

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH JIAYAN ZHANG

CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

for the

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Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott
Monday, 24 October 2016
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TS: Jiayan Zhang was the 2016 recipient of the Kennesaw State University Outstanding Book Award. This is a new campus-wide award, and so Jiayan is the first ever recipient. We're going to talk about his book *Coping with Calamity* in a few minutes.¹ But we're going to start by asking you to talk about your background. I know for instance that you graduated from Hubei Agricultural College in 1984, which makes you at least twenty years younger than I because I graduated from college in '64. But your background is in China, and why don't you talk about that a little bit because graduating in '84 I guess you were born sometime in the '60s.

JZ: Yes, 1964.

TS: Okay, so you were born into a world where Mao Tse-tung was still running the country and, to say the least, some interesting things were going on in China in those years. So why don't you talk about your background? Where did you grow up, and what was life like for you while you were living in China, and what kind of schooling did you have, and how did you end up in an agricultural college?

JZ: Thank you first, Tom, for interviewing me. This is a very great honor to be interviewed by you, and it's a really wonderful experience that I won the book award. Okay, this is a long story. I grew up in the countryside. I was born two years before the Cultural Revolution [1966-1976]. I grew up and went to school in the middle of the Cultural Revolution. Actually, as village boys we did not know much about the outside world. At that time we thought everything was normal, everything should be that way. We had no idea about the outside world. We went to a village school. At that time, every kid was able to go to school. We did not have to pay a lot of tuition or something like that. It was pretty much free. So we just went to school. Maybe you can say that the teachers were not really qualified for teaching.

TS: Not qualified?

JZ: In the village school, many of them, according to today's standards, were not highly qualified. Some of them had just graduated from high school and returned to teach.

TS: Because there was a shortage of teachers?

¹ Jiayan Zhang, *Coping with Calamity: Environmental Change and Peasant Response in Central China, 1736-1949* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014).

JZ: Yes, I think so, and it was not very common before because you also need to know we are actually the Baby Boomers, like in the United States.

TS: The Baby Boomers?

JZ: Lots of young kids. So that's the reason almost every village had a school.

TS: And you were in a rural area?

JZ: Yes, I was in the village. The school was in my village. All my brothers and sisters went to the same elementary school. Because there were so many kids, actually, we had a so-called middle school after elementary school—two years of middle school—so I went to middle school in my village as well. That's really unusual. I don't think it was common before.

TS: They didn't have a middle school before?

JZ: No, I don't think so, probably only a couple of years.

TS: You said no tuition, but in America we just assume that there was no tuition in elementary school. Before the Communist revolution, did Chinese parents have to pay tuition?

JZ: No public schools. To my understanding, before there were only private schools.

TS: That would probably make the Communists popular.

JZ: Yes, to my understanding only private schools had existed in [rural] China, so you had to pay the teacher, not necessarily money, but maybe some food, like grain, to pay the teacher. I remember my grandfather only attended, I think, two months of school.

TS: In his whole life?

JZ: It was too expensive [back then]. But almost every kid [at my age], I think, in my village at that time went to school.

TS: So you're the first generation where that's happening I guess.

JZ: Not necessarily first generation, because I attended in the 1960s.

TS: And 1949 was when the Communist Party came to power.

JZ: Yes, the changes were taking place in the 1950s.

TS: So the Communist reforms were almost fifteen years old by the time you were born. But you mentioned the Cultural Revolution. How did that affect education?

JZ: I always had a different view than other people. I thought that the Cultural Revolution really did not affect the education in rural areas very much. The Cultural Revolution was mostly an urban thing; that's my understanding. Of course, it was affected. For example, we did not have enough textbooks. We were short of textbooks. I think the economic situation at that time was not good. I don't think we paid much, probably a couple of Chinese yuan, Chinese dollars. I think it was a couple of dollars per semester, half a year. It's a very small number, but at that time it was still expensive. But our whole family was able to get us some education.

TS: Okay, so you go through middle school in your village.

JZ: In the village, and then I graduated from middle school and went to high school. So in high school there's some change. There was no high school in my village, so I had to go to the commune, like a township. Commune is the name of a Chinese administrative system like a township that has many, many villages. I had to go to that high school, but the problem was the high school was a half hour to one hour walking. We had to get there by foot. Kind of far, and that was a rural high school. Our village is very close to town, to the county seat of our county. There was another high school, which was an urban high school, but it was actually in a rural setting. It was close to our village. Through some kind of personal connection, my parents found somebody in that high school and tried to transfer us, not just me, but some of the students from my village went to that school. That was an urban school, which was close to our village. So we actually walked only thirteen minutes to that school.

TS: Oh, that's closer then.

JZ: Yes, that's closer. But that school was different. In the whole city there was only one high school, and that was the best school in our county. Some of the teachers probably did not get along with each other. There was a high demand, so they built a new high school close to our village.

TS: The teachers didn't get along with other teachers?

JZ: In the First High School.

TS: So that's when they built the second high school.

JZ: No, they built the second high school because there was an increase in the number of students. But you understand that nobody wanted to teach in this new school because it was in a rural area. I will give you an example. There's a high school in downtown, and everyone wants to teach downtown.

TS: Right. They didn't want to go to the boondocks?

JZ: Yes. But they were good teachers.

TS: What did your parents do?

JZ: My parents are peasants.

TS: But they pushed you to get a good education it sounds like.

JZ: Well that's the good thing because my parents were like all traditional Chinese parents, because they did not get much education, but they knew education is important, so they said, "As long as you pass the examination for high school and college, we will support you."

TS: Did your parents own their land or did they rent?

JZ: Oh, no. That's different. When I was young in the 1960s and 1970s that was the time of the Maoist era, the age of collectivization, so nobody owned land.

TS: Oh, nobody owned land. With the Communists in charge I guess they wouldn't.

JZ: Yes, nobody owned any land.

TS: So the state owned the land?

JZ: Not necessarily. The land was owned by the state, but it was actually owned by the village. So no private land, except maybe a garden where people could grow vegetables.

TS: All for one and one for all.

JZ: To grow vegetables, but yes, they're working for the village.

TS: What did they think about that?

JZ: We never talked about that.

TS: Was it dangerous to talk about?

JZ: No, no, no, it's just . . .

TS: You just didn't talk about it.

JZ: We just didn't talk about it.

TS: You weren't curious about asking? No? When you were growing up and that's the only world you know I guess you accept it.

JZ: Yes, but I think it was in 1984 or something like that the land once again was returned to peasants to farm, so at that time . . .

TS: Oh, about the time you're graduating from college.

JZ: From college, exactly the same year.

TS: What year did Mao die?

JZ: In 1976. [September 9, 1976]

TS: So after that things began to change.

