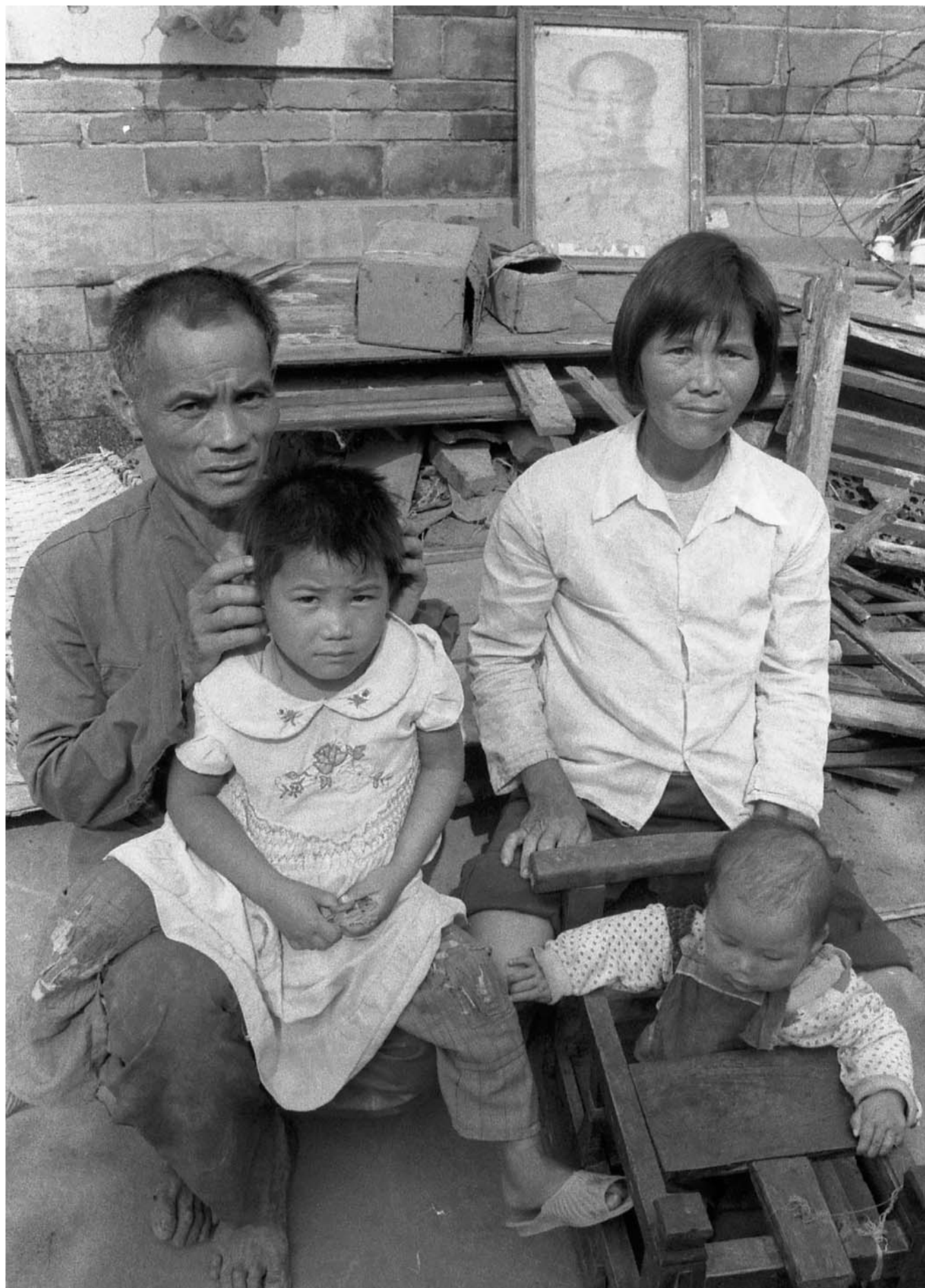


IX



A Raid on Long Wan

A middle-aged villager walks his bicycle down a narrow village lane. He's eager to talk with someone about what happened in Long Wan last night.

While the villagers were sleeping, carloads of cadres - some carrying guns - made a surprise raid on the village. The cadres came to seize men and women who had violated the country's one-child-per-family birth-control policy.

He says about 40 people were detained by the authorities last night. No one knows where the villagers were taken, but many believe that at least some of the captured villagers will be forced to have a sterilization operation.

The villagers were angry when the cadres entered the village, but they didn't try to stop them. In nearby Mao Village, the farmers threw stones at the cadres, but in Long Wan no one lifted a finger against them.

