

Transcript of the Interview with Zhengang Wang (王振刚)

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Wang, Zhengang (王振刚)

Vice Chairman, CPPCC, Dandong City

Industry: Government

Zhengang Wang is the former vice chairman of the Dandong Municipal Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. He is now the chairman of Dandong Poetry Society. Wang was born in 1944 in Donggang City, Liaoning Province.

Transcript

Interviewee: Wang, Zhengang (王振刚)

Interviewer: John Delury

Date: August 14, 2009

Place: Dandong (China)

01:10

My name is **Wang, Zhengang** 王振刚, born in An Dong County 安东县, in Dong Gang city 东港市, in the Dan Dong area 丹东. I was born on the intersection of the rural and the urban areas. I went to elementary school in 1952. I have studies 6 years in primary school, then 6 years in secondary and high school, then university. I have studies Chinese literature in Liaoning University. I entered university in 1964, at that time, university took 5 years. So I was supposed to graduate at 1969. Because of the Cultural Revolution, one year has been delayed. So I have stayed in University for 6 years. Within these 6 years, I have studied for 2 years, then 4 years were during the revolution. I have experienced the whole period of Cultural Revolution. Although in my memory, I have experienced a lot of changes. I used to be a teacher in high school, then in the university. In April 1987, I became a politician. I became a member of political consultative conference on the municipal level till now. I will

soon retire. But I think my major has played a great role in my life. I have never abandoned my passion of Chinese literature. I have written 7 books, now am working on the 8th book during my spare time. 2:43

03:02

We were talking about North Korea. For people from Dandong or from China, we feel it's somehow funny/ridiculous what is happening in North Korea. Why people's mind is so backward? But in reality, in the 60s and 70s in China, we were as funny/ridiculous as North Korea. I think that in the developed world, they might think it's funny/ridiculous in China. But China is changing. The past 30 years change has been unprecedented in the Chinese history. First of all, people's mind is freer. We can freely express our thoughts, your ideas. Yet, in China we have to obey certain rules, under the rule of Chinese Communist Party, Dictatorship of the Proletariat, which are unquestionable. But when I was in university, I couldn't speak like this. 1981, I have wrote about a German guy in Dandong. I have a student who brought a German student who was studying in Liaoning University, his Chinese name is He Meitian, now he is a professor at Hamburg University, studying on Chinese civilization and China-Germany friendship. At that time, Dandong has been opened, the father of this Chinese student was scared, went to report at the police station. Then the national security agent came after and followed the German guy. Now you look back, how ridiculous it was. Now in Dandong, everywhere, you can meet foreign people. If you still want to follow these people, there will be too many. And it's also unnecessary. Back in the old days, it was scary to bring a foreigner into the town. Now we have this freedom to welcome foreign friends in China. It wasn't allowed in the past. Now we can. So this has changed a lot. Including the intellectuals, such as Guo Yaowu, big thinkers are lonely and they suffer. Because so many ideas are not compatible with the reality. But intellectual can think. In China, we are often not allowed to think. If people think too much, you will be considered as a controversial (heresy), sometimes be teased. Guo Moruo, he is a great historian and writer. During the rule of Guo Mindang, Jiang even wished to kill him. He dared to criticize Jiang. He won't dare to criticize Mao Zedong. Because under the political environment, if you criticize, you will be killed. This has created a lot of imprisonments, thinking imprisonment, political dictatorship etc. This is the reality in the past. Nowadays, though our living standard is still quite behind the developed world, but our life much better off than that of the past. 06:22

06 :53

We should explain this way. From the perspective of living standard (cloth, food, housing and transportation), housing condition has been improved for most of people. Though salary is still pretty low, my neighbors and relatives all have changed their houses since 20 and 30 years. As for food, 20 and 30 years ago, to buy meat, you needed meat coupons, less than a half jin [250g]. The butchers needed a license and coupons. For clothes, you needed

cloth coupons. Nowadays, as long as you have money, you can buy anything you need on the market. Ordinary people used to be astonished to see the American president bringing his own bottled water with him to China, now Chinese drink mineral water. Now it's normal to see construction workers, everyone drink mineral water. They won't need to pick up water somewhere else. This shows the improvement of consumption capacity. Seafood is Dandong's main product; every family can afford it. The only differences are greater or lesser quantities. However, in inner areas, among minorities, and in mountainous areas, people are still below the poverty line. 8:35

08:40

The Dongbei area is pretty good. The base of Dongbei is solid. Although during the Japanese occupation of Dongbei they took wood and mineral resources, they also did some good things such as building the railways. The railways were mainly built by the Russians and Japanese. This has provided a transportation infrastructure which has boosted the economy. They also built a lot of factories, like the Dandong Huaxian factory--this factory was in my natural geography text book--the Anshan Steel (鞍山钢铁) factory, one of the earliest steel factories in China, was built by the Japanese. Well, the Dandong area, it's a smaller city. In 2006 the city was 100 years old. Before that, it was a fishing port. So when you look at Dandong's streets, they aren't all the same. In the well organized area, we have ten main streets and 15 roads. They were planned by the Japanese. The main counties around Dandong such as Dong Gang and Gui Hua were set up by the Japanese since they were planning for a long-term occupation. Then they realized that they were wrong. 10:06 (John intervened) 10:10 The Japanese had a long-term plan; they built some infrastructure. 10:15

10:20

The Dong Bei economy in 50s and 60s were pretty advanced because it's a base of heavy industry as a priority of national development. In addition, the area has plenty of coal and iron resources.