JZ: Deng [Xiaoping] came to power and by 1979 he began to change and reopened the universities.

TS: Because President Carter normalized . . .

JZ: He normalized the relationship between China and the United States in 1979 [recognized the People's Republic of China on January 1, 1979].

TS: Okay, so when you went to an agricultural college did you go there to study agriculture?

JZ: Well, as I told you, people did not have much expectation because those high schools consisted of students that the first high schools did not want. We came from rural village schools. Our training was not as good as those urban kids.

TS: What was the name of the province that you were in?

JZ: Hubei Province.

TS: Okay, so that's what you're going to write about later on?

JZ: Yes, Hubei Province.

TS: So you wrote about your hometown and area.

JZ: Yes. Before that time, college was not open to everybody. You know that. It was only about 1978 or 1979 that the university opened to the public and they began to recruit students from the society.

TS: So you passed the entrance exams?

JZ: I passed the national exam, which was very difficult at that time. I was told only three or four students among one hundred students were able to go to college.

TS: Oh, very restrictive?

JZ: Even more than that, because not every high school student was allowed to take the national exam.

TS: Oh, so only 3 or 4 four percent from those who were allowed to take it?

JZ: The numbers should be even smaller than that. Then the colleges recruit students based on scores, how many points you earned.

TS: Oh, I see, if your scores are higher, you go to a better college?

JZ: Yes, 500, 600, 700 and so forth on the exam; if you got a higher score you went to Beijing University. My score was not that good, so there were not many choices.

TS: Not that good out of the 3 or 4 percent?

JZ: Well, yes, I should say this was thirty years before now.

TS: Yes, we're talking 32 years since you graduated from college.

JZ: Yes, in the year before the exam my performance was probably the best in that school, but in the exam days always something happened. I pretty much caught a cold or something like that.

TS: You had a bad day?

JZ: Bad two or three days. So my score was really not that good. Barely, I could go to school, but not . . .

TS: But good enough to get into Hubei Agricultural College.

JZ: Hubei Agricultural College was a local university. Actually, it was not called this name at the time. The university I went to was not set up by the central government. Pretty much it was a provincial school. The province set up this school themselves, so it was not officially registered in the administration of education.

TS: So this is like a local community college?

JZ: It was "illegal", a black school. It was run by the government; it was just not run by the central government.

TS: I interview Ming Chen last year, and she was talking about black schools and red schools.

JZ: Oh, no that's different. We are talking about something that's completely different. It was not recognized by the central government. It was set up by the provincial government. So it was a different name, and the name officially was changed to Hubei Agricultural College. The original college name no longer exists. There are so many changes in the recent years. The Chinese colleges were all consolidated together, so Hubei Agricultural College merged with three or four other universities, and it became Yangzi University [in 2003].

TS: So China has had consolidations too.

JZ: Yes, so now it has become Yangzi. The university prefers to use the spelling Yangtze.

TS: But you don't?

JZ: Well, it's optional.

TS: And the Yangzi River looks to be a little south of Hubei Province?

JZ: Yes, exactly.

TS: So it's taken over your agricultural college now, through consolidation?

JZ: I don't know why they picked this name because the Yangzi River runs across so many provinces, but they just took this name. It's a very huge university [about 41,000 students in 2015].

TS: So it's kind of like we [Kennesaw State University] took over Southern Polytechnic State University?

JZ: No, we took over Southern Poly, and Southern Poly disappeared. Our college is now only a very small part of the Yangzi University, one of four campuses to my knowledge.

TS: Okay, did you go to Hubei Agricultural College to study agriculture or did you go there to study history?

JZ: No, I went there to study agriculture; this is an agriculture university.

TS: So did you think you were going to go back to your village and farm?

JZ: That's a good question to ask. You know, at that time, every college student was actually a potential government employee because we were recruited for that, and they would assign a job for you. We had to fill out a form like an archive or a personal archive, whatever. Our identities were as cadres, government officials. So as a university student they would probably assign you a job to teach in a school or to work in a government department or to work in a factory or even in shop. You know, at that time everything was owned by the government. So even if you were working in a factory, you were still a

government employee. So I was a government employee. At first they told us, “You will be agricultural technicians,” which means we would work in the low-level government.

TS: So you didn't have to look for a job; they gave you a job?

JZ: You probably wanted to look for a good job that could be in Beijing, but not if you attended my school.

TS: You're not going to work in Beijing?

JZ: No, my school was not good enough to send students to Beijing. But some of them will work in the capital of our province. Some will be working in cities, and some will go to the lowest government. That you can work out.

TS: I understand. Okay, so you graduated from there in '84. When did the Cultural Revolution end?

JZ: In 1976.

TS: Oh, okay, so it's long gone.

JZ: Long gone. You did not know much about it personally. I was a kid.

TS: So then it's six years before you get your first master's degree; so are you working as an agriculture technician for those six years?

JZ: Three years. I was an agricultural technician for three years working in the lowest government level in China.

TS: Did you enjoy it?

JZ: It depends. For a village boy working in government, many people who live in the villages think that's a good thing, right? Well, at that moment I thought there was some concern.

TS: You're too young to get any respect? Is that what you're saying?

JZ: No, I was respected. I was very young, but respected by them because I worked in the government. I was respected. Maybe that was not a main concern, but it was one concern. Actually, I was wrong because at that time it was very difficult to get promoted because you are at the bottom level. But the main concern was that our job was actually to go outside to go to different villages . . .

TS: To help the farmers, help the peasants?

JZ: Not necessarily helping; mostly talking with the village cadres. Sometimes we directly communicated with the peasants.

TS: You talk in your book about lots of corruption long before the communists ever took over. Are you saying that there was no merit system for advancement?

JZ: No, there was. I just did not know much about that at that time. But the thing is if you want, you could eat outside pretty much every meal.

TS: Eat outside?

JZ: Yes, and then there was drink. Almost every time you had to drink. For example, you visited a village, and because you were an official from a township, the village cadre had to treat you. You were in a very, very poor condition [restaurant], but it was still good to them.

TS: They have to take care of you?

JZ: Whatever the local restaurant was, you had to eat.

TS: So the village cadre takes you out to eat?

JZ: Eat and drink, you have a drink of wine, not beer.

TS: So you gained a lot of weight then?

JZ: Yes. Then if someone visited me, for example, from the county, I had to treat them. So pretty much almost every day was like this. Do you enjoy it or not depends. So I thought this is . . .

TS: This is not for you.

JZ: No. And I'm not a drink people, so I hate to drink, but it's hard for me to not drink because if you do not drink, they will say that you do not respect them.

TS: Oh, so you're disrespecting them?

JZ: Exactly. So that's why I would have to drink, even though it was hard on me. And another thing was you have to smoke. For the Chinese, smoking is very popular. Even though I hate smoking, I had to smoke. This is cultural.