The villager says that farmers seized by the authorities are usually not allowed to return to the village for a week. He is especially concerned this time because his nephew was seized in the raid.

He is also be worried about the fate of his son, whose wife has given birth to two daughters but has yet to bear a son.

Although he is eager to tell his story, a neighbor warns him that talking about what happened with a foreigner could get him into trouble with the authorities.

But the farmer says, No, it's important for people outside China to know what is happening in Long Wan.

He says the needs of the villagers are never taken into account when the officials try to enforce the country's birth-control policy.

Having children, he says, is what the villagers live for and one of the few events that bring real joy to their otherwise harsh lives.

Look at the pigs, he says, even the pigs like to have a lot of babies. The more babies the pig has the better.

In a nearby house, last night's raid still resonates. A child sobs as his mother quietly tries to calm him. The child's uncle says he's crying because he misses his father, who was detained by the cadres last night.

The child was in the house when the cadres arrived and was frightened by what happened. The boy's father already has three children, so the officials will force him to have an operation, the uncle says.

When the cadres came to the village last night, they took away people who had three children. In the past the villagers have been allowed to have at least two children, the uncle says.

When the cadres identify a family with too many children, the husband or the wife must have an operation; in this family, it was the husband who agreed to leave with the cadres.

The uncle says that although his older brother was lucky and already has two sons, he still wanted a daughter. If he had a daughter, he could someday trade her to another family to get a wife for his son.

The uncle feels bitter about last night's raid because he recently got married and would also like to have three or four children.

If a farmer has only daughters, the uncle says, who will take care of him when he grows old? When the parents grow old they rely on their children for support. The daughter will live with her husband's family in another village, but the son and his wife will live in his parents' home.

What would happen, he says, if he had only one son and his son's wife hadn't any brothers? His son would have to care for four elderly people - his parents and his wife's parents. This would be too great a burden for one couple.

Babies on the Street

She walks through the fields with a set of panniers hanging from her shoulders. The reed baskets at either end of the long pole are filled with vegetables harvested from the lowland fields.

The woman is taller than other village women and strikingly attractive. She hasn't the worn out look of many farmers who spend long hours working under the fierce southern sun.

She enters her courtyard and fills a basin with water. She picks up her children's soiled clothing and starts to scrub them. A portrait of Chairman Mao gazes down from the wall behind her as she works.

Her life so far has been a good one, she says. She has a hardworking husband who seldom needs her to help him out in the fields. Most of her life now is spent at home cooking and cleaning for her children. Raising her three boys and a girl has been the focus of her life, she says.

Although she would like to have more children, she realizes it's impossible now. The cadres ordered her to have a sterilization operation and she agreed to their request. She can no longer have children even though she still wants to have them.

She says her childbearing years started off auspiciously because her first child was a boy, which is what most villagers hope for when they start to have children.

But after the birth of her second child, which was also a boy, the cadres ordered her to use an IUD to prevent additional pregnancies. She says the birth control device worked effectively, but she still felt the need to have more children.

When her sons went off to school the house was suddenly quiet...too quiet, she says. She missed having a house filled with children.

Then, one day she was walking in Zhanjiang when by chance she found a baby girl on the street. The child's parents had apparently abandoned her because they wanted to have a son rather than a daughter.

She picked up the child and took her home. At about the same time, her birth control device failed and she mysteriously became pregnant again. After giving birth to a third son, the authorities stepped in and forced her to have a sterilization operation.

She says she feels no bitterness toward the cadres for forcing her to have the operation. If it were possible she would continue to have children, but she knows it's out of the question now.

Finally a Son

Liang Zhe bends over a basin scrubbing clothes in her village home. Her granddaughter lies wrapped and sleeping in a harness on her back.

Watching over her and the family from the living room wall is a portrait of Mao Zedong. Mao is like a god, she says. Having his picture on the wall will bring the family good luck.

Liang Zhe says she was 17 years old when she married her husband and arrived in Long Wan. It was before liberation when the village was very poor. She had wanted to marry a city man but wasn't beautiful enough to attract one, she says.

Instead she married a Long Wan farmer and very quickly began to have children. There was never enough food but there were more than enough children, she says.

Daughter followed daughter until she had five of them. On her sixth attempt she finally gave birth to a son, the father of the child sleeping on her back today.

Liang Zhe says she understands why villagers prefer to have sons rather than daughters. Sons are always there to help their parents with the farm work. When sons marry, they remain in the village and continue to live with their parents, just as her son does now. A daughter marries outside and moves to another town or village.

Sons make a family feel more secure, she says. If there is trouble in the village, a son will be there to protect the family. If a family has sons, other villagers will be less likely to take advantage of them.

