhèng Guìhuā.

Wáng Yàjūn

Village cadre, village accountant, responsible for the Small Group for Ecological Rice, and the Small Group for Ecological Minor Food Crops, shareholder in the Small Group for Ecological Rice, the Small Group for Ecological Minor Food Crops, the Small Group for the Integrated Cultivation of Lotus Roots and Crabs, and the Happy Pig Farm, member of the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid, and the Happy Pig Small Group.

Zhào Yùgāng

Council member of the Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid, chairperson of the former Cooperative for Economic Development, member of the former Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice.

Zhèng Guìhuā

Worker in the Small Group for Ecological Rice, and the Small Group for Ecological Minor Food Crops, wife of Wáng Wěi.

Zhū Xiǎojiān

NRR intellectual at a university in Běijīng, high political offices at Dàhé County and Píngyuán Municipality.

Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
ER group	Small Group for Ecological Rice
FC	Cooperative for Mutual Financial Aid (or Financial Cooperative)
HP farm	Happy Pig Farm
HP group	Small Group for Raising Happy Pigs (or Happy Pig Small Group)
LC group	Small Group for the Integrated Cultivation of Lotus Roots and Crabs (or Lotus and Crabs Small Group)
MFC group	Small Group for Ecological Minor Food Crops
NRR	New Rural Reconstruction
NRRM	New Rural Reconstruction Movement
RA	Association for Environmentally Harmless Rice (or Rice Association)

Bibliography

Ahlers, Anna L., and Gunter Schubert

- 2009 “Building a New Socialist Countryside”—Only a Political Slogan? *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 38(4):35–62.

Alitto, Guy S.

- 1986 *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity*. Berkley: University of California Press.

Ash, Robert

- 2009 Agriculture. In *Brill’s Encyclopedia of China*. Daniel Leese, ed. Pp. 20–25. Leiden: Brill.

Bhaskar, Roy

- 1998 *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences*. London: Routledge.
- 2008 *A Realist Theory of Science*. London: Verso.

Bianco, Lucien

- 2001 *Peasants Without the Party: Grass-roots Movements in Twentieth-Century China*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.

Bijman, Jos, and Hu Dinghuan

- 2011 The Rise of New Farmer Cooperatives in China: Evidence from Hubei Province. *Journal of Rural Cooperation* 39(2):99–113.

Bodemann, Y. Michal

- 1982 Class Rule as Patronage: Kinship, Local Ruling Cliques and the State in Rural Sardinia. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 9(2).

Bourdieu, Pierre

- 1986 The Forms of Capital. *In Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, John G. Richardson, ed. Pp. 241–258. New York: Greenwood.

Cabestan, Jean-Pierre

- 2009 Provincial and Subprovincial Government Structure since 1949: Overview. *In Encyclopedia of Modern China*, vol. 3. David Pong, ed. Pp. 204–205. Detroit: Scribner.

Chang, Gene H., and Guanyhong J. Wen

- 1997 Communal Dining and the Chinese Famine of 1958–1961. *Economic and Cultural Change* 46(1):1–34.

Charmaz, Kathy

- 2001 Grounded Theory. *In The American Tradition in Qualitative Research*, vol. 2. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. Pp. 244–270. London: SAGE Publications.

Danermark, Berth, Mats Ekström, Liselotte Jakobsen, and Jan Ch. Karlsson

- 2002 *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*. London: Routledge.

Day, Alexander

- 2007 Return of the Peasant: History, Politics, and the Peasantry in Postsocialist China. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of California.
- 2008a The Central China School of Rural Studies: Guest Editor's Introduction. Theme issue, "The Central China School of Rural Studies," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* 41(1):3–9.
- 2008b The End of the Peasant?: New Rural Reconstruction in China. *boundary 2* 35(2):49–73.

Day, Alexander, and Matthew A. Hale

- 2007 Guest Editor's Introduction. Theme issue, "New Rural Reconstruction," *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* 39(4):3–9.

Deng, Hengshan, Huang Jikun Huang, Xu Zhigang, and Scott Rozelle

- 2010 Policy support and emerging farmer professional cooperatives in rural China. *China Economic Review* 21(4):495–507.