TS: Do they grow tobacco in China?

MZ: Oh, of course. Even my grandpa grew some tobacco himself, but it was too raw, too strong. I think when I went to the government to work, at that time people just smoked cigarettes.

TS: So you used to smoke.

JZ: I hated to, but I had to because this is another culture, you see. You had to give a cigarette to other people when you got together.

TS: But you don't smoke now do you?

JZ: No, after I left the position, I didn't smoke any more.

TS: Okay, so you spent three years there, and you didn't want to do that anymore, so you went to graduate school?

JZ: Graduate school, yes.

TS: And you went to Nanjing Agricultural University and studied agronomy?

JZ: Agro-history.

TS: Oh, I thought it was agronomy.

JZ: Agronomy was the title for the master degree. There's no title for agro-history.

TS: Okay, so you're really studying agricultural history?

JZ: Agro-history. The name of the institution is called the Institute of Agricultural History or Chinese Agro-History.

TS: The institute was inside the university?

JZ: Inside the university.

TS: Okay, so were you thinking at this point, "I want to be a college professor?"

JZ: Good question. I didn't know at that moment. I just went to college to get out of that kind of environment.

TS: Right, but obviously you were interested in history.

JZ: Interested in history. That's another story. You are probably wondering why an agricultural guy went to a history department. I do like history. I would say that my older brother—when he attended high school, he majored in social science. I majored in natural science. In China you divided very early; even before you went to college, you divided.

TS: Right. So you did well on the tests, and they said, "You need to study" . . .

JZ: The exams on natural science and social science are different, so I went to natural science. That's why I went to agricultural school. My brother did not pass the national exam, so he went to work right after high school. But he has lots of history books and I read lots of stuff. In college I taught myself about social science and classical Chinese. I like to read that stuff. So when I decided to go to the graduate program, I had to pass an exam as well, and it was tough . . .

TS: To get in?

JZ: Yes. I was thinking that if I want to go to another college like the agricultural university, I would have to take a mathematical exam. I was good at that when I was in college and in high school, but that was many years ago. I thought I just could not compete with those guys who are still in school, so I thought this program is very interesting. They recruited students from both fields. You could be an agricultural student, and you could be a history student. I thought to myself, "If the agricultural students want to get in this program, they cannot compete with me with my classical Chinese. For those history students, first their classical Chinese is better than mine, but they cannot compete with my agricultural knowledge. I graduated from an agricultural school, so I know more than them." So I thought this was my advantage. That's the reason I picked out this program. The whole institute only recruited one student and that was I. And also now it's common, but at that time I was told I was the only one that came from a township. All others came from urban areas.

TS: I would say you had an advantage growing up in a rural area if you were going to study agricultural history.

JZ: To take this program, yes. That's three years. I got a master's degree.

TS: So you got your degree in 1990 . . .

JZ: And I stayed at that institute.

TS: You stayed there teaching?

JZ: No teaching. I need to explain. When I graduated it was very difficult to find a job. If I wanted to go back to my hometown, maybe I would be able to find some kind of job, but the institute thought I was a good person and wanted me to stay if I wanted to. That's the reason I stayed there. It's difficult for people to stay in a large university in a large urban area. Nanjing is a large city, and the university is a large university.

TS: So when you stayed there what were you doing?

JZ: At this institute at that time, we had no duty to teach. Our job was to do research.

TS: Oh, okay, so you're doing research?

JZ: It's a research institute; actually it's very complicated to explain. It was located in the university, but it was actually a branch of the Chinese Agricultural Academy [Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences], and the headquarters was in Beijing.

TS: So were you doing historical research?

JZ: Agricultural history. That was our job. Everybody in this institute studied agricultural history.

TS: Well, you were getting prepared to do a dissertation for a doctorate.

JZ: At that time I had just a master's degree, no doctor's degree, and the doctoral program only started at that moment I think in our department, which of course was very difficult because not many universities had a doctoral program. We had one. But the reason is I just didn't want to take a doctoral program in my own institute. I want to try outside.

TS: When did you start learning English?

JZ: Oh, that's a good question. I think in theory we started to learn English, I want to say, in high school. That's of course very simple.

TS: You say in theory because there wasn't much depth to it?

JZ: No, that's just writing English, no spoken English, we couldn't speak English at that time. The teacher could not speak English, it was just memorizing grammar and the words and writing translations.

TS: I must say your book, *Coping with Calamity*, is very well written. I mean there's no way to know that you're not a native English writer.

JZ: Thank you. That's because I had a very good copy editor.

TS: Okay, but it sounds like you really learned your English along the way.

JZ: I pretty much taught myself. We learned English in college, but it was not very advanced. I can give you an example. After I graduated from college I was an agricultural technician in my hometown. At that time in the mid-1980s the Chinese government wanted to send some agricultural technicians to Africa.

TS: What part of Africa?

JZ: I have no idea. I think it may have been West Africa. Before that they wanted to recruit some young people, so they had to pass an exam on English. I went to the capital city of our province to participate in the exam. You had to listen to a paragraph and write it down.

TS: Write what you heard?

JZ: Yes. The only word I heard was wheat. That's the only word I heard, so definitely I failed the exam. You can imagine how poor my English was.

TS: At that point?

JZ: Yes, at that point. When I went to the institute to study agricultural history, English was one part of the exam. I believe my English was very poor. I met the minimum requirement. For the first time in the graduate program we started to learn [spoken] English, and that's the first time I directly listened to somebody who could speak English. I think there were foreign young college students who went to China to teach English, and so that was the first time I heard somebody who could speak English.

TS: Foreign students?

JZ: Yes, mostly from America. They went there as what we called a foreign teacher, teaching us English. Only English.

TS: Okay. So how did you get to America?

JZ: I was in Nanjing Agricultural University, and Nanjing Agricultural University is a very prestigious university in China. We were number two in agriculture. China had many, many agricultural universities. When I was there a doctor's degree was not required. If it was required I just couldn't stay. But gradually the university began to require people to have a doctor's degree. Otherwise you weren't able to be promoted. So if I wanted to stay in that institute, I had to get a PhD degree. It didn't matter where, when, and how. So I had to find some place to study to get a PhD degree. Well, as I told you, I did not want to get a degree from my institute. I needed to look somewhere else. Before that I spent one year in the Netherlands.

TS: When was that?

JZ: In 1996 to 1997. I wanted to study agricultural history [of China], and the best agricultural historian all over the world to my mind was Philip Huang [professor of history, UCLA]. So if I wanted to study agricultural history, I needed to study from the best one. So I applied to UCLA.

TS: I know you got a master's there in 2000. What year did you earn your doctorate?

