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Hot Topics

Women Who Volunteered for Farming at Eunduk County Declare: “We cannot go to work without food worth for eight months.”

Females of Eunduk County in North Hamgyong Province, who went to the farm village with the promise of food distribution, were absent from work due to the failure of food supplies. Since early this year, after the new policy to send housewives to farms began, every region has looked for applicants. Each village office held several lectures and advertised considerably, but no one applied. With the low rate of volunteering, the government promised to give food worth for eight months in advance to those who go to the farm. It was also promised that the work period would be for three years and that absence from work would be allowed if something transpired at home.

As a result, fifty women applied for work at the farm in Eunduk County. Corn was first distributed to these individuals for a month. Then, in early February, these women requested the remainder of the food worth for seven months. The County Party said it would distribute the rest of the food after two months, as it was short of food due to the supply of provisions. In response to this, the women started missing work; everyone, with the exception of the foreman, was absent on Feb 12. The County Party harshly reproached the foreman. One worried worker said, "When the party workers received the report, they were very surprised. They mouths were open, but they did not say anything, because they were the ones who did not keep their promise. The female farm volunteers worked one month, with one month of food supply. They worked as much as they were paid. The shortage of workers is a big concern, as spring farming begins soon."
[Food]

Last Year's Corn Harvest of Baechun County Failed to Meet Estimates

It is said that last year's corn harvest of Baechun County in South Hwanghae Province was lower than previous estimates. Some farms harvested 1.5 MT of corn per 1 Jungbo (1 Jungbo is 2.45 acres), but many of them harvested less than 1 ton of corn. A farm worker of Baechun County said, "We expected 1.5 or 2 MT of corn per Jungbo. It is better than last year, though. There is no food to distribute – not because of the provision, but because many farms failed to harvest 1 ton. All the corn is taken from here first, because this area is the forefront. Thanks to the farm managing worker's petition to the County Party and Provincial Party, they could only secure food until early June." According to Kim Geun-mo (age 48), "It is said that they could distribute food up until early June, but actually the amount is only available until April. We have to calculate the work points for worth of labor and support the meats for the army; there are so many things we have to submit. Therefore, after deducting all of them, we will only be left with available food until April."

[Economy]

Low Productivity at Duksa Coal Mine of Soodong District Strikes a Fatal Blow to Hamheung Factory

Regional factories have suffered from a lack of coal supply, due to low productivity at the Duksa Coal Mine of Soodong District in South Hamgyong Province. This coal mine has generated over 1,000 MT of anthracite coal every month for regional factories. The low heat anthracite coal produced in this coal mine has been utilized for clothing, market, and shoe factories throughout Hamheung City. However, the availability of coal from this mine is frequently not guaranteed, due to low productivity. Higher rank associates demand, “an absolute completion of all coal mining duty”, but workers resist, claiming that “we cannot work anymore.” The workers argue that “We will be happy to work if you provide us with food. Food comes first.” Jeong Young-il (age 50) said, “I hope coal miners and others disappear. It can’t be worse than this.” Han Gwang-soo also commented that “They are well-off and we’re the only ones suffering. The animals need to be fed for our consumption, but they make us work hard without providing adequate food supplies. He added, “They always claim that we are a powerful great nation, a military great nation, a political great nation, and now also an economic great nation, but they do not care about the poor workers. We need to eat well and stay healthy to work energetically.”

Ryongdae Coalmine in Sungchun City Fails to Supply the Pyongyang Thermoelectric Power Plant

Ryongdae Coal Mine, located in the Workers District, new Sungchun, in Sungchun County of South Pyongan Province, has been supplying its partial production to the Pyongyang Thermoelectric Power Plant. However, there has been a recent failure in supply, due to low productivity volume. The production level has dropped to about 27,000 MT a month. This coal mine had produced over 100,000 MT a month and about 1,000,000 MT a year. The workers blame their obsolete equipment, a lack of electricity, and transportation problems, as well as a lack of workers. There are only about 6,000 registered workers at this site; such a seriously depleted work force is due to a decrease in attendance level. A coal miner in his
forties, named Choi Hyuk, said, “They do not give us our rations or any other vitamins. This is why attendance level has declined. Poor coal miners and mine diggers have nothing else to do but live as beggars.” Choi Hak-min, who is in his thirties, explained the supply failure to Pyongyang Thermoelectric Power Plant, saying, “The food situation is getting worse and nobody is going to work at the mine with an empty stomach. That is just stupid. Because the workers do not work, it is natural that the coal production level is low; which then leads to failure in supplying other factories.

