

The Social Significance of 8th and 9th 5-Year Plans on Economic
Reformations to a Littoral Community During 1991-2001 in Lvsi Port Town,
Nantong

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Abstract

Following the end of the Cultural Revolution, Chairman of the People's Republic of China Deng Xiaoping convened the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), initiating China's economic transition from a command to a partially market economy. Consequently, significant social and economic changes were undergone by communities in the eastern China area, especially in the littoral cities such as Shanghai and Nantong during the period 1991 to 2001. These changes, which often include fluctuations in the economic index and welfare or well-being, varied among communities separated by political administrative units and geography. This study aimed to identify and analyze the effects of the 8th and 9th 5-year plans from a microscopic angle of Lvsi Port town, a littoral community in Nantong with approximately 400 people. In this historical research, the researcher examined the recurring themes identified through unstructured, in-depth interviews with permanent residents of Lvsi Port town who lived in this area through 1991 to 2001 using a thematic analysis approach, and analyzes how frequently those themes appear in the historical documents archived in the Nantong governmental archive via content analysis. This study first derived four recurring themes from the interviews, including the establishment of the new Lvsi Port, distrust in politics, suspension of the cooperative medical service system, and increase in the price of daily goods. However, in later stages of the investigation, the recurring themes acquired through in-depth interviews displayed inconsistency with the 200 official historical documents analyzed in the governmental archive, which questioned the topic of the authenticity of political propaganda in China. In the future, similar studies could be done in other Chinese non-urban communities in order to have a more nuanced view of the social developments during the Reform and Opening-up period due to the exclusiveness of the results of this study to the investigated community.

Keywords: Oral History, Reform and Opening-up, Social Development, Eastern-Chinese Economy

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the redistribution of political power and the rise of Deng Xiaoping’s influence. After gaining power, Deng Xiaoping made various plans for political, social, and economic reformations, aiming to accelerate the “sluggish economic growth” and improve China’s production efficiency. [6] Later, in December 1978, he convened the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with the members of the Central Bureau to introduce the reformative plans. [8] These initial plans launched the process of Reform and Opening-Up of China, aiming to readjust China’s economic pursuit from the consummation of a command economy, which focuses on heavy industries, to adaptation to a market economy that facilitates light industrial production and economic investments through free market trades. [14] Moreover, in late 1980, the CPC Central Committee affirmed using the Household Contract Responsibility system after extensive debates, privatizing the previously collectively-owned lands. [11] This henceforward allows rural residents to operate independently as individual landowners, liberating abundant labor forces from farming and leading them to participate in various economic activities.

Following these reformations, Deng’s theories of economic constructions were deepened in the 1990s. Throughout the decade, the Central Committee worked on certifying China’s marketization reforms, i.e., constructing the “socialist market economy”, a system with capitalist economic relations proposed by Deng that operates under the political entity’s control. [2] In the National Congress of 1991, the state council ratified the 8th 5-year plan on national economic and social development, emphasizing the development of Township and Village Enterprises(TVEs for short) that were physically or economically embedded mainly in villages or smaller towns. [11] These enterprises played a significant role in shaping the results of the earlier economic reforms in

coastal China, especially Jiangsu. Indeed, the township and village enterprises serve as the core of the “Southern Jiangsu(Sunan) model” of economic development.[13] Proposed by anthropologist Fei Xiaotong, this model illustrated that the economic constructions and developments in the South Jiangsu area (including Suzhou, Nantong, etc.) were mainly powered by the spontaneous developments of these enterprises. [7] Later, as a combined result of Deng’s “tour to the south” and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the CCP leaders put more momentum on economic reforms since 1992, enabling a faster pace of growth of TVEs in Jiangsu. [2] In fact, the annual average real growth rate of these companies in the 1990s is 19%, and 70% of South Jiangsu’s industrial output was produced by rural enterprises in 2000. [13] Also, the 9th 5-year plan lasting from 1996 to 2000 emphasized improving people’s social well-being and constructing a modernized nation, therefore playing a decisive role in China’s marketization reforms. Hence, China established a framework of a market economy system that is basic yet fundamental, especially in the South Jiangsu Area where TVEs actively participate in market activities.