DeWalt, Kathleen M., and Billie R. DeWalt with Coral B. Wayland

- 1998 Participant Observation. *In Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*. H. Russell Bernard, ed. Pp. 259–299. Lanham: Altamira Press.

Dillon, Michael

- 2009 *Contemporary China: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.

Edelman, Marc

- 1999 *Peasants Against Globalization: Rural Social Movements in Costa Rica*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw

- 1995 *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fan, Cindy C.

- 2008 *China on the Move: Migration, the State, and the Household*. New York: Routledge.

Glaser, Barney G., and Anselm L. Strauss

- 1998 *Grounded Theory: Strategien qualitativer Forschung*. Bern: Verlag Hans Huber.

Graeber, David

- 2001 *Toward An Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams*, New York: Palgrave.
- 2005 *Value: Anthropological Theories of Value*. In *A Handbook of Economic Anthropology*. James G. Carrier, ed. Pp. 439–454. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- 2011 *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*. New York: Melville House.

Gudeman, Stephen

- 2005 *Community and Economy: Economy's base*. In *A Handbook of Economic Anthropology*. James G. Carrier, ed. Pp. 94–106. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Hale, Matthew A.

- 2009 *Translator's Introduction*. In *Senior's Organizations in China's New Rural Reconstruction: Experiments in Hubei and Henan*. Matthew A. Hale, trans. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 10(1):138–139.

Hann, Chris

- 2005 *Property*. In *A Handbook of Economic Anthropology*. James G. Carrier, ed. Pp. 110–124. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- 2009 *Class*. In *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. Alan Barnard, and Jonathan Spencer, eds. Pp. 98–99. London: Routledge.

Hayford, Charles W.

- 1990 *To the People: James Yen and Village China*. New York: Columbia University Press.

He, Baogang

- 2009 Provincial and Subprovincial Government Structure since 1949: Villages. *In Encyclopedia of Modern China*, vol. 3. David Pong, ed. Pp. 213–214. Detroit: Scribner.

He, Huili

- 2007 Experiments of New Rural Reconstruction in Lankao. Huiping Iler, trans. Theme issue, “New Rural Reconstruction,” *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* 39(4):50–79.

Heberer, Thomas

- 2009a Cadre System. *In Encyclopedia of Modern China*, vol. 1. David Pong, ed. Pp. 159–161. Detroit: Scribner.
- 2009b Henan. *In Encyclopedia of Modern China*, vol. 2. David Pong, ed. Pp. 196–199. Detroit: Scribner.

Herrmann-Pillath, Carsten

- 2009a Income. *In Encyclopedia of Modern China*, vol. 2. David Pong, ed. Pp. 297–299. Detroit: Scribner.
- 2009b Land Reform of 1950. *In Encyclopedia of Modern China*, vol. 3. David Pong, ed. Pp. 300–302. Detroit: Scribner.

Isaac, Barry L.

- 2005 Karl Polanyi. *In A Handbook of Economic Anthropology*. James G. Carrier, ed. Pp. 14–25. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Jacka, Tamara

- 1992 The Public/Private Dichotomy and the Gender Division of Rural Labor. *In Economic Reform and Social Change in China*. Andrew Watson, ed. Pp. 117–144. New York: Routledge.

Jia, Xiangping, Huang Jikun, and Xu Zhigang

- 2010 Marketing of farmerprofessionalcooperatives in the wave of transformedagro-foodmarket in China. *China Economic Review* (in Press): doi:10.1016/j.chieco.2010.07.001.

Kelliher, Daniel

- 1992 *Peasant Power in China: The Era of Rural Reform, 1979 – 1989*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Kolb, Raimund Th.

- 2006 *Agrarzonen*. In *China: Lexikon zu Geographie und Wirtschaft*. Brunhild Stai-ger, Stefan Friedrich, and Hans-Wilm Schütte, eds. Pp. 110–113. Darmstadt: WBG.

Li, Huaiyin

- 2006 *The First Encounter: Peasant Resistance to State Control of Grain in East Chi-na in the Mid-1950s*. *China Quarterly* 185:145–162.

