

Interview with Jin Renfu

Jin Renfu is a proprietor of a small restaurant on the bank of the Jian River in Unfettered Valley (*Xiaoyao Gu*) with no sign, nor many customers.

Interviewer: About how long have you lived in the Wudang Shan area?

Jin Renfu: I've lived in this area all my life (45 years).

Interviewer: Can you tell me your impression of the changes you've witnessed in the area in the last ten to twenty years?

Jin Renfu: Well, there used to be many houses throughout the valley, but most of these have been torn down and reclaimed by nature since their residents were moved. The public road is relatively new.

Interviewer: What was here before the road?

Jin Renfu: There were many more people. Now visitors take a car or bus to the main sites without bothering to stop here at the bottom of the valley. The trail that you came down [now primarily overgrown, though still passable] was once the main road that pilgrims from all over China traveled to reach the Golden Summit. Unlike today, it was tended regularly and there were a string of stands along the route to cater to pilgrims. Now, those who haven't been moved have gone up the mountain [to the larger tourist areas] to seek a living.

Interviewer: In your experience, how does the total amount of pilgrims today compare to the time before the start of major improvements to the park (pre-1994)?

Jin Renfu: There are far fewer pilgrims than before. In the winter there are still a good amount of pilgrims, but even then it is less than several years ago.

Interviewer: In the winter? Why is this?

Jin Renfu: Because they [the pilgrims] are primarily farmers. They live off the land. During the winter they have time to devote to pilgrimage. During the summer they are far too busy.

Interviewer: In your experience, how does the total amount of tourists today compare to the time before the start of major improvements to the park?

Jin Renfu: There are many more. Today we have tourists from foreign lands as well.

Interviewer: This disparity in classification may just be semantics, but could you clarify the difference between tourists (*yoke*) and pilgrims (*xiangke*) in your estimation?

Jin Renfu: Well, yes. Pilgrims come for religion (*zongjiao*) whereas tourists come for fun (*wan'r*).

Interviewer: Is there overlap between these two categories?

Jin Renfu: I suppose there is.

Interviewer: Have you noticed any significant change in the amount and quality of temples [since pre-1994]?

Jin Renfu: There has been little change. They are the same as before. I guess some have been renovated though.

Interviewer: You were in the area during the Cultural Revolution. Do you have memories from this time?

Jin Renfu: Oh yes.

Interviewer: I have received conflicting reports concerning the extent of the destruction during this period. Do you know if many temples were destroyed during this time?

Jin Renfu: Oh yes, many were destroyed.

Interviewer: Which ones?

Jin Renfu: Prince's Slope was completely torn down.

Interviewer: What about Purple Cloud Hall?

Jin Renfu: No, not really, but all the temples on the South-Facing Cliff were.

Interviewer: What about smaller temples and shrines?

Jin Renfu: Yes many shrines were destroyed and idols smashed by the Red Guards. There are very few shrines to the Earth God surviving today. Actually the people who 'believe' (*xinyang*) are very few now. In the past there were many though.

Interviewer: During this time [the Cultural Revolution] did religious practice continue?

Jin Renfu: Religion was not allowed during the Cultural Revolution but people still practiced in secret in their houses.

Interviewer: Do you remember when people started practicing religion openly once again?

Jin Renfu: By the 80's. Yes eighty - something.

Interviewer: Did you notice any change in religious practice after the interruption during the Cultural Revolution?

Jin Renfu: No there was no major change. Worship is still relatively the same.

Interviewer: Are you religious (*xinyang*)?

Jin Renfu: Yes, I am a Daoist.

Interviewer: What forms does your worship take? Do you have a shrine in your house? Do you visit temples?

Jin Renfu: I'm very busy, but still find time to visit Golden Summit and Purple Cloud Temple once a year.

Interviewer: Do you have to buy entrance tickets to these places?

Jin Renfu: No, it is free for locals. That is, only if I carry my identification card.

Interviewer: I would like to know about the relocation program you spoke of earlier. Why have you been able to remain while others have been forced to relocate to Laoying?

Jin Renfu: No one has forced us to move yet.

Interviewer: Why is this?

Jin Renfu: I'm not sure, but we've already been moved once before so maybe they will wait before they move us again.

Interviewer: Where did you move from? And when did you move?

Jin Renfu: They [government authorities?] moved us three years ago from Prince's Slope and let us open a restaurant here.

Interviewer: Do you know how authorities decide when and who to move?

Jin Renfu: No I don't understand this. I do know they want us all to leave one day though.

Interviewer: So you think you'll be moved once again?

Jin Renfu: Definitely.

Interviewer: Where would you go and how would you support yourself?

Jin Renfu: We would go to Laoying with the rest of them and try to start a business. But it will be difficult for us to support ourselves in Laoying. There are already so many people competing for business. We have no money saved and no home there so a move would be very hard on us.

Interviewer: Does the government compensate those who are forced to move?

Jin Renfu: Yes, of course.

Interviewer: How much do they give on average?

Jin Renfu: A few thousand, but it depends on the area of your house. They give about ninety yuan per square meter.

Interviewer: Is this enough to move to Laoying and start again?

Jin Renfu: It's definitely not enough, but what can we do? I feel angry sometimes, but anger doesn't help. What choice do we have but to obey? It is like moving a tree: you dig up its roots and plant it in a new place. It won't actually die, but it will never fully adapt.

Interviewer: What about burial sites on the mountain? Can those who've been forced to move return to their home village for burial?

Jin Renfu: No, burial has been slowly phased out. There has been a switch more and more to cremation when people pass away.

Interviewer: What about graves around the area? Do people return to visit the graves of ancestors?

Jin Renfu: Well compared to before there are very few graves these days. With the passing of time these graves have gradually decayed and returned back to the Earth. People still return to respect their ancestors' graves but as I said, there are very few of these compared with before. These days people get cremated.

Interviewer: Lastly, I've a few more general questions regarding your experience of the transformation of the Wudang Shan region in the last twenty years. How does your present occupation compare with your job before the improvements to the area?

Jin Renfu: After elementary school I had to start working immediately. I worked in the fields and as a laborer and was very poor. But look, before I worked as a hard laborer and

today I have my own restaurant. So of course this is a big improvement. Though I'm still not a rich man, I make much more money than I did back then.

Before it was very difficult to make money, but now with the road improvement and the opening of my restaurant it is easier to bring in income. My standard of living has risen sharply since the opening of the area.

Interviewer: Has there been a correspondent change in culture with this rise in the standard of living?

Jin Renfu: Change in culture?

Interviewer: I've gotten the impression that there is a campaign to alter traditions in the area that don't conform to tourist expectations. Have you seen the booklet entitled Trustworthy People of Wudang (Chengxin Wudang Ren)?

Jin Renfu: No I haven't seen it.

Interviewer: In general, what hopes do you have for the future?

Jin Renfu: Well my son will start elementary school this year. I hope he will attend college, get a good job and help us when we get old.

Interviewer: Where does he attend school?

Jin Renfu: We send him into Laoying for school.

Interviewer: Will he commute every day?

Jin Renfu: No, it's too far and too expensive. He will sleep in a student dormitory.

[The interview having far exceeded the time originally estimated, we end the interview as Jin, a busy man, prepares food for some newly arrived guests]