Clothing Factory in Danchun Shuts Down
A factory located in Danchun City of South Hamgyong Province was closed down last year, due to a decrease in production. An estimated 400 workers have been known to work here and 90% of them are female workers. Since many of these workers are also their family’s caretakers, many are worried for their daily meals. Some of the women even take the machines home and make the products there. On the holidays, the workers receive only about two to three days worth of food supplies. Thus, the female workers must work to provide their families with future meals. Naturally, due to these factors, the attendance rate and the number of products decreased over time, ultimately leading to this tragic result.

[Politics]
Heightened Security on the Streets of Hamheung and Chungjin
On February 1st of last year, the starting of inspection for narcotics control was announced. Persons caught producing and/or selling narcotics are sentenced to death and their consumers will spend some time in re-education centers. Starting in February, there has been an increase of security between the streets of Hamheung and Chungjin. ‘Ice (Amphetamine)’ inspectors have been assigned to guard posts where body inspections may take place. Although the passing car may have the required documents, it is still hard to pass through security smoothly. In order to pass each security point, at most 30,000-50,000 NK won are needed. Due to this, many citizens are complaining that they are being ripped off. Some business owners are forced to pay the passing fee although they take no part in selling drugs. On the other hand, inspection workers have said that the street security has shown to be effective. One worker said, “It is obvious to see who has the drugs and who doesn’t. I can pick out who has it eight out of ten times. So, the body inspections are a must.” Other workers have also said that with the growing security, many sellers are being caught.

North Pyongan Province, Inspect Street Trade Extensively
The National Defense Committee and Central Party carried out extensive inspections of street trading from February 10th to 14th in all parts of North Pyongan Province. At this time, the party and committee proclaimed that “street trade is Anti-Socialist and is too excessive” so mostly street traders were caught under these inspections. A Woman (thirties) who participated in street trades in Sinuiju said, “People selling out of a market were thrown into confusion like meeting a storm. I’m desperate because I’ve earned no money for the last few days” One elderly lady (fifties) who sells fruit in Chaeha market said in a word that it was “tough” watching the inspections of street traders. She was worried saying, “It was scary watching the inspectors attack one trader after another just passing by on the streets. There
are mostly older women like me or even more elderly senior citizens trading in these markets. Grandmother who traded next to me has rice mixed with ground up corn flour for her meals. Trade is not going well so this is all they can eat. Trading within the markets is this tough, so the people who trade in the streets haven’t been able to sell anything for several days. I don’t know how they’ll get to eat.”

**Pyongwon Women Accuse Bad Prison Guard**

This past February 3, two women in their thirties living in Pyongwon County reported illegal acts by prison guards’ in the Chungjin traveler detention center to the Province Party of South Pyongan Province. While traveling to the Chungjin in the North Hamgyong Province for their trade business, the police detained these women in the traveler detention center after an inspection. They testified that the prison guards in the police detention center took 420,000 NK won that the women had earned from trading and the women themselves were used as playthings. The Party of South Pyongan Province delivered similar testimonies to the Party of North Hamgyong Province, and the organization’s director in charge of the North Hamgyong Province Party went himself to investigate these accusations against the prison guards. When the testimonies were revealed to be true the two responsible prison guards were immediately dismissed. The 420,000 NK won in cash was promised to the two women before February 16. To punish the center as a whole, the 420,000 NK won was to be raised by reducing all the workers’ salary in the police detention center for the next few months.

[Society]

**[Hoeryong Observation Trip] Apartment residents Detained on the 1st and 2nd Floor**

At 3 a.m. on February 24, soldiers burst through the doors of an apartment building in Hoeryong City to drag the residents living on the 3rd to 6th floors to the first and second floors. The escorting soldiers blocked the main entrance and occupied floors 3 and above. The residents were detained on those 2 floors without being told why. The reason was that the apartment happened to be located at the 1st road (the road for Kim Jong-Il). The soldiers also caught people who were out in the streets for early morning work and shoved them into any near by house. People who reacted slowly or asked a simple question like “Why are you detaining us?” were harshly beaten by the soldiers and were put in a warehouse. At least 20 people, including women with their babies, were put in the warehouse. Some of the babies were hurt badly when their mothers fell down holding them while the soldiers beat them. Six of these babies were transferred to a hospital and are now being treated. Two of them were reported to be unconscious.