Lvsi Port Town is one of the littoral towns in Nantong, Jiangsu that experienced great expansions accompanying the ratifications of the 8th and 9th 5-year plans. From 1991 to 2001, Lvsi Port serves as a fishery center in Nantong, and its production continuously expands. [3]

1.2 Literature Review

There is a body of knowledge investigating the township developments in the Southern Jiangsu area in the 1990s. The Qidong Committee for Literary and Historical Development published a book addressing the significance of economic reforms among its registered residents. According to Zhang and his colleagues, there is a positive and stable increase in the gross annual value of industrial and agricultural outputs each year, from 1978 to 2001.

[17] However, research Tianjiao Qi pointed out that there is an important distinction between county towns and village townships, with the former being statistically urban while the latter is statistically rural. [12] This indicates that the actual economic development of the rural areas might be overestimated since the governmental statistics account for both cities and rural areas in Qidong, Nantong.

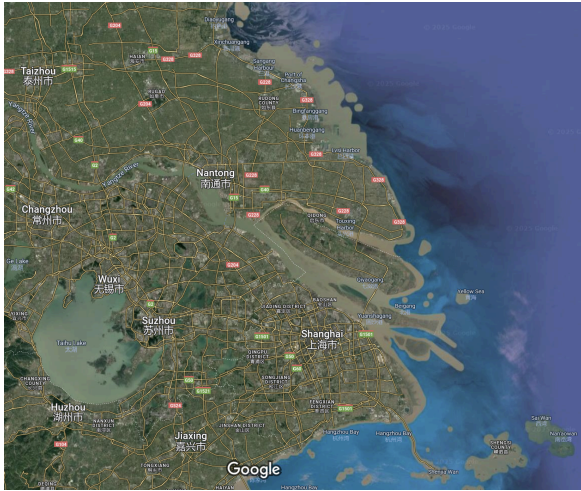


Figure 1: Map of the Sunan Yangtze Delta Area

Similarly, research done by Xiaoping Shen and Lawrence Ma touched on this issue, investigating the “de facto urbanization from below” that refers to the actual urbanization occurring in the rural areas where the residents have not been officially counted as urban population in the household registration system. [13] According to Shen and Ma, the TVEs in the rural Sunan area experienced privatization at a significant rate that made crucial contributions to the region’s economy in the 1980s and early 1990s. Entering the mid-1990s, the researchers mentioned that the privatization of these TVEs supplemented the wealth accumulation and industrial development of the rural areas since the ratification of the 9th 5-year plan, hence fostering urbanization with minimum assistance from the central government. [13] Nevertheless, the conclusion of a later investigation done by Phillip Huang con-

tradicts Shen and Ma’s research, claiming that the informal economic practices and interventions from local governments are the main reasons for the development of the Chinese economy. In particular, Huang suggested that these informal practices, including the large amount of temporary migrant workers working in various small private firms, were not included in the official statistics, leading to the omission of a large source of finance. [9] This inconsistency among bodies of knowledge invokes an issue. That is, although many scholars investigated the economic reforms of the Jiangsu area in the 1990s, their usage of only official statistics and previous information was relatively insufficient to account for the dynamic historical developments. As a result, they might fail to include undocumented economic factors such as those mentioned by Huang. [9]

Consequently, the importance of studying modern history from the common man’s perspective arises, i.e., to acquire a more comprehensive perspective through incorporating interdisciplinary approaches that investigate the grassroots society. [4] Due to the diverse ethnic composition and large population, China’s historical developments are unlikely to be concluded in grand narratives nor with universal theories as they omit microscopic details. As Ching put forward in his writing, Chinese scholars began to realize the importance of trivializations of history in the late 1990s. [4] In her article, Zhou also underscored the significance of trivializations of history in studying the Third Front Movement, a process promoting the heavy industries throughout the Cultural Revolution and Reform and Opening-up. According to her, knowing the perceptions of witnesses of the process would provide her an additional form of historical narrative that depict the factory as a cohesive unity rather than merely industrial entity. [19]