Little, Daniel

- 2009 *Peasants*. In *Encyclopedia of Modern China*, vol. 3. David Pong, ed. Pp. 81–83. Detroit: Scribner.

Marx, Karl

- 2005 *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, vol. 1: *Der Produktionsprozeß des Kapitals*. Marx Engels Werke, 23. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag.

Mauss, Marcel

- 1968 *Die Gabe: Die Form und Funktion des Austauschs in archaischen Gesellschaften*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Mayring, Philipp

- 2002 *Einführung in die qualitative Sozialforschung. Eine Anleitung zu qualitativem Denken*. Weinheim: Beltz Verlag.

Mitchell, Jon P.

- 2009 *Patrons and Clients*. In *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. Alan Barnard, and Jonathan Spencer, eds. Pp. 416–417. London: Routledge.

Nash, June, Jorge Dandler, and Nicholas S. Hopkins, eds.

- 1976 *Popular Participation in Social Change. Cooperatives, Collectives, and Nationalized Industry*. The Hague: Mouton.

Nash, June, and Nicholas S. Hopkins

- 1976 *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Cooperatives, Collectives, and Self-Management*. In *Popular Participation in Social Change. Cooperatives, Collectives, and Nationalized Industry*. Nash, June, Jorge Dandler, and Nicholas S. Hopkins, eds. Pp. 3–32. The Hague: Mouton.

Ong, Lynette H.

- 2009 Agricultural Banking. *In* Encyclopedia of Modern China, vol. 3. David Pong, ed. Pp. 313–314. Detroit: Scribner.

Padovani, Florence, and Antonia Finnane

- 2009 Peasantry since 1900. *In* Encyclopedia of Modern China, vol. 3. David Pong, ed. Pp. 78–81. Detroit: Scribner.

Pan, Jia'en, and Du Jie

- 2011 Alternative Responses to 'the Modern Dream': The Sources and Contradictions of Rural Reconstruction in China. Matthew A. Hale, trans. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 12(3):454–464.

Polanyi, Karl

- 1957 The Economy as Instituted Process. *In* Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory. Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg, and Harry W. Pearson, eds. Pp. 243–270. New York: Free Press.

Poulantzas, Nicos

- 1975 *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*. London: NLB.

Robotham, Don

- 2005 Political Economy. *In* A Handbook of Economic Anthropology. James G. Carrier, ed. Pp. 41–58. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Rothstein, Frances

- 1979 The Class Basis of Patron-Client Relations. *Latin American Perspectives* 6(2):25–35.

Sayer, Andrew

- 1992 *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach*. London: Routledge.

Schädler, Monika

- 1998 Gesellschaftlicher Umbruch im ländlichen China: Wie aus Bauern Arbeiter werden. *In* Wie aus Bauern Arbeiter wurden: Wiederkehrende Prozesse des gesellschaftlichen Wandels im Norden und im Süden einer Welt. Olaf Bockhorn, Ingebor Grau, and Walter Schicho, eds. Pp. 55–68. Frankfurt: Brandes und Apsel/Südwind.

Scott, James C.

- 1985 *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- 1989 Everyday Forms of Resistance. *In* Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance. Forrest D. Colburn, ed. Pp. 3–33. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.

Shue, Vivienne

- 1988 *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Strübing, Jörg

- 2004 *Grounded Theory: Zur sozialtheoretischen und epistemologischen Fundierung des Verfahrens der empirisch begründeten Theoriebildung*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Taubmann, Wolfgang

- 2007 Naturräumliche Gliederung und wirtschaftsgeographische Grundlagen. *In* Länderbericht China: Geschichte – Politik – Wirtschaft – Gesellschaft. Doris Fischer, and Michael Lackner, eds. Pp. 15–49. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.

Thøgersen, Stig

- 2002 A County of Culture: Twentieth Century China Seen From the Village Schools of Zouping, Shandong. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- 2009 Revisiting a Dramatic Triangle: The State, Villagers, and Social Activists in Chinese Rural Reconstruction Projects. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 38(4):9–33.

Truschkat, Inga, Manuela Kaiser, and Vera Reinartz

- 2005 Forschen nach Rezept? Anregungen zum praktischen Umgang mit der Grounded Theory in Qualifikationsarbeiten. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* 6(2), Art. 22. <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0502221>, accessed May 8, 2009.