[Hoeryong Observation Trip] A security Squad Tightens Security Level at the 1st Road (1 선도로)

After detaining residents in the 1st and 2nd floor of an apartment, security squad (호위국) soldiers went into full-alert mode. Security squad soldiers stood in line with 5 meters of space in between each other to guard the 1st road (1 선 도로). In the apartment, soldiers could be seen even up on the roof. To prepare for this visit of Chairman Kim, it has been reported that National Security Agency placed 1,050 soldiers from 3 battalions. The Defense
Security Command (보위사령부) also placed around 60 National Security Agency members. Each of these members received cell phones. Rural National Security Agency took charge of external roads. The Security Squad and National Security Agency members all withdrew immediately after Chairman Kim’s visit.

[Hoeryong Observation Trip] Chairman Kim Satisfied after Visiting the 1st Kim Ki-song Middle School
On his visit to the 1st Kim Ki-song Middle School in Hoeryong, the North Korean leader, Chairman Kim Jong-Il, was very pleased with the school’s educational facilities. Looking at the well-equipped facilities, he said, “All schools in the nation should be like this school.” The school will get 50 computers thanks to Kim’s special consideration. Most students at the school are the children of party officials or wealthy families. Televisions, recorders, and computers in the school were all purchased by donations from its students and their families. To keep their school updated, each student pays 30,000 NK won every 3 months. Students, who study well but come from a working class family, often end up withdrawing from the school because of the heavy non-tax payment. One resident said, “Our leader, Kim, tells us to make all the schools in the nation like the 1st Kim Ki-song Middle School but he doesn’t know the general situations of all schools.” After visiting the construction of the Kim Jong-sook (his mother) statue in Ohsandeok, a food company, and the Daesung Cigarette factory, Kim left Hoeryong pleased.

[Hoeryong Observation Trip] Special Distribution of Half a Month’s worth of Corn for Workers in Hoeryong
Following Chairman Kim’s visit, Hoeryong workers received 7 kilograms, or half a month’s worth, of corn in late February. When Kim asked the leading secretary of Hoeryong whether food rations were properly delivered, the secretary replied, “This month, rice, corn, Byunsung noodles, flour, and other foods were distributed.” The secretary also reported that because of last year’s good harvest, they contributed good amount to military provisions. Hearing this, Kim was satisfied. However, the residents refuted it as a false report. The rations distributed by Hoeryong city were rotten corns.

[Women/Children/Education]
“Holidays are the most tiring time for women in Chosun (North Korea).”
We do not celebrate like the Chinese who usually relax by going to restaurants or movie theaters during holidays. It would be good if people gather, eat, then go home, but they stay a long time playing card and other games. Women can't have any break time as even kids bring their friends home. Women are beat-up after all guests leave and clean up was finished.” It is common complaints from women after holidays.

Jang Won-young (30) in Wonsan city, Kangwon Province, who has been married for 5 years, said that she is fed up with serving her husband's guests every holiday. No matter how poor she is, she has to prepare food for holidays, and she could not help but hate her husband as if he is her enemy when he brings his friends home and keeps asking for more drinks even though he knows there is little to eat.
Choi Ok-hwa (in her thirties) said, "Many times I was so mad I could knock over the table. I blame myself for being born as a woman and continue to serve the guests, but I am sick to my stomach." She also mentioned that she has headaches and feel nauseous even before holidays begin. All the bad symptoms are gone after the holidays are over. Jung Jung-hee (in her twenties) who was at the market with Choi Ok-hwa said that "I don’t know how my mother's generation lived, but nowadays there are many women who wish that there be no holidays."

