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The villagers ask me why I come to Long Wan to ask them questions and take their photographs. They ask me if I am going to put their picture in a newspaper.

I tell them I'm not going to put their picture in the newspaper; I tell them I'm doing research and want to let American people know how people live in a Chinese village.

My answer usually satisfies them, and they continue to let me ask my questions and photograph them in their homes.

Whenever I stop in front of their homes and ask them to answer my questions they smile and invite me into the courtyard.

Come in, sit down, do you want something to eat?

They like it that I single them out and value their opinion. I doubt that anyone before has asked them for their opinion and written it down on a piece of paper.

They invite me to sit on a small stool in the courtyard and start to carefully answer my questions.

They are as curious about me as I am about them; they invite me into their homes in part to see me up close and hear me speak. I am the first foreigner most of them have seen, a messenger from a distant place that few villagers will ever visit.

They always say, America is very rich but we are very poor. They say, the Americans who see our pictures will think we are very poor.

After they answer my questions I ask them if I can photograph them; they almost always say, yes, what do you want me to do?

Often they want to pose formally for the camera and ask me to wait a moment so they can put on their best shirt and pants. Most of the time I snap their pictures while they are talking or moving around the house or courtyard.

I want to record people when they are forgetful of the camera and are doing what they always do when I am not there to see them.

Trouble in the Countryside

Everyone in the village has been talking about it. Even in the nearby city of Zhanjiang, people have heard about it. It wasn't reported in the newspaper or on television but the story is circulating by word of mouth.

The story goes something like this: Two men from nearby villages - one from Wen Che and the other from Huang Lue - were playing Chinese chess in Wen Che.

When the game ended there was a dispute over who had won the contest. It's possible for a game of Chinese chess to end without a clear winner, but in this case one of the men felt he was the winner.

The men had wagered 20 yuan on the game, so it was important to know who had won. An argument erupted that soon escalated into a fight. The people say the farmer from Wen Che was a butcher. Angered by his opponent, he took out his butcher's knife and chopped off two of his opponent's fingers.

The severely injured man returned to Huang Lue and told the farmers there what happened. In Long Wan, Huang Lue men have a reputation for being fighters.

The injured farmer decided to return to Wen Che with his friends to find the butcher and seek revenge. They arrived in Wen Che and indiscriminately started to attack villagers. Unable to find the butcher, they returned to Huang Lue.

Not long after this first incursion, the Huang Lue villagers returned to Wen Che to again look for the butcher.

But this time the Wen Che villagers were waiting for them. The two groups fought and by the end of the encounter two men from Huang Lue were dead. The Huang Lue men carried their dead friends back to the village. They also went to a nearby sugarcane factory and forced the authorities there to give them guns.

Although they managed to get the guns, they were unable to use them because a part was missing. Undeterred, they made the part themselves and managed to fire the guns.

When government officials learned of these events, they sent police and soldiers to Huang Lue. Two people had been killed, guns had been stolen, and the government didn't want the conflict to escalate further.

When the police and soldiers arrived in Huang Lue, the villagers were shooting at Wen Che village from a distance. They were aiming their guns at the village school. People said the Huang Lue villagers had also seized a truckload of pigs traveling down the road and were attacking anyone from Wen Che they saw in the countryside or in the nearby city of Zhanjiang.

People said two Wen Che villagers had been captured and locked in a room with the corpses of the two Huang Lue men who died in the fighting. Some people said the Huang Lue villagers wanted to kill two Wen Che men to revenge the death of those who had died in the earlier fighting.

When the soldiers arrived in Huang Lue they tried to negotiate with the villagers. Worried that the villagers might start shooting at them, the soldiers tried to persuade them to hand over their guns. But the villagers refused and ended up abducting some of the government officials.

The standoff came to an end when some of the villagers persuaded their neighbors to allow the police and soldiers to enter the village.

By the time the officials entered Huang Lue, the men who had been doing the shooting had managed to escape. The Wen Che men who had killed the two Huang Lue men had also escaped.

People in the area say that fighting between local villages isn't unusual. Residents of a village are like members of the same family. Many share the same ancestors and family name. These families have lived side by side for generations.

Although two men from Huang Lue died in the feuding, the people of Long Wan appeared to side with the residents of Wen Che. Several villagers say that people from Huang Lue are famous for fighting and troublemaking.



