JZ: In 2004. I went there for a doctoral degree, but the secretary asked me, "Do you want to fill out the form to get a master's degree?" I said, "I already have a master's degree. I don't need this one." She said, "You don't have to do anything. You've already finished the course work. You only need to fill out a form to get the master's degree." I said, "I will do that. Okay."

TS: Yes. In a lot of research institutions you go into the doctoral program, and they just give you the master's at a certain point.

JZ: Yes, after you finish a certain number of courses and write one or two seminar papers.

TS: So what year did you actually get to Los Angeles?

JZ: In 1998.

TS: So after two years they gave you the master's and 2004 you got the doctorate. So you applied and went to UCLA with the blessings of the people at Nanjing Agricultural University? Were they happy that you applied?

JZ: Well, they supported my decision. What could they do if I wanted to go?

TS: I guess I'm asking, did you have any trouble getting out of the country to go to UCLA?

JZ: At that time it was not that difficult. This was by 1998 now.

TS: So once you got accepted, you had no problem getting a student visa and coming to Los Angeles?

JZ: No, at that time it was not really difficult from the Chinese side. It was difficult from the American side.

TS: Difficult getting in?

JZ: Yes. They did not give you a visa.

TS: But once you're accepted at UCLA they give you a visa?

JZ: No guarantee. It depends. You should have a full scholarship.

TS: Okay, and you had a full scholarship, I guess?

JZ: At least the first year. I did not get a package deal. The package means for a full five years. I only got the first year. Every year I had to apply, apply, apply.

TS: Were you thinking at this point, "I'm going to get a doctorate in America and go back to China to teach," or are you thinking, "I might want to stay in America?"

JZ: Actually, I think at that moment I did not really prefer one option; either way was okay. I would say that since I was already here, why not try the market? I think when I came here to interview, someone asked the same question, and I think I answered the same

way. I would say, “I will go to the market, have a try, and stay here if I can find a job. But if I cannot find a job, I will go back to China.”

TS: It must have been hard leaving family and all behind though to come here.

JZ: Yes, sure.

TS: How often do you go back? You go back fairly frequently don't you?

JZ: Not really frequently, actually. I should go back more.

TS: Do you still have family there?

JZ: All in China. My parents, my siblings.

TS: Your parents must be getting older by now.

JZ: Yes. They're very old. They're probably close to eighty now.

TS: Well, more and more, eighty doesn't seem that old. I'm seventy-three now.

JZ: My parents are a similar age to you.

TS: Okay, well, that's not very old.

JZ: But you are a college professor. They are in the countryside.

TS: All right. So you came over and you finished your coursework and wrote a dissertation under Dr. Philip Huang. Was the dissertation an earlier version of what became your book?

JZ: Yes, this is the final version of my dissertation. This book has come from my dissertation.

TS: What was the title of your dissertation?

JZ: “Environmental Change, Economic Growth, and Peasant Behavior: The Agrarian History of the Jiangnan Plain, 1644-1949.”

TS: And right now the title of your book is *Coping with Calamity: Environmental Change and Peasant Response in Central China, 1736-1949*.

JZ: Yes, that's because of the publishing house. My editor said, “Your title is so wordy.”

TS: Well, nobody would know where the Jiangnan Plain was, so I guess the change in the subtitle to “Central China” made sense.

JZ: They just changed the name. I was not happy at first because they changed my title; they change the name of my book.

TS: You ended the book with the Communists coming to power in 1949. Why did you start in 1736?

JZ: That's a good question. That's because I used lots of official documents, government memories, official reports. I used one very thick book, a collection of those kind of memories, and the starting year of that book is 1736.

TS: So 1736 is a good place to start. That was the time of the Qing Dynasty [1644-1911]. So 1736 was well after its start.

JZ: Yes, yes, it was the middle Qing Dynasty.

TS: Obviously, the Jiangnan Plain is where you grew up, and it seems to be a province that has not been over-studied. Did your major professor, Philip Huang, suggest this to you or did you suggest it to him?

JZ: I picked it myself. When I did my master's degree in Nanjing, I did the same topic. So I had already published a lot in Chinese. This is one reason he actually allowed me to go to study with him.

TS: He had read your work?

JZ: He already read my publications, five or six of them.

TS: How about that?

JZ: Yes, so, of course, I chose this topic.

TS: He must have been impressed enough with your writing that he wanted you to come.

JZ: Yes, of course, he had no objection.

TS: Okay, so you wrote your dissertation. We'll talk about the book in just a few minutes, but I'm assuming you haven't changed your main themes a lot since the dissertation with regard to the calamities, the flooding.

JZ: I think I knew what I was going to do, but how to present them is different.

TS: So this is a much more sophisticated version of the dissertation?

JZ: Yes, actually, the first thing I wanted to do was not environmental history, but economic history. You know, Philip Huang is a very famous scholar, and he had some famous

theories. I want to dialogue with him, but the problem is I did not have those materials in my region. For example, the daily income, the daily consumption—how much money you spend on this or on that—I did not have those kind of materials in my area in the Jiangnan Plain.

TS: Oh, they just didn't exist?

JZ: Yes, because in the 1930s, the Japanese invaded China, but some of them were scholars who did interviews, surveyed the countryside in the Yangzi Delta and in northern China, very detailed. How much land do you have? How much income?

TS: While the Japanese were occupying the country, Japanese scholars were there doing real research?

JZ: Yes, doing lots of surveys. There is a lot of material for scholarly use.

TS: So you used a lot of Japanese sources?

JZ: No, they did not do those kinds of surveys in my hometown, so I did not have those kinds of materials.

TS: Oh, but Philip Huang had used the Japanese sources for his work?

JZ: Yes, he studied the Yangzi delta and northern China.

TS: Northern China was a poorer part of the country wasn't it?

JZ: Not necessarily. The Yangzi delta is a rich part of China.

TS: But other parts in the north were poorer?

JZ: Yes, northern China was poor; you're right.

TS: Okay, so he's an economic historian . . .

JZ: He focuses on economic history, and I tried to dialogue with him.

TS: Right, but you're not going to do a study quite like him because you didn't have the same kinds of sources?

JZ: So, I thought, I have lots of materials about environmental change, so why shouldn't I focus on these?

TS: And that's okay with him?

JZ: Yes, and to be honest I did not categorize myself as an environmental historian. If you remember, when I first came to Kennesaw, I still said I was an agrarian historian.

TS: Agrarian, not environmental?

JZ: I was not an environmental historian. But gradually I have found a lot of new materials. I went to archives to get some new materials, yes. There's lots of new information. The book is different from the dissertation in many ways.

TS: Well, from 2004 you had ten more years to research and write by the time the book came out.