**At a DWU (Democratic Women's Union) Lecture, Participants Left During Power Outage**

Nowadays lecture halls frequently become noisy like markets. On 14th of the last month, in Sinuiju, North Pyongan Province, about 1,000 members of DWU attended the 'recorded lecture.' The lecture was titled 'Chairman Kim Jong-Il is a great master who promotes mental power of military and people and leads our country to a superpower nation.' In the beginning of the lecture, a couple of people started whispering, then it got noisier, and eventually it became clamorous. An amplifier on the podium added up more noise. The leader of DWU shouted "Be quiet" at the audience and it became quiet for the moment, but it did not last even 5 minutes before it got noisy again. The leader got mad and stood up staring at those who were talking. Those who were stared at by the leader stopped talking, but it could not stop others making noises. Finally the leader got up and walked among the participants just like a patrol. Yet some were still careless and kept chatting; some were on edges because it was almost time for them to go to do the trading business. Then the power went out. As if it was a signal, one or two women started to leave, followed by the whole mass. The officials of DWU blocked exits to stop people leaving, but due to the number of people rushing to get out, it was beyond their ability to stop them. The people who stayed behind were the wives of police officers or security agents. They couldn't leave because their behavior might hurt their husband. When the 'recorded lecture' was over, a lecturer gave a 15-minute talk, but the room was almost empty and no one seemed to listen.

**Four University Students in Sinuiju Watched Foreign Movies and were Expelled from College**

Four university students in Sinuiju were expelled from their school because they watched foreign movies prior to the February 16th Holiday. In front of the entire faculty and students, they were criticized and then expelled. Lately, middle schools and universities have frequently inspected students’ belongings to search for any illegal movies. When they search students’ bags or clothes, they could find a good number of CDs of South Korean movies or dramas. Although the teachers have warned the students it is useless. Kim Kyong-mi (44), a middle school teacher, stated, “I warned and warned about these CDs until they may feel sick of it. However, they do not seem to care about it because they are young and do not understand the seriousness of the situation. Because they exchange the CDs with friends, it is not possible to prevent them from watching these movies. Because students who watch these CDs usually are from rich family background, they can avoid any punishment by paying money. I worry about them though as I am a teacher.”
[Accidents]

People Died by Falling from a Truck’s Cargo Section

Last February 15th, a person died when she fell from a truck loading corn from Hamheung to Chungjin. According to Kim Jae-hak (in his 50s), the driver of the vehicle, he picked up two women from Hamheung at the cargo area. His co-workers had already taken the passenger section on the truck and bags of corn were piled up to the limit on the cargo section so there was no room for them to take. They annoyingly begged the driver to take the truck even with the gunnysacks of corn, so he allowed them to take it. Mr. Kim said, “There was no snow, but I worried because it was pretty cold. They seemed to be indefatigable and tough, so I did not worry so much. However, I stopped the truck to prevent the worst-case scenario. I found that the wind was stronger than I thought when I opened the door. I became worried and asked them if there are ‘any problems,’ but they did not respond. I went up to the bags and found only one woman left. When I shook her body to ask about the other lady, I realized that this woman was already frozen to death.” When asked about the other woman, he described that police officers located the other woman’s body far away from his stop and they assumed falling from the truck as the cause of her death. Mr. Kim felt sorry about this accident and stated, “The fallen woman needed to save as much as a penny, so she took the enterprise’s truck to save money because her daughter entered a medical school. She was short and skinny and had tanned a lot. I gave her a ride because I felt deep sympathy for her hard work. Now I feel I made some mistakes. If I was indifferent, I could have saved their lives.”

[Commentary]

Drawing in Housewives Will Resolve the Rural Workforce Problem?

Last year’s farm hardship period was a very painful time for farmers. It was a time when survival was the only goal. Many farmers died because they could not stand the long lasting famine. At Jeongbong farm in Shingye County in North Hwanghae Province, 32 farmers died from April to June last year. During the same period, the number of dead farmers was 35 at Taeseong farm in Nampo in South Pyongan Province, 28 at Heukgyo farm Hwangju County, and 31 at Bokpyong farm Danchun in South Hamgyong Province. Considering that the total number of farmers at a farm is between 400 and 500, the mortality rate reached almost 7%. This is a considerably high figure compared to the death rate of 1.4% in Haeju city last year. As many people die of starvation in several farms in the area including Hwanghae Province, the overall shortage of labor has become a serious problem.

North Korean authorities earlier this year issued an order to secure volunteers to the farms. The easiest targets were housewives. The city party officials mobilized all kinds of means and stressed how much contribution they can make to make the county strong by volunteering to work in the farm. The reactions of the women were cold. The authorities offered carrots. They promised to give five to eight months worth of food in advance. Then some women began to show interest. Most of the women were from households where they had difficulties getting a meal for the day because they are too poor.

