

## Interview with Li Rui and Chen Liqin

Interview with Li Rui, the proprietor of a small makeshift shop grasping the steep slope opposite Purple Cloud Temple and extending along the main road. The shop likewise acts as a temporary home for him and his family. A prominent figure in the community of Purple Cloud, he is forty-three years old and has lived at Purple Cloud his whole life.

During the conversation, Li's friend Chen Liqin, a worker clearing rubbish from the parking lot and street, sat down and joined us.

*Interviewer:* First a quick question: have you seen the booklet entitled *Trustworthy People of Wudang* (Chengxin Wudang Ren)? And if so, have you read it?

*Li Rui:* No, never seen it nor heard of it.

*Interviewer:* I've heard that within the last year you were forced to move from your home at Purple Cloud Village. Can you elaborate on some of the circumstances as well as impressions surrounding this move?

*Li Rui:* I was moved so as to protect this World Cultural Heritage Site. We understand and obey such decisions by the Communist Party leadership. I don't speak just for myself when I say that we support the plan for protection of the scenic area – it is logical. Our only real complaint is with the compensation package.

*Interviewer:* And what complaint is that?

*Li Rui:* Well, it's just not enough. Originally it was 90 yuan per square meter, but then we got it increased to 180 yuan. After an expensive trip to Beijing and lodging formal complaints with the Housing Bureau we were able to once again increase this figure by another 60 yuan, making the total 240 yuan per square meter. But even with all of this work, it's still not enough. We need 300 yuan per square meter at the very least to adequately compensate us, but should have gotten 500 yuan per square meter if they really expected us to move to Laoying and find a place there to live.

*Interviewer:* I see you haven't made the move to Laoying. Why is this?

*Li Rui:* Well that question is a bit complicated. Before the resettlement I was a shopkeeper in Purple Cloud Village with an individual's commerce permit. Because I was one of the few with a permit the local officials let me keep my shop even after the resettlement. But for most people there is no such opportunity [for employment] and they are best off going to Laoying and trying to work something out.

Actually, even though I work [and sleep] here I've accepted the compensation package and so my residency is now in Laoying. This worked out rather well for me, though I'm still very poor and my life is hard. Business has not been nearly as good as it

was before. You see, before the relocation we could use our house to lodge pilgrims and other such visitors. This money actually went a long way for us, but now with no house there is no way to continue making money on the side.

Now they want the tourists to stay in the larger hotels. This way the cheapest room a visitor can find is 200 yuan a night! We've taken a 60% loss in income because of this.

*Interviewer:* Are there many others who've stayed behind like yourself?

*Li Rui:* It's hard to turn down the money. That's precisely how they get you out: if you leave they give you one enticing lump sum and if you don't, they tell you that you won't see a penny. Demolishing your house is a direct government dictate, but the decision to leave the mountain area or not ultimately comes down to the individual. Most chose to leave, but since then some of these have already returned mostly because they couldn't find work or a place to live in Laoying.

Of the over three hundred people who used to live in Purple Cloud about 80% have already left. The other 20% are a mixture of those who couldn't stand to leave their home and those who left for a short period, found they couldn't make it in Laoying and have since returned. Even though returning is prohibited under the stipulations of the compensation package, many have done it anyway.

It's just too difficult to make a living down the mountain with so little money and no friends and relatives to turn to for support. They have no money for rice much less enough to buy a house! And with no work they can't even save a penny – they just slowly spend their compensation until it's all gone and they're completely broke.

*Interviewer:* Earlier you stated that you support the government's policies to protect Wudang Shan as a World Cultural Heritage Site. This is an honorable position considering the loss of income you have suffered as a result of one of these programs.

*Li Rui:* It's not the policy we disagree with; it's the implementation of it at the local level that has brought us much frustration. We agree that the protection and preservation of the World Cultural Heritage Site is of utmost importance. It's just that the entire process has been ridden with deceit.

The local government has deceived the people. They said that they'd give us fair compensation and assured us of steady employment opportunities for after the move. But the local government is just no good. What good is a little compensation money if you have no work? They promised 400 yuan per month and a steady source of income but this was all empty talk because as soon as our houses were torn down they forgot about us. And when we try to resist their most unfair policies, they threaten to disturb our business. Now look what pitiful state we are in. But I am not afraid. I will speak my mind.

*Interviewer:* How far in advance were you given notification that you had to move and have your houses demolished?

*Li Rui:* One week! Can you believe that! They told us on April 17th [2004] that we'd have to move by April 25th after which they'd start fining us for stalling. One or two months I understand, but only one week to leave the place where you've lived your entire life!

When we said that we needed more time to take the matter up with the Housing Bureau they refused to grant it. They pressured us to have the houses destroyed as soon as possible and before a real protest effort could be realized. They especially bullied us eight.