Turner, Terence

- 2008 Marxian Value Theory: An Anthropological Perspective. *Anthropological Theory* 8(1):43–56.

Unger, Jonathan

- 1989 State and Peasant in Post-Revolution China. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 17(1):114–136.
- 2002 *The Transformation of Rural China*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.
- 2009 Rural Development since 1978: Overview. *In* *Encyclopedia of Modern China*, vol. 3. David Pong, ed. Pp. 309–312. Detroit: Scribner.

Vargas-Cetina, Gabriela

- 2005 Anthropology and Cooperatives: From the Community Paradigm to the Ephemeral Association in Chiapas, Mexico. *Critique of Anthropology* 25(3):229–251.

Walker, Kenneth R.

- 1965 Planning in Chinese Agriculture: Socialisation and the Private Sector, 1956–1962. Chicago: Aldine.

Wang, Ximing

- 2009 Seniors' organizations in China's New Rural Reconstruction: Experiments in Hubei and Henan. Matthew A. Hale, trans. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 10(1):138–153.

Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, Susanne

- 2008 The Distance between State and Rural Society in the PRC: Reading Document No 1 (February 2004). *Journal of Environmental Management* 87(2):216–225.

Wen, Tiejun

- 2001 Centenary Reflections on the “Three Dimensional Problem” of Rural China. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 2(2):287–295.
- 2007 Deconstructing Modernization. Huiping Iler, trans. Theme issue, “New Rural Reconstruction,” *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* 39(4):10–25.

Worsley, Peter, ed.

- 1971 *Two Blades of Grass: Rural Cooperatives in Agricultural Modernization*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Zhang, Heather Xiaoquan

- 2009 Three Rural Issues. In *Encyclopedia of Modern China*, vol. 3. David Pong, ed. Pp. 316–318. Detroit: Scribner.

Zhang, Pingjie, Zhang Yuan, Hu Jingwei and Huang Ling

- 2009 Developing Status of Specialized Farmers Cooperatives: Based on the Investigation Data of 162 Villages in Sichuan Province. *Asian Agricultural Research* 1(8):15–19.

Zhao, Li

- 2011 Understanding the New Rural Co-operative Movement: towards rebuilding civil society in China. *Journal of Contemporary China* 20(71):679–698.

Zhou, Xueguang

- 1993 Unorganized Interests and Collective Action in Communist China. *American Sociological Review* 58:54–73.

Zweig, David

- 1989 Struggling over Land in China: Peasant Resistance after Collectivization, 1966–1986. *In* *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Forrest D. Colburn, ed. Pp. 151–174. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.
- 1997 *Freeing China's Farmers: Rural Restructuring in the Reform Era*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.

Websites

URL 1

<http://www.ripesseu.net/en/definitions/solidarity-economy.html>, accessed November 07, 2011.

URL 2

<https://catalyst.uw.edu/workspace/halema/11372/58749>, accessed October 20, 2011.

Interviews, Interview Reports, and Fieldnotes

FN (plus date) refers to field notes.

IR (plus abbreviation of name plus date) refers to interview reports.

This is the list of the interviews in alphabetical order according to the abbreviated names used in the references in the text:

CMG = Chén Mùgēn

2011-04-29 1:27, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Jiǎ Yànyàn.

CYJ = Chén Yùjiàn

2011-05-29 1:08, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.

FFP = Fāng Fēipéng

2011-05-29 2:00, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.

GSK = Gāo Shùnkāi

2011-06-03 1:49, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.

HGQ = Huáng Guóqiáng

2011-05-27a 0:45, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.

2011-05-27b 1:16, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.

HJG = Huáng Jiànguó

2011-06-04 1:23, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.

HQH = Hú Qǐhuá

2011-05-06a 0:59, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.

2011-05-06b 0:53, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Chén Yíngyíng.

2011-05-07 2:18, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Chén Yíngyíng.

2011-05-25 1:52, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Chén Yíngyíng.