JZ: Yes. Well, actually I should say eight years before it went to the publishing house.

TS: Sure, it takes a couple of years for the press. My paperback copy was published by the University of Hawaii Press.

JZ: No, the University of British Columbia (UBC).

TS: University of British Columbia? Why does it say University of Hawaii Press if it's the University of British Columbia? Oh, I see, first published in Canada in 2014, but University of Hawaii Press did the paperback in 2015.

JZ: They have a contract like that. In Canada it was published by UBC originally. They signed a contract asking the University of Hawaii to publish for the Asian and Pacific market. Actually, for the North American market the title was held by the University of Washington Press. And the European edition was held by someone else.

TS: But this is all under UBC press?

JZ: Well, they signed contracts telling one press, "You're in charge of this part of the world," and another press, "You're in charge of that part of the world."

TS: Oh, I see. So one owns the publication rights in North America and the other in Asia.

JZ: Asian and Pacific. That's University of Hawaii Press.

TS: But I bought a paperback copy published by University of Hawaii Press online through Barnes & Noble.

JZ: I don't understand, but anyway it was originally published by UBC.

TS: That's interesting. Who is going to publish your Chinese language version?

JZ: The Law Press China.

TS: Well, you're going to be much published through this book. Obviously, it's got an interest worldwide.

JZ: Yes, you know WorldCat.org? My book is currently in over 180 university libraries worldwide.

TS: That's great! You're going to be too famous for Kennesaw State one of these days.

JZ: Oh, thank you, I don't know about that, but the Chinese version I was just told by the press will probably come out next month.

TS: Well, we've been touting ourselves as wanting to be a world class university; it's nice to have world class authors.

JZ: Thank you about that [laughs].

TS: Okay, so in 2004 you completed your doctorate, and then you hit the job market. I guess Kennesaw was advertising for somebody to teach Chinese history?

JZ: No, East Asian history, but with a focus on Chinese history.

TS: Up to 2004 was Tom [Thomas H.] Keene teaching the course on Modern China and Japan [HIST 3374]?

JZ: Yes, Tom Keene was the chair of the search committee.

TS: So he was working himself out of a job teaching the history of modern China and Japan?

JZ: Yes.

TS: Okay, well Tom's background included spending a year in China on a faculty exchange.

JZ: He spent one year in China. Actually, in the same province as I studied for my master's degree--Jiangsu province. He was in Yangzhou [at Yangzhou Normal College, 1986-1987]. Nanjing is the capital city of Jiangsu province. It was only one hour's distance, but we didn't know each other before we met at Kennesaw.

TS: So you have something in common. So Tom had been director of the International Center and the Institute for Global Initiatives [from 1988 to 2003], what we call the Division of Global Affairs today.

JZ: Yes, [Akanmu G.] Adebayo took his position [and served as executive director from 2003 to 2009].

TS: Right. So you were applying for jobs and how many interviews did you do?

JZ: I did a couple of conference interviews.

TS: Conference interviews. Several?

JZ: Five or six, something like that. That's conferences.

TS: Okay, so like you went the American Historical Association's annual meeting and other historical conferences.

JZ: Exactly, at that time people did it that way. Now, they just hold Skype interviews. I think [the AHA meeting] was in Washington [January 8-11, 2004].

TS: Okay, but Kennesaw invited you to campus for an interview.

JZ: And they gave me a job. And I came.

TS: Had you ever heard of Georgia before that time?

JZ: Yes, I knew Georgia. Of course, I knew Georgia and Atlanta, but not Kennesaw before then.

TS: How would you describe Kennesaw State when you got here in 2004? We were a university, but not a research university.

JZ: No, no, not a research university.

TS: So you came here to teach the East Asia course and world history and those were your major courses, I guess.

JZ: Yes, yes.

TS: Of course, you had been doing research for years at this point, and Kennesaw was doing some research in 2004, but not anywhere as much as we're doing in 2016, I would guess.

JZ: Even today it is still the case your first priority is teaching. I knew that and I was told that, "This is a teaching institution with heavy teaching loads." You know, at that time we had seven courses per year. That's three-four [three courses one semester, and four courses the other semester]. So I spent a lot of time preparing for courses.

TS: You taught a lot of world history courses.

JZ: World history and even Chinese history. I did not teach any courses on my own before. I was a T.A. [Teaching Assistant], so I had to prepare courses myself.

TS: What were you responsible for as a T.A.?

JZ: Grading papers, leading discussions . . .

TS: This is another reason why it would take you eight years to get your book published.

JZ: That's one reason, but another reason is that the book was actually held up at one publishing house for four years before I changed it to my current publisher. That's another reason.

TS: They just weren't putting it out?

JZ: No, but the review process [was slow].

TS: Okay, but you didn't have a whole lot of time to do research when you were doing all that work on new preparations.

JZ: In the first two years that was indeed the case. But, gradually, once you're used to teaching your courses, you can find more time. Also, I think I got two research grants in 2007 and 2008, so I had almost half a year without any teaching.

TS: Were these internal or external grants?

JZ: One was from Kennesaw, and one was from Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation [for International Scholarly Exchange].

TS: Where is that?

JZ: This is a foundation that actually was set up by the government of Taiwan. Chiang Ching-kuo [1910-1988] was the oldest son of Chiang Kai-shek. He was the president of [the Republic of China in] Taiwan [from 1978 to 1988]. After he passed away, the government of Taiwan set up the foundation in his name, particularly to promote Chinese studies. So it's a very competitive and prestigious award that supports research all over the world, not just in the United States. I got support twice for this book. They supported me for research in 2007-2008. And in 2014 they gave some money for the publisher to publish the book. The publishing house had to apply to the foundation. That's not me.

TS: To support the book?

JZ: Yes, because the publishing houses for academic works always need money.

TS: Yes, academic books are not going to make them a lot of money.

JZ: No, no, I don't think they will make money.

TS: Academic presses are not necessarily to make money.

JZ: No, no, so they maybe need a subsidy.

TS: Okay, so your book came out in 2014. We created a new award at Kennesaw, and you obviously put in an application this year for the award, and you won.

JZ: That's good.

TS: That's fabulous. Let's start talking about the book a little bit. Maybe first of all we could talk about the major themes in the book. It's about environmental change over the course of two hundred years, and maybe for some things in there your timeframe is even more than two hundred years.

JZ: Yes, some goes after even 1949.

TS: And this is pure social history, I think, because there's not a whole lot about politics.

JZ: No, there's some but . . .

TS: But it's indirectly because of its relationship to environmental questions.

JZ: Yes.

TS: So you're talking about a river valley. One of the themes in the book is, I guess, you could almost call it a westward movement away from the coast, a population movement into Hubei Province, right?

JZ: Yes. Not just from coast, but from those densely populated areas.