Therefore, scholars investigating modern Chinese reformations gradually started to emphasize the usage of oral history for a more com-

prehensive analysis on post-1978 developments, integrating perspectives from both official and unofficial aspects. Guanli Zhang implemented oral history into her case study on two villages in the Hangzhou area, a geographically adjacent region to Nantong, in order to determine the social changes brought about by rural industrialization. Mainly basing her study on oral history interviews conducted during her field studies, Zhang was able to illustrate the mindsets of these rural residents when they face the inevitable urbanization process, and therefore discuss the driving forces behind, such as industrialization and capitalistic accumulation accompanying the rise of township enterprises. [18] In fact, urbanization was seen as “forced development” by the participants and the unevenly distributed state-led poverty alleviation scheme did not benefit part of the investigated case. [18] In other words, Zhang’s focus on how the residents perceive, interact, and internalize the changes brought by rural urbanization revealed the negative perceptions of industrialization and aggregated wealth inequality that were not included in official economic indexes. Similarly, a historical case study led by Sato Yoshifumi researched the change in social structures brought by economic development in the Taihu area, suggesting that the low social cohesion among the community deepened the wealth inequalities among the investigated communities in Sunan. [16] This is because the residents are less likely to assist each other’s economic status with only kinship serving as a lineage; inversely, the rapid urbanization process in these areas accelerated this isolation by promoting the pursuit of wealth, a perspective generated through in-depth interviews. [16] Therefore, both Zhang and Yoshifumi revealed that the economic reformations in the 1990s were negatively perceived by residents of the Sunan area as a launcher of rapid urbanization, which induced more wealth inequalities and mammonism.

Although Zhou, Zhang, and Yoshifumi’s wo-

rks contextualized the specific effects of economic and industrial developments in the Sunan area with individual cases adjacent to Nantong, no studies have been done to solely address the social changes experienced by rural residents in Nantong. Moreover, none of these studies focused on analyzing both the social changes and people’s perceptions of those changes that occurred from 1991 to 2000. Consequently, there is a gap in the current historical studies discussing the impacts of economic reformations in the eastern littoral communities of Nantong, and a microscopic perspective on how the rural residents perceived the reformations of the 8th and 9th 5-year plan was lacking. A historical research taking Lvsi port town as a case of inquiry would fill this gap by incorporating thematic analyses of oral records, newspapers, and governmental archives. Also, this would help generate a more comprehensive and critical insight into the political landscape in 1991-2000 by comparing the grassroots perceptions to the official voices.

2 Methodology

The Method of my study directly addresses this research question: How did the perceptions of rural residents of Lvsi Port Town on the impacts of Reform and Opening-up policies from 1991 to 2001 differ from the governmental voices? By structuring the research question that way, the researcher assumed that reliable collective memories with common themes exist among the investigated community, with potential bias due to deviation from personal memories. In addition, the researcher hypothesized that the viewpoints of the rural residents in the investigated community would display inconsistency with the results generated by the analyses of the official historical documents.

This research will use a mixed methodology composed of oral history research and thematic document analysis. Oral history research refers to “the process of conducting and recording

qualitative interviews with people in order to elicit information from them about the past.” [1] In other words, oral history involves both the production of primary information about certain historical events and the analysis of the records to foster a collective narrative of the participants. In the oral history research process, unstructured interviews with local residents were conducted to gather oral records as primary historical sources. [1] With the consensus of participation, discussions on presupposed topics revolving around economic developments and social well-being to acquire individual ideas about the period 1991-2001 were made. Taking a fishery community in the Lvsi Port town area as the specific case, the researcher would interpret the information gathered in the interviews and analyze the common themes via MAXQDA, an analytical tool that helps to estimate qualitative data with a quantitative approach.

The second part of this research is a thematic document analysis. In thematic analysis, qualitative researchers identify recurring themes in a specific dataset and take an analytical approach to describe the patterns or features of the dataset. [15] In this research, the researcher digitalized documents from Qidong Library using a CZUR Scanner and converted the documents into Portable Document Files. With that, the researcher could extract most of the words in the documents and input them as datasets into MAXQDA. Therefore, a list of recurring themes among the documents could be made, which would later be used to be compared with the common themes from the oral records.

By incorporating both thematic document analysis and oral history research, the project aims to generate a comprehensive understanding of the period 1991-2001 and the relationships between governmental claims and personal well-being in the Lvsi Port area. In other words, a perspective in addition to the official narratives about the 1990s Chinese society can

be formed.