- 2011-05-27a 1:11, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.
2011-05-27b 1:25, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Chén Yíngyíng.
2011-06-05 3:07, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.
2011-06-07 2:29, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.

HYM = Huáng Yǒumín

- 2011-05-05 1:04, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn and her fellow students.
2011-05-16 0:30, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.

HYT = Huáng Yùtíng

- 2011-06-04 0:45, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.

MZY = Mǎ Zhìyǒng

- 2011-06-03 1:25, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.

PYH = Péng Yùhùi

- 2011-05-10 1:15, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.
2011-05-15 0:32, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.

SYL = Sūn Yúnlóng

- 2011-05-13 3:30, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.
2011-05-18 1:02, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.

WW = Wáng Wěi

- 2011-05-03 1:05, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Sūn Tòng.
2011-05-06 1:28, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Jiǎ Yànyàn.
2011-05-15a 1:37, interviewed by Ph.D. students from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.
2011-05-15b 1:09, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Kǒng Zhìyíng.
2011-05-29 1:40, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Jiǎ Yànyàn.
2011-06-08a 0:45, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.
2011-06-08b 0:48, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Sūn Tòng.
2011-06-08c 1:00, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Jiǎ Yànyàn.

WYJ = Wáng Yàjūn

- 2011-05-25 1:33, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.

ZYG = Zhào Yùgāng

2011-05-28 2:15, interviewed by Christof Lammer, transcribed by Wáng Yàn.

Abstract

The New Rural Reconstruction (NRR) Movement promotes cooperation in the Chinese countryside as an alternative to neoliberal marketization and privatization. In this diploma thesis I focus on NRR projects initiated by a NRR intellectual in one Chinese village in a poor county in the Hénán Province. I use interviews and participant observation as methods of data collection. In the analysis I use concepts from economic anthropology, for example from Karl Polanyi, from political economy, and from David Graeber's anthropological theory of value. Furthermore, I discuss anthropologists' concepts about cooperatives, namely Gabriela Vargas-Cetina's "ephemeral associations" and Marc Edelman's "imagined organizations". My main interest is the internal organization of those projects that focused on economic cooperation, their connection to the outside world, as well as the chances, risks, and limitations.

In the projects there was a rough division of labor between the managing shareholders of the cooperative, mainly the village cadres on the one side, and working peasants on the other. Furthermore, a gender division of labor existed within the cooperative between managing husbands and working wives. In the marketing cooperative-like projects, being a member basically meant selling products to the cooperative. In the production cooperative-like projects the peasants sold their labor power to the shareholding village cadres. In the marketing cooperative-like small groups, the control of the means of exchange, and in the production cooperative-like small groups, the control of the means of production, were essential for (potentially) appropriating the values produced by the peasants in the countryside and materialized into money and other material tokens of appreciation in the cities. The competition the cooperative faced on the market was tough. The benefits for the ordinary peasants were limited, even in comparison to the low income from wage labor as migrant workers in the city, and connected with risks.

Through these projects, new surplus became available in the village, namely state support and surplus other intermediaries previously appropriated. The village cadres,

especially Wáng Wěi, who was village party branch secretary and chairperson of the village committee, had a big influence on many decisions and controlled the cooperative. The village cadres themselves thought that this was a good thing; other villagers thought that it was not. They claimed that the village cadres made profit with the NRR projects and benefited from state support; the village cadres themselves claimed that they made no monetary profit.

Through the NRR projects, existing unequal relations were reinforced and inequalities reproduced. Before the NRR projects were initiated, different villagers had occupied different class places *outside* of the village and patron-client relations between village cadres, who, being the local link to the state, had redistributive power, and peasants had already existed. With the production cooperative-like projects, new direct class relations *within* the village were established. The marketing cooperative-like projects had the possibility of appropriating the surplus value other intermediaries had extracted from the peasants before.

Concerning informal decision-making, it was crucial who carried out empowering tasks and controlled the contacts to the outside and, hence, external resources. The power of my two main informants stemmed from these contacts, both Wáng Wěi's power to control the NRR projects and Hú Qīhuá's power to resist, as he could use these contacts to sell niche products without the cooperative. Thus, unlike other peasants, he did not depend on the village cadres.