However, there was a place where they could not keep the promise. In Eunduk County in North Hamgyong Province, only one-month worth of rations was given although eight months worth was promised. They said the rest would be given 2 months later. The women
did not wait. They stopped going to work saying there was no reason to go to the farm if they did not keep the promise.

The news demonstrates that mobilizing farm volunteers is not easy. In fact, labor shortage in the farm is inevitable under the current food distribution system. Because of the policy that gives priority to reserve food for the military, the farmers who are actually producing grain are being pushed to the back in the priority of distribution. That is the reason why farmers are missing the era of Kim Il-Song. In those days, food was given to the military after the distribution to farmers. Now, it is the opposite. Once the food is given to the military, the portion that goes to farmers is reduced no matter how good the harvest was. When there is not enough distribution of food, many people are unable to come to work during the spring farm hardship period. By that time, the food runs out and people can survive only if they go out to the mountain and field to collect grass roots.

It is not that mobilizing housewives into farm work itself is a problem. The problem is that any incentive policy will end up as a makeshift as long as there is a fundamental change in policy that can increase the food production. That was exactly the case of a large number of absenteeism in Eunduk County. They tried to attract them with food, but they stopped coming to work when they did not receive food. Can you criticize them for lack of ideological commitment? The answer is already given as to how to come up with a fundamental solution.

The farming season has already started. If they have to rely on a makeshift policy, the promised food distribution should be made to the women. The food must be secured first in order to distribute properly. The methods will increase food production, food import, and external support. First, enough food should be given to farmers who are the producers of the food in order to increase food production. There should be national measures to ensure enough supply of fertilizer and farm equipment. Second, food imports need to be increased. It is true that there is not enough foreign currency. Nevertheless, food imports can be given a higher priority if there is a political decision, which recognize the survival of people first. Third, it is obtaining external support. The food aid from the U.S. through the WFP has stopped due to a monitoring issue. When it comes to food aid, the recipient has no choice but to accept the request of the supporting organization. They should secure more food aid by accepting the request of the supporting organizations as much as possible. Even if the officials in Pyongyang have to eat a little less, there should be a decision that allows the distribution of external food aid going to the farmers first. At any rate, the only way to secure farm work is to secure food for farmers.

[Investigative Report]

[Correspondence From Pyongyang] Being Appointed as a Manager of a Class One Enterprise

Even though the first day of spring has come and gone, the weather in Pyongyang has yet to become warm. Chilly winds brought the temperature down to 15 degrees below zero (Celsius). Early this morning, I left home after eating a breakfast prepared by my mother. I
received instructions from the Central Party that I should arrive at the headquarters by nine. I was in a hurry as I walked on the street behind the Changgwangsan Inn.

Normally, I would have taken a streetcar to Pyongyang Main Station. But on this day, I walked. Electric power outage might cause a delay, which could make me arrive late. I could not afford to make that kind of mistake, and I knew walking was the best way to get there on time. When I arrived at the headquarters, there were several others already waiting. All of us registered at the reception desk and were led to the Administrative Leadership Section of the Organization Department in the Party’s Central Committee. The Comrade Secretary in charge was already waiting for us. The Comrade Secretary led us to a small meeting room where five of us were to receive appointment as managers from the Comrade Secretary in front of the portraits of three Great Leaders.

I received my appointment first. The certificate says, “Comrade Kim Chang-ho (pseudonym) is notified that he has been appointed as manager of the Pyongyang OOOO Factory under the leadership of the Beloved Leader, Kim Jong-Il and his great political trust and consideration. Year of Juche 98, February 12.” All the rest of us received the appointments in the same manner, followed by a simple speech of congratulations and encouragement by the Comrade Secretary. This ceremony of appointments was one of the projects planned on the occasion of the birthday of our Beloved Leader. The ceremony itself took less than ten minutes. After the ceremony, we, the appointed managers, went to the Administrative Leadership Section and wrote our pledges to our Beloved Leader.

