大寨也不吃大锅饭 "Dazhai ye bu chi daguofan le"

Even Dazhai no longer eats from the "big bowl of rice"

Translated by myself. Excerpted from Yangcheng evening newspaper. December 21, 1982

Intro/Notes: **Dazhai** （大寨）was a celebrated commune during the Maoist era in China. Mao Zedong had a saying "Xue Dazhai" or "Study Dazhai", or alternatively "follow the path of Dazhai". Millions of peasants and party cadres from across China were brought to Dazhai to see firsthand how a commune could be run properly. **Daguofan** (literally "big bowl of rice," see title) refers to the communist system of agricultural organization. In this system, massive, party-controlled communes controlled all the rural land. Farmers themselves had no property rights, had little control over what they grew, or where they grew it, and all of the fruits of their labor were taken to the commune to meet government quotas. Services including food and basic healthcare were supposedly available free of charge to all at communal distribution centers. The name "big bowl of rice" implies security and equality. No matter what happened, individuals would be provided for. Nevertheless, the expression in the last 25 years has come to be associated with a lack of incentives for individual effort. Everybody can eat from the big bowl of rice, whether or not they have contributed their fair share. The "**Household Responsibility System**", mentioned in the following article, was introduced under Deng Xiaoping during the period of opening and reform starting in 1978. It broke up the communes and allowed land use rights (although not ownership) to be contracted down to individual households. This policy was implemented gradually and unevenly]. There was much speculation about what happened to Dazhai, the famed commune. The following article won a national award for journalism in China for reporting on the fate of the commune in 1982.

**Yancheng evening newspaper: December 21, 1982:**

Even Dazhai no longer eats from the "big bowl of rice"

Even the Dazhai Commune in Shanxi province no longer eats from the big bowl of rice. Today, they have taken all of their 860 mu (57.3 acres) of arable land and divided it into individual contracts for 130 households. This is in compliance with the larger policy of individual household responsibility [**see Intro/Notes**]. Things that used to be used collectively, such as a coal foundry, soy paste mill, 3 tractors, 200 mu (13.3 acres) of orchards, 800 mu (53.3 acres) of forest land were also contracted down to individuals.

At 9AM in the morning, the local Brigade Party branch secretary Jia Changsuo led the commune members from the flax fields all the way to the dog pens and divided them piece by piece amongst the individuals. The commune members were joyous, and spoke passionately about having received their independence. The former brigade captain and now Commune Deputy Secretary Jia said in an interview with reporters: "Now we can finally begin, the former set of extremely leftist policies were not effective. The people of Dazhai will no longer "follow the path of Dazhai" [**See Intro/Notes**]. I've already taken a trip to Lankao county in Henan Province to look around; the conditions for farming there are worse than here, but they have more enthusiasm than us and are developing at a faster pace. We members of the Dazhai commune can change our direction. We must not stick to the old mantra. Starting today, Dazhai once again has private plots within the collective." In accordance with the policy, each person was distributed 2.2% of the land. The brigade altogether 123 mu (8.2 acres), 15% of the total farming land.

In the past, Dazhai relied on a production team to distribute food for everyone to eat, but it was insufficient to meet demand. In Dazhai village, we turned in a circle, and noticed that in some houses, in front of the doorways, people had taken tubing from the roof and inserted it into the earth, and were growing cabbages and tomatoes around them[which was previously not permitted as it was individual enterprise]. The people of the Dazhai commune have started to get really excited about creating side businesses and hobbies. Lots of houses have chicken coops and rabbit cages, and some even have pig pens. There have been 140 heads of swine produced in total, 70 of which have been purchased to raise within the last two months. At the village entrance we saw farmer Jia Jiusheng. He was lovingly petting his three cows, and was all smiles, telling us : "The Central Party policy is to my liking. This year I've made 500 yuan from selling pigs and rabbits, and eaten all of the eggs that the 6 chickens I have raised have lain. Both cows I bought this year have all given birth, and I even have four piglets in my pig pen.

-Yangcheng Evening Newspaper, December 21, 1982.