There was disagreement in the village as to whether the NRR projects were real or fake cooperatives. I propose to view the NRR projects in the village as "imagined cooperatives" with the following characteristics: They were nominal cooperatives and imagined as cooperatives by those who dominate it and by those who support it. They were non-cooperatives in the sense that patron-client and class relations existed between those involved in the organizations. Furthermore, the NRR projects were potential cooperatives due to the tension between what the imagined cooperatives were at that moment and what some (potential) members of the organizations imagined a cooperative to be.

The results of my research fit into a critical general picture of the state policy of "Constructing a New Socialist Countryside" that points out that rural elites take advantage of this state policy and the NRR movement to benefit themselves. This does not mean denying the existing potential of the movement. Imagined cooperatives could be transformed under certain circumstances if peasants struggle for it.

Curriculum Vitae

Personal data

Name: Christof Lammer, Bakk.phil.
Date of birth: 17.06.1985
Place of birth: Graz, Styria, Austria
Citizenship: Austria

School education

1991-1995: Primary School Peesen, Styria, Austria
1995-2003: Secondary School Weiz, Styria, Austria
2003-2004: Civilian service at Lebenshilfe Weiz, Styria, Austria

University education

2004-2009: Bachelor in Chinese Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria;
focus on 20th century rural China
since 2005: Diploma in Cultural and Social Anthropology at the University of
Vienna, Austria; focus on economic anthropology
2006-2007: Language study (Chinese) at Tiānjīn University, China
since 2009: Master in Chinese Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria

Special awards

Performance scholarships from the University of Vienna: 2005, 2006, 2007
Scholarship of the Chinese Scholarship Council for language study in China 2006-2007

Languages

German
English
Chinese
French

Kurzdarstellung

Die Bewegung zum neuen ländlichen Aufbau (NLA) fördert Kooperation im ländlichen China als Alternative zu neoliberaler Vermarktlichung und Privatisierung. In dieser Diplomarbeit beschäftige ich mich mit den von einer Intellektuellen initiierten NLA-Projekten in einem chinesischen Dorf in einem armen Kreis in der Provinz Hénán. Als Methoden verwende ich Interviews und teilnehmende Beobachtung. In der Analyse arbeite ich mit Konzepten aus der ökonomischen Anthropologie – unter anderem von Karl Polanyi – aus der politischen Ökonomie und aus der anthropologischen Theorie des Wertes von David Graeber. Außerdem diskutiere ich Konzepte von AnthropologInnen zu Genossenschaften, nämlich “ephemeral associations” von Gabriela Vargas-Cetina und “imagined organizations” von Marc Edelman. Mein Interesse gilt vor allem der internen Organisation der Projekte, deren Verbindungen zur Außenwelt, sowie ihren Möglichkeiten, Risiken und Grenzen.

In den NLA-Projekten gab es eine grobe Arbeitsteilung zwischen einerseits verwaltenden Anteilseignern der Genossenschaft, hauptsächlich Dorfkader und den arbeitenden Bauern und Bäuerinnen – beziehungsweise den arbeitenden Ehefrauen der Dorfkader – andererseits. In jenen Projekten, die Vermarktungsgenossenschaften ähnlich waren, bedeutete die Mitgliedschaft in der Genossenschaft, Produkte an die Genossenschaft zu verkaufen. In den Produktionsgenossenschaften verkauften die Bauern und Bäuerinnen ihre Arbeitskraft an die Genossenschaft. In ersteren war die Kontrolle der Tauschmittel und in zweiteren die Kontrolle der Produktionsmittel essentiell für die (potentielle) Aneignung der von den Bauern und Bäuerinnen am Land produzierten Werte und deren Materialisierung in Geld und andere materielle Token der Anerkennung in den Städten. Am Markt war die Genossenschaft mit starker Konkurrenz konfrontiert. Die Vorteile für die gewöhnlichen Bauern und Bäuerinnen waren begrenzt und mit Risiken verbunden.