TS: And sometimes when there's a revolution or a war or some other disaster, people become refugees. So one of the themes is the growth of the population in this region.

JZ: Yes, there's no doubt about it. I think of this not as a major theme, because this is a precondition. When we studied this region, this is a condition, the increase in population. I did not spend much space discussing how many people, that's just . . .

TS: No, but the growth of the population is going to have an environmental impact.

JZ: It's just a pre-condition.

TS: Right, and, of course, part of the environmental impact that you talked about is that they moved into the higher mountainous areas and cut down the trees to farm the land, thus having an environmental impact way downstream.

JZ: I think that's one thing and the most important actually is how people did in the plain, because of population pressure and the need for more land, built dikes to increase land around the river and lakes. So many lakes actually disappeared.

TS: The lakes disappeared?

JZ: Yes, They enclosed those lakes and turned them into farmland.

TS: So the dikes kept the water away?

JZ: Well, there are two systems of dikes. You are right, but there are two systems. At that time we need to think of two kinds of dikes.

TS: Yes, there's a reference to what you called yuan-dikes. And you mentioned that as money earlier, I think.

JZ: It's money, it's the name of the dike, and it's the name of a dynasty. It's always the same.

TS: I was trying to find it in your book, but I know there's a note in here where you gave a definition of yuan for diked lands or enclosures [p. 230, Introduction, footnote 3.]

JZ: Yes, I'll write it in Chinese characters for you.

TS: Okay, so they build these dikes to obviously keep water away, and all of a sudden the lakes disappear, and they start farming them.

JZ: Yes. It is also possible there were farms already there, but to protect them they built dikes, so the water would not come down.

TS: Something that I thought was really interesting in the book: I guess there's a long established theory about these dynasties like the Qing Dynasty being despotic and having total control, and you talk in here about how to a large degree it was local control.

JZ: Yes, that's a major argument, one of the major themes.

TS: So you're really doing some innovative stuff in this book, I think, in challenging some of the . . .

JZ: I challenged many ideas.

TS: So you challenged the received wisdom of practically everybody by the time you got through your book.

JZ: It challenged some of them.

TS: I thought that was really interesting, but also this is definitely not a Marxist interpretation.

JZ: No, definitely not. You know in China and the outside there are at least two major themes. The market explanation sees the peasants as rational investors. They will do whatever helps them make money, so they are like capitalistic investors. I disagree with that.

TS: You disagree, so they're not making rational economic decisions?

JZ: No, not for money, but for survival.

TS: So they're not making rational economic decision the way a classical economist would describe it—that people do what is going to increase their wealth. But they are not motivated by class struggle either.

JZ: Exactly, that's my argument. The dominant ideology in China is the Marxist system. They are rebelling peasants because they were exploited so much. They overthrow the government, so they were all revolutionists. No, no, no . . .

TS: Okay, so what is driving their decisions about what they do?

JZ: The best way to survive in their environment. They had lots of responses. The title of the book is "peasant response"—how did they respond.

TS: And you argue that they made very sophisticated responses.

JZ: Yes, that's my major argument.

TS: Even though what they do in one village may not be good for the country as a whole?

JZ: No, not for the whole country and maybe not for the neighboring villages.

TS: This comes to play particularly when they're building dikes.

JZ: Yes, you protect yourselves, and the pressures go to your neighbors.

TS: And you more than imply that they could be very contentious.

JZ: They fight, there's lot of fighting.

TS: You mean physical fighting?

JZ: They killed each other. I just published an article about that, and I will continue to study that. They killed each other, because that meant life or death.

TS: Well, this really sounds like the wild-and-woolly frontier in America where everybody protects his own interest.

JZ: Yes, Tom Keene said the same thing.

TS: But it also implies government is very, very weak, even though maybe the traditional viewpoint is government is controlling everything. But that's not true.

JZ: No, no. Particularly for the dike system in this region the central government intentionally didn't decide for you; it's your business.

TS: You also talk about corruption in dike management. How does the corruption work? You pay off an official to do what?

JZ: Well, there was corruption in the provinces, but I'm not saying that all officials were corrupt. That was not the case. But there were some instances where it existed. So for example, those people who were in charge of collecting money for the dike fees and particularly those petty officials that picked up the dike fees from peasants did not always hand them over to the government. They pocketed them.

TS: Oh, they were picking up money from the peasants supposedly to repair the dike?

JZ: Yes, they put it in their pocket.

TS: So that's why the dikes keep breaking?

JZ: Yes, that is one reason. There were many other reasons. Some officials did not pay much attention to it. They did not cooperate quite well.

TS: When the peasants were violent, did they take out their violence against government officials on occasion?

JZ: Yes. There are some of those occasions as well. But that's my argument. They just wanted to react against the government because the government did not protect them. Marxist scholars say that's a revolutionary idea.

TS: You are saying it's more individual?

JZ: Yes, maybe more collectively, but I don't think they have any revolutionary ideas.

TS: So it's everybody for themselves or at least every village for itself.

JZ: Not necessarily every village, particularly yuan.

TS: Or even part of a village.

JZ: No, maybe more than a village, a yuan, because a yuan may include several villages. One yuan may come to fight against another yuan.

TS: So a yuan is more than a village?

JZ: It could be smaller than a village or it could be larger than a village; it really depends. It's a basic unit in rural society.

TS: It was just unbelievable how many water-based calamities there were. It was almost like every year, wasn't it?

JZ: In some regions it was. In one sense it was nearly every year because the Yangzi River was flooding every year. The river was like the Nile River. You had flooding every year, but it depends how you prepare yourself to protect yourself.

TS: When you use the Nile as an example, the flooding actually enriches the soil.

JZ: Yes, that's the same situation in the Yangzi River.

TS: But all these dikes interfere?

JZ: Yes, the dikes narrow down the river valley.

TS: When people built these dikes, they were really farming in a flood plain that ought to be flooded, but it isn't as long as the dikes work, so that's going to create more calamities downstream.

JZ: Yes, and mostly this region particularly because this location is low, so mostly this region particularly, in Jingzhou District and nearby.

TS: You talked about crops too and about how as the population moves west new crops became prevalent. Back east they may have been growing wheat . . .

JZ: North China.

TS: North China? But once they got into the Jiangnan Plain they . . .

JZ: They grow rice.

TS: But you also said they were growing cotton.

JZ: Yes, cotton was also an important crop in my hometown.

TS: Which would be more of an upland crop, I guess.

JZ: Exactly, you're right because cotton cannot grow in lower places, too dangerous. If the water table is too high cotton just can't grow, so you have to find dry land for cotton to grow.

TS: You also point out in the book that land ownership was more widespread than maybe we customarily thought.