Liang Zhe says that ideally she would have preferred to have two sons and two daughters. She says it's unlikely that anyone in the village could have such a family now. If they try to have more than two children they will get into trouble with the local authorities.

Just the other day the cadres raided the village to collect people who had violated the country's birth-control policy, she says. They came in the middle of the night and dragged off "half-naked" people.

The people were so angry, she says. The cadres didn't even give them a chance to dress. They went to the home of one young man who lived alone with his mother. When they knocked on his door and nobody answered, they broke down the door and seized him.

He said: Why did you do that? What does this have to do with me? They said they didn't like his attitude and dragged him away with the others.

They are just like emperors, she says. They do what they want and you can't stop them. She says she's sure the Central Committee in Beijing wouldn't have approved of their behavior if they had known about it.

This is not the way government officials are supposed to act towards the people, she says. She believes that some members of the raiding party were from Huang Lue, a nearby village. The people in that village are murderers, she says.

Harsh Measures

Fines, abortions, and forced sterilization are the most common methods used by the government to control families who have violated the country's one-child-per-family birth control policy.

One villager says fines for bearing an extra child are at least 1,000 yuan ¼ a

sum that most farmers barely earn in a year from their work. One 15-year-old girl complains that she was forced to leave school to help her family out at home in part because of a 1,000-yuan fine imposed on her parents for having an additional child.

The villagers say that farmers who have two or more children are detained in the twice-annual raids. The villagers say the cadres arrive with a list of people they plan to detain and order violators to provide documents certifying that they have been sterilized or are using birth-control devices. Those in danger of being detained often flee when the cadres arrive.

In addition to the cadres, people from area work units (banks, offices, and government departments, for example) also take part in the raids ³/₄ many unwillingly, says one city resident. One woman in Long Wan says farmers from other villages also participate in the raids.

The villagers are taken to an undisclosed location and given lectures on the benefits of the birth-control policy. The officials try to persuade them that a sterilization operation or an abortion is the best choice for them.

The villagers are not allowed to return home until either the husband or the wife has agreed to an operation or an abortion, though they are not - in theory at least - forced to have the procedures.

One woman says that cadres advise couples with a girl and a boy to stop having children and to practice some form of birth control. They don't force anyone in the family to have an operation but may urge the woman to use an intrauterine device.

If a couple has two boys and neither partner is practicing birth control, the husband or wife may be a candidate for an operation. If a man and woman have three children ³/₄ regardless of the combination of boys and girls ³/₄ and aren't practicing birth control, they may also be targeted for an operation.

The Chinese government believes its birth control program is in the best interests of the Chinese people given the country's bloated 1.2 billion population. Many educated city-dwellers believe that a birth control policy is necessary in a country with the world's largest population, but even they think couples should at least be able to have two children.

Bad for Women

A village woman sits in a neighbor's courtyard nursing her son. A fierce tropical wind blows in from the sea but it doesn't disturb her. She seems happy and content today, not worried about life the way so many villagers often are.

The child she holds to her breast is her third child, she says, and it will be her last. After the child was born the cadres came to her home and told her she would have to go to the hospital to have a sterilization operation.

She accepted their decision and had the operation. She says she doesn't regret it as some women do.

Three children are enough, she says. It's not healthy for a woman to have too many children. Childbearing takes its toll on a woman's body.

But some village women believe that a sterilization operation also harms the body. Women who have been sterilized are incapable of doing heavy work in the fields, says Zheng Yu Mei, a middle aged farmer. Many women don't want to have the procedure because of this.

If you want to do the farm work, the family needs at least two sons, she says. The government shouldn't be forcing the villagers to be sterilized, especially if they can support the children they have.

She says many women flee from the village and hide in a city or another village to avoid having an operation.

On the Run

A young woman stands in the doorway of her father's village house. She lives with her husband and children in a nearby village but has returned to her place of birth to escape from the authorities.

She says the cadres in her husband's village have ordered her to have a sterilization operation to stop her from giving birth to another child. But she is determined to have one and has so far refused to follow their order.

She says she gave birth to two children and both were sons, which is what most villagers hope for, but she still wants a daughter.

As the mother of two sons, she knew it was only a matter of time before the authorities would pressure her to be sterilized. Her only option was to flee from the village before they caught her.

When the authorities finally came knocking on her door, the couple had already left the village. She says they knew the authorities were going to force one of them to have an operation, but neither was willing to have one.

She says her only hope now is to elude the authorities long enough to give birth to a daughter.

If the cadres catch up with her, she'll have no choice but to go through with the operation, she says. She will accept her fate and give up her dream of having a daughter.