*Interviewer:* You eight?

*Li Rui:* Yes, there were eight of us who went to the Housing Bureau in Beijing to lodge a formal complaint.

*Interviewer:* And what became of this trip?

*Li Rui:* As I said before, the first time we went we got the figure raised by 60 yuan per square meter, but it should have been much more. They just sent the suit back to the local courts where the matter has now stood without any resolution. The upper courts can make these decisions quickly, but when the suit returns to the lower courts, who knows how long it will take to get a decision? It's pure corruption. Somewhere in between the upper court's settlement figure and the distribution to the residents a lot of money is unaccounted for. The upper court decided on 500 yuan per square meter but we only got a little more than 200 yuan per square meter. And every time we appeal it seems that the local government comes out richer again and we find ourselves under greater pressure.

All of this I'd be willing to live with if they'd just arranged some decent work for us. Now most of us are too poor to go on. We have no rice to eat.

*Interviewer:* Have you heard of the similar situation south of here at Three Gorges Dam?

*Li Rui:* Yes, they too have been displaced but they got a better compensation package than us. Anyway you look at it, displacement makes people sad and frustrated. With no friends and family to depend on nor work to pay for one's rice, life is very hard.

Like I said before, we support the policies for the development of Wudang Shan but now that we've been mistreated and forgotten such development means nothing to us. It's not a balanced development and is certainly not fair. If they were fair to us, then I'd be in full support of their policies.

*Interviewer:* Earlier you said that local officials had bullied you. How did they do this? Are you not afraid to continue the process of appeals or even speak with me now?

*Li Rui:* They actually haven't touched me, but they've threatened us and keep us under constant pressure to stay quiet. But I'm not afraid. They say we can't talk about this in public or they'll arrest us, but if we stay quiet everyone will forget. I speak openly because I hope someone will hear us and be able to help us.

We trusted them, but now I know you can't depend on the local Party. They arrest you if they think you'll expose their corruption. But it's certainly not consistent. Now I don't fear the local officials because I know that the national government knows about our case. They [the local government] can only intimidate the weak. But I am strong – and they don't dare arrest me now.

The local government has a black heart. They only bully those they know they can exploit. I'll give you a hypothetical example: Two people get in a brawl. One is rich and the other poor. The police arrive to break it up but instead of arresting both, they arrest the poor guy and let the rich guy go. He gets off by having connections and paying a fine to the police officers that go right in their pocket. The rich guy can do whatever he pleases, while the poor guy goes to jail.

Originally, they threatened to arrest us if we took our case to the Central Authority so we had no choice but to leave surreptitiously in the middle of the night just to be able to get out of town unobstructed. But now our case is known and we enjoy a degree of authority.

*Chen Liqin:* Though it was once us who feared them, now it's them who fear us common people (*laobaixing*) going to the Central Authority.

We first sought the help of the provincial government in Wuhan, but they just sent us on to Beijing. I was also one of the eight who went to Beijing, but now that I'm back I'm no longer afraid. The local government says that we're forbidden to speak of the subject or they'll arrest us. They've threaten to take away our commercial permits and force us to close shop. But these threats just prove that they're scared of us. We know that they won't follow up on them because if they do we'll start a war and we'll keep going back to Beijing until the dispute is resolved.

*Interviewer:* How much faith do you have in the upper courts and Central Authority in being able to resolve this dispute?

*Chen Liqin:* I think they can certainly help us because they have authority over the local government. But so far they've only returned the case back to the local courts and no resolution has been made. And things only get harder for us as time passes. We've been spending our compensation money waiting for a resolution and soon that little money will be gone. How will we make it back to Beijing if all our money's spent?

*Interviewer:* Do you know anything of UNESCO's role in this dispute?

*Chen Liqin:* They are not to blame. It's our local government's corruption that has caused the problem. UNESCO officials came here some years ago and investigated the local conditions. In the end they determined that we residents didn't have to leave to fully preserve the area's cultural relics and natural environment. But when we tried to raise our complaint to the UNESCO Beijing office, they wouldn't even let us in the door. We have not yet been able to present our problem to the proper UNESCO authorities.

*Interviewer:* In conclusion can you say anything about your hopes for the future, beyond a resolution to your compensation package suit?

Li Rui: I just hope that they don't destroy my shop. It's my only source of income now that we no longer take guests for the night. But if they do tear this shack down, I'd understand. It's for the development of Wudang Shan. If they do in fact tear it down I just hope that they don't forget about me and provide me with a new shop, bigger and nicer than this one.

Chen Liqin: The future, we shall see - day by day (*manman lai*). I want better living conditions for today though. Right now we have so many people crowded into the old school living in the classrooms. More than twenty to a room and no showers - They're very bad conditions. I hope this will change soon.