JZ: Yes, I challenged it. I'm not the first one to challenge that actually. According to the communist ideology 10 percent of the rural population were landlords and rich peasants and 80 to 90 percent were middle and poor peasants.

TS: So it's the rich against the poor?

JZ: It's 70 or 80 percent of the land owned by the rich peasants and the landlords and the rest of the people owned 20 or 30 percent of the land or something like that. But that's not the case. According to the communist ideology, the rich owned the majority of the land, but that's not the case. In many cases the land owned by them was less than 50 percent.

TS: So the top 10 percent owned less than 50 percent of the land.

JZ: Yes. That's based on their own records!

TS: They just don't admit their own records because it doesn't fit their ideology?

JZ: The records are already there; you just cannot change that! I wrote an article about that.

TS: So people see what they want to see?

JZ: Because clearly that's the information they presented themselves.

TS: So you used a lot of Chinese government records, including records from more recently, I guess?

JZ: The archives.

TS: So you spent a lot of time in Chinese archives working on this book?

JZ: I did. I also read a lot of gazetteers.

TS: And they could have looked at their own archives and come to a different conclusion?

JZ: Exactly. It depends on how you use them.

TS: You were saying before we started and it might be worth putting on tape that you are finding much more freedom of discussion among scholars in China now than maybe was the case fifty years ago.

JZ: Yes, definitely now there is more freedom. But you have to be cautious, be very careful, but basically there are some topics you can discuss freely. I think it is okay because if there was a problem, they will not publish my book; that's my understanding.

TS: So people can freely buy your book in China?

JZ: I think so. I don't know; maybe did not realize that.

TS: Of course, all they have now is an English version, but there's going to be a Chinese translation soon.

JZ: It's already close; it will come out next month.

TS: Wow, and you did the translation into Chinese?

JZ: Yes, I did it myself. So they are supposed to have a censor before the publication. So somebody already read it.

TS: If the censor did his job, he read your book, and he knew what was in it?

JZ: It should be okay. That's my understanding, yes.

TS: Okay, so we'll find out. If you get invitations to go over there and speak at universities in China . . .

JZ: I think my topic is fine. I did not say communism is evil; I did not say that. This is a history.

TS: You just said that the Marxist interpretation was not correct.

JZ: Many of their scholars themselves actually say that. Marxism is the system actually, how do you say . . .

TS: Well, the government has moved away from a Marxist system too, hasn't it?

JZ: Yes, exactly. Officially, they are still a Marxist system, a socialist state, but in reality we all know that it's not; in some ways it's a capitalistic society.

TS: But you are getting reactions already from China about your book? Any reviews in Chinese publications?

JZ: There is one very short review, a book review about this book in China.

TS: Is it positive?

JZ: Yes, it was definitely positive, but I don't know how the mainstream will respond to it.

TS: The very fact that you're getting a response is good.

- JZ: Definitely, obviously after the book is published [in Chinese] someone will say something, I guess.
- TS: That's great. It's great for Kennesaw State too that people around the world are taking seriously something written by a scholar from Kennesaw State.
- JZ: Thank you, that's good to hear.
- TS: Are there some other themes in the book that we haven't talked about that you think we should?
- JZ: Well, I think we talked about most of the things in there. I think one thing I emphasized many times that we cannot take one factor, single out one factor and say this is the determining factor. We're talking about an argument. They are all combined together and interact together. That's one of my arguments. So, for example, when classical Marxists talk about rural China or any other rural society, they only focus on one part, the political struggle, the classical struggle, peasants against landlords. And then in the market school they consider only one factor, money. They are all driven by money.
- TS: And you know that point of view is fine to a certain point, but it must be exhausted by now; and if that's all you're writing about, then you're missing a lot.
- JZ: I would say we have to think of political factors, economical factors, environmental factors, and also peasant behaviors and community actions, so we have to think of all of them together and their interconnections. I try to bring more factors together . . .
- TS: Of course you end your book in 1949, which is a logical place to end. What happens after 1949? Did the Communists do any better at solving the environment problems in the Jiangnan Plain?
- JZ: This involves something that I will discuss in my second book.
- TS: Oh, are you already working on that?
- JZ: Already, and actually some parts are already being published. The newest one was published by the *Journal of Social History*. Oxford University published it I think. After 1949 the major change was the government taking more responsibility to take good care of the dikes. So in this book I will say the central government intentionally did not take care of them, then after 1949 the government did more. Now, the dikes were directly supported financially by the central government that gave money to local governments to build these dikes. So this dike has now become a national dike.
- TS: So the peasants ought to like that shouldn't they?
- JZ: Well, after 1949 there were more and more river dikes built.

TS: More river dikes?

JZ: Yes. So they were built along the river, so they pretty much circled the river in two dikes, and that reduced some of the water calamities, but many of the small dikes disappeared. They no longer needed them. The major dikes already put the water inside the river.

TS: And they're working better?

JZ: Yes, it should be. And there's another major change in recent years. You've probably heard about the Three Gorges Dam [started 1994, completed 2012]. One reason the Three Gorges Dam was built was to reduce the water calamity in this place.

TS: Just one dam on this part of the Yangzi River?

JZ: Actually two dams because the Gezhouba Dam was built in the 1980s [started 1970, completed 1988].

TS: I've got an interest in this because my father was an engineer for the Tennessee Valley Authority.

JZ: I know that. When I first came, I remember I talked to you about that. The Gezhouba is a smaller dam on the Yangzi River, and the Three Gorges Dam is huge. It is just finished recently. So after the dam the Yangzi River is not like before. The huge pressure on the dikes is gone because now they can store water and then release it slowly [reservoir flood storage capacity of 22 cubic kilometers]. So the pressure on the dikes in this region is much smaller than before.

TS: Well, it's like the story of the Tennessee River Valley. Chattanooga would get washed away every now and then before the TVA dams were built, and Chattanooga has not been washed away since then.

JZ: Okay, so that's a major change.

TS: That was one of the major purposes of building those dams was to control flooding on the Tennessee River and indirectly flooding on the Mississippi.

JZ: The same with the Three Gorges Dam is to control flooding in the Jiangnan Plain. At least that's what they said. But the main reason definitely was to generate electricity.

TS: Of course, that was another purpose of the TVA dams too. It used to be for a long time they were producing so much hydroelectric power that the electrical rates in the Tennessee Valley were significantly cheaper than Georgia, Alabama, or anywhere outside the Tennessee Valley. It's not so much the case now because they went to coal burning plants.

JZ: The people living close to this dam actually cannot use the electricity generated.

TS: They cannot?

JZ: It's too hard to transfer it for people to use and it's very expensive, so the electricity is transported long distances for other people to use.

TS: Oh my goodness.

