

## Interview with Jiang Heqiang

Interview with Jiang Heqiang, a shopkeeper in one of the many stalls alongside the road at Crow Ridge. She was moved there earlier this year from Purple Cloud Village. Interview conducted both in the Daoist Cultural Center and in her stall as she attempted to sell items to passersby.

*Interviewer:* Can you tell me a little something about yourself and how you made it here to Crow Ridge?

*Jiang Heqiang:* I was born and raised in Purple Cloud Village. I've lived there my whole life until I was forced to move earlier this year. Now I have no home.

*Interviewer:* When and under what circumstances were you moved?

*Jiang Heqiang:* It was this year [2004] right before the March Third festival, but I'm not sure of the exact date when they told us to move. Some people just came to our door one day and told us that the higher-ups said that we needed to leave. We were upset but had no choice in the matter, as it had already been determined. Before our village, the government only moved temporary dwellings like shacks and makeshift-houses. Ours was the first village of permanent residents to be moved. Makeshift houses are meant to be demolished because the people who inhabit them are transient themselves, but ours was the first group of regular/standard houses to be demolished. We had just finally bought that house a few years ago after many years of saving the money we earned at the teashop. We were quite upset.

*Interviewer:* Can you tell me about your impressions of the government's compensation package?

*Jiang Heqiang:* Well, they gave us 120 yuan per square meter. But this pitiful sum wasn't enough to cover moving and buying a new house. They should have supplied us with housing but they deceived us.

*Interviewer:* Deceived you? How so?

*Jiang Heqiang:* They simply didn't give us enough money. It takes several hundred yuan per square meter to buy a house in Laoying, but they only gave us 120 yuan! Then they said that they'd add an extra 60 yuan per square meter. Each village unit head was required to add 40 yuan per square meter, while the village accountant adds 20 yuan per square meter. But we commoners (*laobaixing*) asked the government: Purple Cloud Village is completely broke, how can you possibly ask us to add 60 yuan per square meter to move residents? All they said was that these were the orders from above and that that money should have been provided in the original sum given to the village heads.

But we asked the village heads and they said they never received so much money. So where did it go?

*Interviewer:* And so the 'deceit' was due to the missing money?

*Jiang Heqiang:* No, not just that. The deceit lies in the fact that the entire situation isn't fair. That money should have been ours to start with, but only after we aggressively sought it out, appealing to various government agencies, were we able to finally get the extra 60 yuan from the local government.

*Interviewer:* So you did get the extra 60 yuan, bringing the total to 180 yuan per square meter. Is that right?

*Jiang Heqiang:* Yes, but as I said before it takes hundreds of yuan per square meter to buy a new house in Laoying and so adding a miniscule 60 yuan really doesn't make a big difference in the long run. Anyway, we shouldn't have had to seek it out. That money originally should have been ours. The government should have pre-arranged housing for us to move to if they planned on giving us so little, but they are too corrupt. The entire Wudang Shan government pockets the money that should be going to help people like us. Corruption is a very bad problem here.

*Interviewer:* Is that how others in the area feel as well?

*Jiang Heqiang:* Well, even if we don't often say it, we know it. We simply have not been convinced with their efforts. The compensation was not enough. There's no way to buy a new house with it.

*Interviewer:* You said that you pursued various government agencies for extra money. How did the process work?

*Jiang Heqiang:* It's really been difficult. We've complained before the provincial government on several occasions to supply us with housing and already my husband has been to Beijing twice to raise our complaint to the national government. The first time he went he discussed the problem with the Bureau of Housing (*xinfang ju*) but was sent back to Hubei to take up the matter with the provincial Bureau of Housing. This effort had no effect and so about a month ago he returned to Beijing, finally getting a hearing with the Court for Housing Matters (*jianshe ting*). But this failed too and they once again sent the order back down to the regional government. Now we wait to hear from them.

*Interviewer:* What are your primary demands?

*Jiang Heqiang:* We simply want a place to live and food to eat. This is really not a question of money as it is about our basic need for housing and food.

*Interviewer:* What will you do in the meantime?

*Jiang Heqiang*: I will keep working and wait for their decision. Who knows how long it will take or if they really are looking at our case in earnest. We still haven't received the 2000 yuan for leaving the mountain area (*rentou fei*) because to do so would be to acknowledge that we are no longer mountain residents, giving us little ground to argue on in court. This way we are still considered local and our case is stronger.

*Interviewer*: How do you feel about your chances of getting a favorable court decision?

*Jiang Heqiang*: I really don't know. Who knows how long it will take to get some sort of resolution. There are so many levels of government for these questions to pass through. It's very complicated and nothing happens quickly. All we can do is wait, but who knows how long. Even though I know that our chances of getting a house from the government are rather small, I will continue as long as I can the process of appeals until someone listens to us. It's incredibly disheartening. Not having a home - this isn't even a possibility!

*Interviewer*: How have you been getting by these days?

*Jiang Heqiang*: It's been very rough on us. Even though our home was small, at least it was *ours*. But now without a home the days have been very hard to get through. Money has been quite scarce and business hasn't been going well. There is simply too much competition - too many of these small shops and not enough tourists. Even the few tourists we do get, most often don't spend very much money.

It's been bad for my family as well. It's split my husband and I up as he's been forced to go to the only place where he can find work - Laoying. He does hard labor in the valley and I stay up here on the ridge sleeping on the floor of my shop at night. I see him very rarely these days.

*Interviewer*: What about other residents?

*Jiang Heqiang*: Many have moved to Laoying, but no one has found good work. Some still live in the few shops remaining at Purple Cloud Temple and others have come up here to Crow Ridge as I have.

*Interviewer*: Your connection to your home village seems strong. Do you have relatives buried in the area? Do you wish to be buried here as well? Is that allowed?

*Jiang Heqiang*: I haven't got relatives buried here, but my husband does. We honor them on *Qingming Jie*.

Yes, it's allowed assuming you get permission from the village head. I know people in the city are no longer allowed to be buried on the mountain, but those with rural residency still can. Since I haven't accepted the 2000 yuan moving fee I'm still considered a local and can therefore be buried here.

*Interviewer:* A quick question on the efforts to 'civilize' local residents by the local government: Have you seen the booklet entitled Honest People of Wudang (Chengxin Wudang Ren @)? And if so, have you read it?

*Jiang Heqiang:* Yes I've seen it, but I haven't read it.

*Interviewer:* Do you have any final words on the greater transformation of Wudang Shan; it's future and specifically your role in defining it?

*Jiang Heqiang:* Wudang Shan is better now than before the area was opened up. Better, I guess for everyone but commoners like us. Now we have no home to return to and this is certainly a horrible feeling. It is simply not fair that we commoners have no voice and authority. It's not an equitable situation and we commoners are not convinced with the government's efforts. The government doesn't work for the people but rather for themselves. I would support the government's plan for the development of Wudang Shan if it could likewise help the commoners - but it hasn't helped us thus far and so I don't support it.