

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY AREA

Weizhou township, the capital of Wenchuan County, is located in a mountainous area, 1,200 - 2,200 metres above sea level, at the intersection of the Ming River and Zagunao River. It is a temperate zone characterised by a semi-dry monsoon climate. There are two major roads crossing the region, Chengdu-Aba and Chengdu-Nanpin. The principal natural resources are water, forests, wild animals, and medicinal plants which are a source of traditional medicine.

There are 12 villages under the jurisdiction of the Weizhou township government; three in the basin at an elevation of 1,300 to 1,400 metres, another five on the mountain slopes (1,400-2,000 metres), and four at elevations of 2,000 metres above sea level (see map). In 1990, the total population was 8,223. Ninety-three per cent were of *Qiang* nationality. The culture, customs, and religion of the *Qiang* nationality are similar to those of the *Han* nationality in Sichuan Province, possibly due to a long history of exchange and involvement in the same type of agricultural activity.

Agriculture remains a major occupation, although the share of crop production in the total income has been declining for more than a decade.

Socioeconomic and Resource Profile

The total population of Weizhou township is 8,223, of which 3,872 or 47.1 per cent of the total population are part of the active labour force. Females account for 47.3 per cent of the total labour force. The average family size is around five. A sample survey of 20 households in Binli settlement showed that about 27.5 per cent of the labour force were illiterate, 39.1 per cent had elementary education, i.e., 6 years of schooling, 31.9 per cent had about 9 years' of schooling (junior high), and about 1.4 per cent had completed senior high (12 years' of schooling) school.

The average amount of arable land per capita is only 1.39 *mu* (less than 0.09 ha; 15 *mu* = 1 ha). This does not include marginal lands that are planted with fruit trees. Traditionally, corn and other grain crops were the major agricultural crops. Soyabean and cash crops were introduced later.

In 1981 when the System of Contracting the Production Responsibility to Households (CPRH) was established, farmers started reclamation activities on the virgin hilly areas and slopes of mountains to produce apples, Sichuan chilli peppers (S-pepper), cherries, and walnuts, Table 1 shows the structure of present land use.

Diversification of farming has brought about changes in the rural economy and increased farmers' living standards. The growth of non-agricultural activities induced further diversification of the entire economy. Corn was replaced by rice as a staple food grain. Meanwhile, farmers' expenses on durable consumer goods have also increased. Table 2 gives a breakdown of farmers' income and the changes that have taken place between 1978 and 1990.

In Weizhou township, the major off-farm activities include those related to livestock, horticulture and forest products, transportation, industry, and retail business. This is reflected in Table 3 which shows the output of off-farm activities.

Table 1: Land Use in Weizhou Township

	Forest	Farmland	Fruits ¹	S-Pepper	Total
<i>Mu</i>	3,421.1	11,430.5	1,415.9	4,249.8	20,517.3
%	16.7	55.7	6.9	20.7	100

1. Only fruit trees starting to produce fruits are included.

Table 2: Income Breakdown of Households between 1978 and 1990

Year	Income Source in Percentage				Income Per capita (Rmb)		% Family
	Crop	Fruit	Livestock	Sideline (Other non-ag.)	Total	Average	Owning TV
1978	50.5	8.5	3.1	37.9	1,217,618	113	0
1990	33.1	16.7	18.9	31.3	6,136,124	606	67.8
%	-17.4	+8.2	+15.8	-6.6	+504	+536	+67.8

Source: A General Introduction to Non-Agricultural Activities in Weizhou - no date

**Table 3: Output Value of Off-farm Activities
(Thousand Rmb)***

	Total	Fruits & Forest Products	Livestock	Industry	Transport	Retail	Other
Amount	4110.9	1026.4	1160.5	467.7	574.5	128.6	753.2
%	100	25	28	11	14	3	18

*In 1988, the conversion rate between the *yuan* and the U.S. dollar was 3.75

Water is among the major resources of Weizhou township. Since Weizhou is in a mountainous area with semi-dry climatic conditions, there is a growing demand for water for irrigation purposes as well as industrial use. The waters of the river Mingjiang remain as yet unutilised. Water conservation is one of the major needs of the area.

Infrastructure and Institutions

Development infrastructure and institutions at the township level include extension offices/centres under the local government and organisations under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) branch (Chart 1). In Weizhou, as with everywhere else in China, political and administrative powers are shared by the local government and the CCP. The local government is usually responsible for administrative decisions, whereas the CCP branch takes care of the business of personnel, propaganda, ideological, and cultural affairs. However, whenever there is a major policy implementation exercise or a temporary job assigned by higher levels of government, both establishments generally work together under the leadership of the CCP branch since, after all, the leading posts in both institutions are concurrently held by the same people.

Chart 1: The Structure of the Local Government and CCP Branch in Weizhou Township