“Our pledge,
We respectfully submit to you, father of us all, great heaven-sent Marshal Kim Jong-Il. I, Kim Chang-ho, was born into an ordinary soldier’s family in Kanggye and graduated from Kanggye Middle School. I followed in my father’s footsteps and served six years as a frontline sentry. I was allowed to join our glorious Chosun Rodong Party and received recommendations for university education. Consequently, I had a privilege to attend the Han Duk-soo Light Industry College in Pyongyang. Later, my father was called to serve in the Support Bureau of Ministry of Defense, and our family ended up living in Pyongyang. Since I graduated from college, I have worked at the Research Institute of Light Industry and Science. I graduated from the People’s Economics College and since then have been working as Chief Engineer of the Pyongyang Textile Factory. I could never repay all of the glory, trust and concern given to me. My new appointment as the manager of a class one enterprise strikes me with awe. I will never know how to repay the grace and trust upon me, it is as great as an ocean. I hereby pledge: I will dedicate myself to the great project of establishing a strong nation by the year 2012. I am willing to sacrifice myself to the tasks given to me by our Beloved Leader with the resolution that I would not even have any right to die before the tasks are completed. Please trust me. I pledge that the factory under my management will never be a concern to you, our Beloved Leader. Year of Juche 98 February 12.”

After I finished writing my pledge, the propaganda secretary of the factory party was waiting for me with a car. We drove to the factory. The factory party secretary as well as other leaders welcomed me. They said, “Our favorite national holiday will be in a few days (Feb. 16). We prepared some provisions for you during the national holiday break. Please start
your work at the factory after the holiday.” I found out that the provisions included five bottles of Baekdoo Mountain wild berry liquor, 5 kgs of pork, two live chickens, a box of apples, 10 kgs of potato, 10 liters of soy oil and other sweet cakes.

When I arrived home, my wife was the one that welcomed me the most. Perhaps she welcomed the provisions more than me. On the other hand, my mother mentioned her worries as soon as I entered the room.

My mother frowned and said, “My eye lids have been trembling since yesterday, and I was afraid that this was the sign of some evil omen. Your appointment must be it.”

“How come you sound so superstitious?” I said. “Do you think your appointment as manager of a class one enterprise is so great? I have never seen any manager who performed well all the way through to the end. They often end up in suspension without pay or receive punishment from the party. Sometimes it gets worse. They can be kicked out of the party or sent to a rural area. That’s my worry.”

My sister followed my mother, “Mom is right. Isn’t the factory manager a hostage? He is a sacrificial lamb. Good for being whipped.”

“You sound so ridiculous.”

Mother added, “She is not ridiculous. My worry is like a high mountain. Do you remember the young man recommended as a groom for Chang-ok (pseudonym)? I am not opposed to the marriage. We should get ready for her marriage. If something unexpected happens to you, all of us in the family might be exiled to the rural area. Can you imagine your sister following us to the rural area too? Having her get married off as soon as possible will be a way to avoid such a potential hardship. Chang-ho, do you know how many managers of light industry got fired, kicked off or exiled to the rural area so far? Do you think they were less faithful or less competent? They just became sacrificial lambs because of unreasonable requests from their superiors or due to their own initiatives to save the factory. Isn’t this the fate of all workers in the administration?”

My father who had so far kept silent opened his mouth, “Please listen to your mother carefully. Never volunteer your initiatives under any circumstances. You may have to endure everything up to and including a suspension without pays, but do not suffer beyond that.”

“Father, I am not blind. I know how to behave myself in a dangerous situation. I have accumulated experiences since my graduation from the People’s Economics College. Leaders of our young generation are aware of a gap, wide and deep, between reality and the current policies. We are learning how to survive in that situation. We learn how to escape it, not just in school, but also in reality.”

My mother interrupted again, “Chang-ho, you still sound alive and proud. Don’t ever think those other managers were less competent than you. When you are dismissed or exiled, however competent you think you might be, it won’t be able to help you. That’s what makes me worry.”
Chang-ok added, “Mom is right. They say the gates of a strong nation will be open by the year of 2012, but be honest with yourself. Do you see any light at the end of the tunnel? Figure out how to stay away from responsibility. Think hard and think again to avoid being a target. Think of the family more.”

I said, “Don’t worry too much. I will do something before I become a hostage. Everyone relax. With so much to eat here, let’s enjoy our greatest national holiday now.”

I heard other families do not welcome appointments as administrative leaders. Our family is not any different. After that I found out my family’s worries, I also began to worry.
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