JZ: Yes, but anyway, the main purpose is to generate electricity, and another purpose was to protect the Jiangnan Plain.

TS: But nowadays environmentalists often don't like dams.

JZ: That's exactly what I want to argue in my second book. That's exactly true in the West, and now it seems it is criticized [everywhere]. The critics think we should blow away all of them. But my argument is you could blow away the dam, but in this region you cannot remove the dikes. Otherwise everything will be gone.

TS: Has the standard of living improved in that area?

JZ: Yes. Even the central government says that even after the building of the Three Gorges Dam, you still have to pay close attention to your dike system. You cannot rely on the Three Gorges Dam, so the government spent a lot of money to rebuild and to strengthen the dikes in the region after 1998. There was a valley wide flooding in 1998.

TS: We were talking before we started the interview. I don't know how much you studied southern history, probably not a lot, but there are some incredible parallels between agriculture in Georgia historically and agriculture through the South and flooding on the Mississippi River. Some of the same factors perhaps went into play, certainly with the cutting down of the trees for the lumber industry in Minnesota and what have you.

JZ: Yes, so after 1998 the Chinese government banned lumbering, banned the cutting of trees up river, upper reaches of the Yangzi River.

TS: Good for them.

JZ: So it's illegal; you cannot cut trees.

TS: That's good.

JZ: Yes, because erosion was too serious a problem.

TS: Yes, but we also had sharecropping, and you talk about fixed renting in your book.

JZ: That no longer occurred in China after 1949.

- TS: Not at all?
- JZ: After 1949, no private land.
- TS: Sure, okay, because everybody works for the government.
- JZ: After 1984 or in the 1980s the land returned to—did not belong to—the peasants, but peasants had a responsibility to farm the land. So they divided the land to each individual household to use, responsible to take care of that piece of land. There is some kind of things [renting land] happening now, but this is a completely different situation.
- TS: Well, of course, another trend in American agricultural history is that 150 years ago practically everybody lived on a farm, or lived off of the farm, even if they lived in small towns. We actually had an extended agricultural depression in America because of overproduction. We had too many farmers, and I think one could argue that farmers made the rational decision along the way to abandon the farm and move to the cities as industry developed. So a lot of rural areas in Georgia became depleted of their population as time went on.
- JZ: That's the same that's happening now in China.
- TS: So the Jiangnan Plain that you're studying, the population is less today than it used to be?
- JZ: The Chinese government has pushed very hard for urbanization, so they've moved country people to the city. Many young villagers did not want to live in the village; they wanted to leave.
- TS: That's the way it worked in America too. It wasn't the old folks who were going to move to the cities.
- JZ: So they say that hundreds of thousands of villages disappear every year. They are disappearing every year. But not much in my hometown. We saw some kind of deserted villages, yes, from the small villages all people gone. Yes, we saw those, but it was not very common in my home town. In my home town it's not that poor maybe.
- TS: What's holding people? Is it because they're making a living off of the farming?
- JZ: I think yes, probably we do not have many good factories. The young people won't go to the coastal areas.
- TS: Where the factories are?
- JZ: Not in our local region. I heard that in the neighboring counties, the neighboring regions, many villages are deserted, people just moved away. That's exactly the same

situation we have in China now. The Chinese government encourages people to have a larger farm.

TS: They encourage them to?

JZ: Yes.

TS: Is agriculture increasingly becoming mechanized?

JZ: Mostly mechanized, yes, but small machines because Chinese land is not like American land where you have thousands of acres of land; it's just very small pieces of land. So they use small machines to work small land. Yes, more and more mechanized.

TS: I was impressed in the era that you're covering in your book that at least for the wealthier peasants and landlords the holdings of cultivated land were fairly sizeable. You know, people with eighty acres and so on, didn't you?

JZ: No, very small.

TS: Did I not read that right?

JZ: No, very small, even the landlords did not have very much land.

TS: I guess I misread.

JZ: No, not acres; I use *mu*.

TS: Oh, you're not using acres?

JZ: No. If I used acres, the farm sizes would be very small [1 acre = 6.07 *mu*].

TS: I'm looking at a table on "Land distribution in thirteen counties of the Jiangnan Plain on the eve of the Land Reform" [Table 12 p. 137]. The landlords made up a little less than 4 percent of the population, and they had 28.49 percent of the cultivated land and averaged 81.77 *mu* per household. [So that converts to only 13.47 acres.]

JZ: Very small. Not a large amount of land.

TS: And poor peasants and hired laborers were over half the population but had only about 18 percent of the cultivated land with an average per household farm of just 3.62 *mu*, [which would be about 0.6 acres]. And even the rich peasants had only 32.23 *mu* per household [5.31 acres].

JZ: Very small.

TS: All right, so if you had an acre or two you were doing well, I guess.

JZ: Oh, you were rich people.

TS: Okay, well, I'm glad you corrected me on that. Let me just wind up the interview by saying that you've been at Kennesaw now for twelve years. What has kept you at Kennesaw?

JZ: That's a good question. Why not stay here?

TS: Why not stay? Well, you might want to go to a research university. Of course, we're moving in the direction of being a research university.

JZ: I will say that the weather is good here and the environment. My wife likes it here, and the environment is very good—better than in Los Angeles.

TS: I've been doing interviews for the city of Acworth, and there are some neat things going on there.

JZ: The environment—there are lots of trees. Also the department [of History & Philosophy] has a friendly environment. You don't see two faculty members fighting against each other. No such thing as that here. But that's something that happens in a lot of other universities. And you got to know we are history professors, and here we are able to buy a house.

TS: You bought a house?

JZ: Yes. That's impossible in a major city.

TS: Yes, land and houses are cheaper here.

JZ: I think they are. I may be wrong, but I think this is one of the cheapest markets in the United States.

TS: Yes, compared to a lot of other places.

JA: Compared to a lot of major cities.

TS: Yes, we see people coming from other place and buying these tremendous houses here because they sold what they had, sold a cracker box up in Massachusetts, and bought a big house down here.

JZ: Yes, of course.

TS: So you like the area, and you like Kennesaw State, and so hopefully you're going to stay here for a long, long time. You're still associate professor, so I guess you're going to be up for a promotion now that you've got a book out.

JZ: I'm already promoted to full professor as of last year.

TS: Well, you're going to have to change that on your vita.

JZ: I was promoted to full professor in 2015.

TS: Hopefully you'll have that second book out before too many more years pass.

JZ: That really depends. It depends on time, depends on materials, and depends on which publishing house, many things.

TS: Well, I've gone through my questions that I had in mind. Is there anything that we ought to talk about in the interview that we haven't?

JZ: No, you asked me everything.

TS: Well, this has been most enjoyable.

JZ: Yes, for me too. Thank you for giving me the opportunity.

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