Durch diese Projekte wurde neuer Mehrwert im Dorf verfügbar, nämlich staatliche Unterstützung und der Mehrwert, den sich früher andere Zwischenhändler angeeig-

net hatten. Die Dorfkader, allen voran Wáng Wěi, der Parteisekretär und Vorstand des Dorfkomitees, hatten großen Einfluss auf viele Entscheidungen und kontrollierten die Genossenschaft. Die Dorfkader selbst dachten, dass das eine gute Sache sei, andere DorfbewohnerInnen sahen das jedoch anders: Sie behaupteten, dass die Dorfkader mit den NLA-Projekten Profit machten und ihnen die staatliche Unterstützung zugute käme; die Dorfkader selbst gaben an, dass sie keine monetären Profite machten.

Durch die NLA-Projekte wurden bestehende ungleiche Verhältnisse verstärkt und Ungleichheiten reproduziert. Unterschiedliche DorfbewohnerInnen nahmen unterschiedliche Klassenplätze *außerhalb* des Dorfes ein und Patron-Klient-Beziehungen zwischen den Dorfkadern und den Bauern und BäuerInnen existierten bereits bevor die NLA-Projekte initiiert wurden. Mit den Projekten, die Produktionsgenossenschaften ähnelten, wurden neue direkte Klassenbeziehungen *im Dorf* geschaffen. Die Vermarktungsgenossenschaften hatten die Möglichkeit, Mehrwert anzueignen, den früher andere Zwischenhändler von den Bauern und Bäuerinnen abgezweigt hatten.

Bezüglich informeller Entscheidungsfindung war es entscheidend, wer die ermächtigenden Tätigkeiten erledigte und die Kontakte zur Außenwelt, und daher externe Ressourcen, kontrollierte. Die Macht meiner beiden Hauptinformanten entsprang diesen Kontakten: sowohl Wáng Wěis Macht, die NLA-Projekte zu kontrollieren, als auch Hú Qǐhuás Macht, Widerstand zu leisten, weil er diese Kontakte verwenden konnte, um Nischenprodukte ohne die Genossenschaft zu verkaufen und daher nicht wie die anderen Bauern und Bäuerinnen von den Dorfkadern abhängig war.

Im Dorf gab es Uneinigkeit darüber, ob die NLA-Projekte echte oder gefälschte Genossenschaften waren. Ich schlage vor, die NLA-Projekte im Dorf als imaginierte Genossenschaften (*imagined cooperatives*) mit den folgenden Charakteristika zu sehen: Sie waren dem Namen nach Genossenschaften und wurden von denen, die sie dominierten und unterstützten als Genossenschaften vorgestellt. Sie waren Nicht-Genossenschaften in dem Sinn, dass zwischen den involvierten Personen Patron-KlientInnen- und Klassenbeziehungen existierten. Darüber hinaus waren die NLA-Projekte potentielle Genossenschaften aufgrund der Spannung zwischen dem was die vorgestellten Genossenschaften im Moment darstellten und was sich einige (potentielle) Mitglieder der Organisation unter Genossenschaft vorstellten. Imaginierte Genossenschaften könnten unter bestimmten Umständen transformiert werden, wenn Bauern und Bäuerinnen dafür kämpfen.

Lebenslauf

Persönliche Daten

Name: Christof Lammer, Bakk.phil.
Geburtsdatum: 17.06.1985
Geburtsort: Graz, Steiermark, Österreich
Staatsbürgerschaft: Österreich

Schulausbildung

1991-1995: Volksschule Peesen
1995-2003: Bundesgymnasium Weiz
2003-2004: Zivildienst bei der Lebenshilfe Weiz

Studienverlauf

2004-2009: Bakkalaureatsstudium Sinologie an der Universität Wien, Österreich, mit Fokus auf das ländliche China im 20. Jahrhundert
seit 2005: Diplomstudium Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie an der Universität Wien, Österreich, mit Fokus auf ökonomische Anthropologie
2006-2007: Sprachstudium an der Tiānjīn Universität, China
seit 2009: Masterstudium Sinologie an der Universität Wien, Österreich

Besondere Auszeichnungen

Leistungstipendien der Universität Wien: 2005, 2006, 2007
Stipendium des Chinese Scholarship Council für Sprachstudium in China 2006-2007

Fremdsprachenkenntnisse

Englisch
Chinesisch
Französisch