2.1 Information gathering

2.1.1 Oral History Interviews

To effectively address the research topic, the researcher adopted oral history research as the tool for acquiring qualitative data, i.e., the perceptions of rural residents of Lvsi Port Town on the impacts of Reform and Opening-up during the 1991–2001 timeframe. Oral history is defined as an “interactive methodology” that deals with the spoken words. [1] In a dialogic process that differs from the traditional questioning-and-answering interview process, the researcher would hold an open discussion with the participant, who would be constantly introducing their personal experiences or anecdotes to address the topics of discussion. In other words, an oral history interview was structurally guided by the researcher, who would develop broad topics of discussion with preliminary research.

On the other hand, the narratives obtained through the interviews were more dependent on the Interviewee, who took a selective approach to their personal memories, anecdotes, or life stories and blended that information with their ideologies. [1] Therefore, individual perceptions on the broad topics discussed were generated, which aligns with the purpose of this research. However, these individual perceptions were reexamined collectively in the later process of data analysis. Adaptation of oral history in this research was followed by Yoshifumi’s oral history study on the structural changes of the Taihu Lake Area society and Xiaohong’s research on the collective memories of Beijing arsenal workers. [16] [19] Despite that, this research took a smaller sample size and focused mainly on the coastal areas of Jiangsu, and the topics involved in the interviews focused more on identifying a general trend of change rather than specific political events.



Figure 2: The Oral History Research Being Conducted

A large proportion of this research’s participants were contacted through personal visits to their households and the researcher’s community networks. The participants were asked preliminary questions that determined their eligibility for this study. For this research, only the residents of Lvsi Port Town from 1991-2001 were selected as participants since this guarantees that they are the ones who experienced the social changes. A total of 14 interviews were conducted with predominantly 13 men and 1 woman and an age variation from 55 to 75 years old. This is because the researcher only picked the personnel who are the main source of income in a household, and due to the societal context of China that time, women often played the roles of housekeepers. Prior to the formal interviews, each participant agreed on an informed consent form that detailed their rights to withdraw anytime. In addition, the participants were told to share their primary and unmodified views and not to consider the researcher’s personal connections with them in the individual interviews.

Due to the peculiarities of oral history, no formal interview questions were given to the participants. [1] However, several topics of discussion were made, serving the function of interview questions. Specific records are included in Appendix 1. Before the interview questions were asked, the researcher would first inquire about the personal information of the participants and, therefore grasp a gist of their basic

background and potential social roles. Then, the researcher would initiate the conversation with open-ended questions revolving around the established topics, and ask specific follow-up questions to guide the participants from invoking further descriptions or memories. The follow-up questions may vary with the participant’s personality, previous experiences, occupations, or economic status. For instance, follow-up questions for a construction worker might be focused on the impacts of Reform and Opening-up on the construction industry. The length of the interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 1 hour, influenced by the willingness of information sharing of the participants. Twelve of the interviews were conducted in Mandarin and not translated into English in the thematic analysis process to preserve the original narrative style, an aspect with much significance in oral history research. However, four interviews were conducted in Lvsi Dialect and were later translated into Mandarin for analysis. All the interviews were recorded and later transcribed manually, with informed consent acquired preliminarily.

2.1.2 Document digitalization

To address the other aspect of the research question, i.e., the so-called governmental voices, the researcher gathered qualitative primary sources from the county library. With a CZUR Scanner, the researcher digitalized newspaper documents that were not yet uploaded to the internet and converted the documents into portable document files. All the digitalized newspapers were Qidong Dailies, and the researcher picked only the October series published from 1991 to 2001 in search of completeness and coherence of data. However, about 15% of the newspapers were still not archived in the library. Following the large-scale content analyses of historical newspapers in the town of Gorizia by Cristianini et.al and in Britain by Thomas Welfare et.al, the researcher attempts to digitalize historical newspapers in the Qi-

dong county area (since there were no newspapers published in Lvsi Port Town) to identify the “macroscopic patterns of social changes” experienced by residents of this area. [5] [10] Also, since the Qidong government possesses ownership of Qidong Daily, the publications on it were under strict censorship and governmental control. Therefore, Qidong Daily could be seen as a newspaper with strong governmental influence, which aligns with the research question.

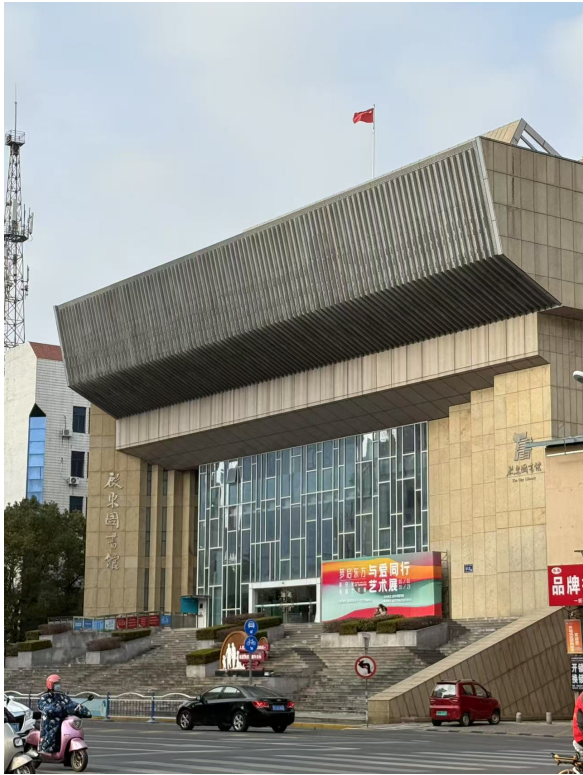


Figure 3: Picture of Qidong County Library

2.2 Thematic Analysis

For both aspects of this research, the researcher used MAXQDA as the major tool for analyzing the qualitative data acquired. MAXQDA allows for the reorganization, classification, and categorization of large amounts of textual data, which satisfies the need for a tool that could deal with archival documents. On the other hand, MAXQDA also supports the

analysis of audio or video files, which means that it could be used on oral records. Therefore, the researcher was able to perform a thematic analysis of the data acquired through both the interviews and the digitalization process. A thematic analysis refers to the qualitative process of identifying, analyzing, and interpreting overarching themes within a dataset. In this case, a thematic analysis was practiced for both the interview records and newspapers, which the researcher classified as two separate datasets, to examine the prominent themes within the two datasets.

The thematic analysis was conducted separately for the two genres of primary sources. For the interviews, the researcher categorized a total of sixteen interviews into four smaller groups based on their durations, with each group codified and analyzed on MAXQDA directly. Therefore, the researcher was able to retrieve the common codes that frequently appear within each interview and combine these codes into overarching themes. However, transcriptions of the interviews were still compiled for the researcher to verify the resulting themes generated. For the newspapers, the prominent themes identified in the oral history step would be implemented for categorization of the newspapers. In other words, the researcher would examine the frequency of appearance of the common codes from the interviews within the newspapers. In addition to that, the overarching themes within the newspapers would be codified following the same steps as for the interviews. With these two datasets codified, the researcher could compare the overarching themes generated.

3 Discussion

3.1 Recurring Theme 1

In more than half of the oral history interviews, the interviewees distrusted the current administration and local governmental of-

ficials. It is important to note that their distrust is not pertinent to Chinese Communism or any primary principles of the Communist Party. In fact, their suspicions are exclusively aimed at the government after China's Reform and Opening-up, which brought marketization of the economy and rural developments. Through further discussions and follow-up interview questions, the researcher discovered that all except five interviewees are Maoists, who are the absolute advocates of Mao Zedong's political philosophy and ideologies. A plausible cause of this might be the high rate of former militaries in the researcher's case of inquiry. In the military, soldiers are trained to possess a firm belief in Communism. For instance, in interview 3 the interviewee stated that despite the life standard of his family improved vastly during the 1990s period, he believes that this promotion was due to the general trends of economic development, but not the benefits from the economic reformations and marketization. Moreover, he mentioned in the answers to the follow-up questions that Mao Zedong could have designed a much more nuanced and efficient command economy system than the "socialist market economy" proposed by Deng Xiaoping. In fact, he views Reform and Opening-up as a catalyst of governmental corruptions that ultimately lead to the untrustworthy and deceptive current government.

In terms of deception, interviewee 3 spoke of the local government's manipulation of data in the developmental report of 1999 toward the central government. This corresponds to interviewee 13's perceptions. In interview 13, the participant discussed how the local officials fabricated approval of construction from the central committee to accelerate economic growth. Participants of interview 9 demonstrated distrust toward the local administration from a more economic perspective. Specifically, he criticized the expansion of government in the 1990s, saying that the over-recruit-

ment and high salaries of governmental officials in the post-Mao era were unnecessary and a waste of taxpayer's dedication to the country.

The main source of document analysis is Qidong Daily, a county newspaper agency controlled completely by the government. Therefore, the researcher examined the results and found very limited descriptions of this theme. The only description of civilians' distrust toward the government is an editorial that criticizes Fuxin's government, which is approximately 1600 km away from my case of inquiry. Therefore, comparison of separated analyses cannot be conducted for this recurring theme.

3.2 Recurring Theme 2

The second recurring theme that emerged is the cooperative medical care system. The primary model of the rural cooperative medical care system formed soon after the communalization of Chinese rural villages in the early 1960s. The rural residents would pay a specific amount of money in exchange for free medical care. Since then, this system served as a significant medical measure that guarantees cheap and convenient medications for rural residents. During the early stages of the Reform and Opening-up, the cooperative medical care system, according to national developmental reports and descriptions in the analyzed newspapers, experienced significant expansion in both scale and efficacy, providing rural residents with stable medical treatments. However, this expansion was seldom addressed in the local newspapers. Although the China Ports Weekly discussed the expansion of Lvsi's cooperative medical care system in 1991, the first descriptions from the Qidong Daily emerged much later in 1996. With the Qidong Daily being the local newspaper but not addressing the medical care system, there seems to be a misalignment among central policies and local executives. A potential reason might be the indolence and corruption of the local government, as discussed in recurring theme 1, which

led to postponed expansion of the system.

Although misalignments among newspapers exist, the information was positive in general. However, almost all participants in the oral history interviews had negative perceptions toward the expansion of the cooperative medical care system. In interviews 3, 7, 8, and 9 the participants addressed the gradual increase of fees paid for the system, and all agreed that this fee increase is quite unaffordable for rural residents. Also, interviewees 12, 14, and 15 discussed the limitations of the system. According to them, the free medical care provided by the system is “very limited”, and medication for severe diseases such as fractures or cancer is not included. Moreover, among the participants that displayed these negative perceptions, 9,11,13, and 15 all compared the system in the 1990s to that in the Mao era. Overall, they believed that Mao’s design of the system was optimal.

3.3 Recurring Theme 3

In interviews 2,3,4,6 and 8, the interviewees talked about the rise of the construction industry. In interview 2, the participant said “Nantong has an engineering company specializing in construction. As I said before, Nantong is a regional city so it has many counties. For each county, we have a very powerful team, and the Lvsi team is the most successful one.” As a former construction worker himself, he talked about his experience of participating in the construction of the first highway in China. According to him, roughly 20 of the co-workers he knew were from the case of inquiry. This is quite a large proportion compared to the total population of approximately 400 residents in Lvsi, and right-age workers might be less. Similar descriptions were made by interviewee 6, who was a former manager of the Lvsi Second Construction Company. He said that “many of us (people from the case of inquiry) worked in the company, and we were mainly working in the adjacent areas at the be-

ginning of 1990s. Later, I think it’s 1995, some of us went to Dongbei (Northeast China), and some to Xingjiang (Western China) ...” This demonstrated how the construction industry in Lvsi expanded and gradually grew in influence to participate in distant projects. In interviews 3,4, and 8, each interviewee talked about the flourishing of the Lvsi construction company during the 1990s, and their suggested possible cause for this rise is the construction tasks urged by rural urbanizations.



Figure 4: Constructions in the Lvsi Port

Results from the thematic document analysis on the historical newspapers displayed alignment with the oral records. Within the 1991-2000 range, a stable increase in the frequency of appearance of the key codes relevant to the construction industry could be spotted. In fact, the codes appeared 29 times in the newspapers of 1991, while in 2000 the frequency almost tripled with a total count of 85 times. Also, corresponding to Interviewee 6’s descriptions, Lvsi Second Construction Company began to participate in interprovincial and international construction projects in 1995, and its scale continuously expanded.

3.4 Recurring Theme 4

Another recurring theme identified is the growing hardware industry. In interviews 2,3,6, 7,8,13,14, the interviewees discussed how the

expansion of the construction industry intertwines with other factors to promote the sales of the hardware stores. In the interviews, the interviewees depicted the 1990s as an era with extremely high demand for construction materials, which also included hardware and construction tools. With the rise of Lvsi Second Construction Company, the market encountered unprecedentedly high demand for those materials, which urged many of the right-age workers to participate in the hardware resale industry. In interview 6, it is mentioned that “the industry which experienced the largest development in the 1990s here (Lvsi) is the hardware resales. People need no backgrounds and knowledge to participate, and this makes a lot of money.” In addition, when asking the former participants of the construction industry (interviewees 2 and 6) about a field that changed the most except their industries, both interviewees discussed hardware resales. Moreover, interviewees 8 and 11 mentioned that most of the hardware resellers in the case of inquiry were veterans, who are limited by their lack of specialties or craftsmanship. This restriction prompted veterans, which is a large branch of the labor force in Lvsi, to participate in the hardware industry.

For this theme, the newspapers analyzed produced a nuanced result that opposes the perceptions of the Lvsi residents. Within the first three years of the 1990s, key codes relevant to hardware focused solely on hardware repairs, including the restoration of broken machines and the replacement of metal accessories. Beginning in 1994, as the frequency of the key codes decreased, the codes that emerged concentrated mostly on openings of hardware resale stores and establishments of hardware factories. For instance, the last codes identified were from the Qidong Dailies of 1999, with only 4 codes appearing in 60 samples. This means that the trend of development of the hardware industry may not be as strong as the residents’ depictions.

4 Limitations

Before the conclusion, it is necessary to address some potential limitations that may affect the accuracy of the results. The researcher’s choice of implementing oral history research implies that there exists bias due to inaccuracies of human memories. While the participants were recalling past events and personal anecdotes during the unstructured interviews, their responses may not be exact and precise as the true history of 1990s Lvsi. In other words, it is reasonable to believe that their memories are distorted over time, and the specific times or locations they mentioned may not be accurate for this reason.

Another limitation is the scope of my research. My case of inquiry has a relatively small size, thus the recurring themes discovered may only reflect the progress of change in this specific case and the conclusions may not be applicable for other communities or generalized to a larger extent. As a coastal community in the Lvsi Port town area containing only around 300 residents, my case of inquiry may differ in social structure and ethnic composition from other communities in Nantong. Thus, my results and findings might only be applicable for this specific case. Limitations induced by bias due to convenience sampling from the researcher also exists. The researcher is personally associated with the case of inquiry. In fact, the case was the researcher’s hometown, and this induced bias due to convenience sampling since most participants were contacted through the researcher’s personal connections. Therefore, their responses may be intentionally exaggerated after the researcher gave them an overview of his research project. The reason is that they might want to give effective results that contributes more to the conclusions. Hence, the results may also be affected by subjectivity from the participants.

The last potential limitation is the linguistic difference among oral records. 4 of the

records were conducted in Lvsì dialect, which is a language different in tones, phonics and grammar structures with Mandarin. Analyzing records of these two languages may imprecise the results as key words or themes in the Mandarin records may not align with those in Lvsì dialect. Thus, MAXQDA may not be able to detect those key themes from the transcripts.

5 Conclusion

The research question “How did the perceptions of rural residents of Lvsì Port Town on the impacts of Reform and Opening-up reforms from 1991 to 2001 differ from the governmental voices?” could be answered through discussions on the four identified recurring themes: distrust of the current government, expansion of Cooperative medical care, the rise of the construction industry, and the development of hardware industry. By comparing the residents’ perceptions of the developments with the documents from the newspapers, the researcher found similarities between the narrations in the rise of the construction industry. However, the results from the separated sources for the other three themes all displayed misalignments.

Therefore, it can be concluded that in most cases, civilians from the case of inquiry tend to have a perception of the impacts of Reform and Opening-up reforms that is different from the governmental narratives. Future studies could be done to address perceptions of rural residents in other communities in Nantong, and in the general Sunan area as well. Due to the peculiarities of oral history, each case of inquiry would produce results that are significantly different. Therefore, much more oral history case studies should be done for the academia to have a more nuanced understanding of how people perceive modern Chinese reforms.

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