10:38 How about now?

10:39

Now Dong Bei is not that good. Such as Fu Jin area where used to produce a lot of coal. Now it's almost run out. It's a resource scarce city. The Fu Jin becomes the pilot experimental city of economic model transformation. The State Council has distributed a lot money to it. City of FU Shun has encountered the same problem where coal has been run out. Beijing has a reception bureau of petitioners. Dong Bei people are the most numerous. Why? Because Dong Bei used to have a lot of state owned enterprises. After the ownership reform of SOE, the problem of workers' rights has emerged. Once their rights cannot be satisfied,

so they went to make petitions. Liao Ning has a lot of people who went petitioning. The factories in the South has less problems of this kind because they were built later on and they have new rules. They fired you and you should leave. That's it. In Dong Bei, it's different. More than couple decades of conflicts, tensions are bigger. That's why there are a lot of people from Liaoning go petitioning. That's where comes the expression "阻访" prevention of petition. In theory, it should not be banned right? It should be a freedom.
12:08

12: 19

For those workers in the old factories, their rights have not been protected. Working insurance system is very poor in China. Social welfare system is not very developed neither. Those who have illness or lost working capacity, how to survive? Gradually, we start to have some, but still very poor and low. 12:52

13:10

(Foreign investment) is less present in Dan Dong. After the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and South Korea, South Korea is very interested in Dan Dong because of geopolitical proximity to North Korea. They wish to be able to get in touch with North Korea. Although the Korea peninsular has been separated into two parts, but national sentiment is still very strong. At that time, the State has regulation, which doesn't allow Dan Dong to be approached in the fear of provocation to North Korea. So at that time, big companies of South Korea went to Qing Dao, Yan Tai, Wei Hai, three coastal cities. As a matter of fact, the closest city to South and North Korea is Dan Dong, rather than the Shan Dong peninsular. Afterwards, when the open policy has been implemented, there is no more big enterprises. Besides, North Korea is still in a very unstable political situation, today missile problem, tomorrow the rockets, which has discouraged the foreign investments. So foreign investment are not willing to come. Several big Japanese companies have pulled away their companies, such as one company makes televisions has moved to Dalian. Very few has left. So foreign investment do not perform very well in Dan Dong. But recently, there are some new comers but I am not very familiar with. I have left the county so I am not very familiar. 14:39

14:39-53 mute

14:54

Liaoning, where there are more local enterprises, some foreign companies. 15:04

15:40

China's 5000 civilization can be viewed in two different ways. Positive view is that it's a long history. But negatively speaking, it's very heavy. China used to be on the same level of

Japan. But why Meiji Restoration movement has happened so quickly, when Japan has introduced modern western ideas and technology. China didn't pay a lot of attention to technology. You have studied history, Chinese ancient philosophers such as Mo Zi who emphasize on the importance of technology used to be ignored. Technology was considered something superficial. So during the May 4th movement, Mr. De and Mr. Sai, one is democracy, the other is science, two engines of modern development. Deng later on has acknowledged that science is the first productive engine. But now people start to question if the technology is productive engine, why is the first productive engine? But technology in the social and economic development perspective, it is the main engine. The reason why US is a superpower is because US is advanced in technology, also in its democratic regime. The democratic regime we used to consider as flood and monsters. But now calmly thinking, US is yet advanced. People who have been to the US, without any clichés, they acknowledge that US is more advanced. The previous president of democratic and progress league's association WU Shiwen, he is a Xiuzi specialist. He went to the US during the 90s to attend a conference. He didn't say anything when he came back cause we are supposed to say bad thing on the US. But it wasn't the case that he saw so he cannot say a word. he said, Firstly, US there is museums everywhere, provided with texts and images. Secondly, the American society is very civilized. He has left his bag in the hotel, after half an hour, he returned and found the bag was still on the sofa. He said in the US one bad thing is there are a lot of black people, they all rest along the streets and once stole his bag and ran away. The Africans in the eyes of the Americans and the Chinese are probably different, Mao used to put hope of the US on the African people. Martin Luther has organized conference of millions of people, how foreign people consider it? We used to consider US as bad country. Now we start to question it and think the US are right. And it seems that it will take a while for China to achieve the same regime as the US. However, every regime has its own drawbacks. But what are the main streams? American society is somehow more advanced than the Chinese society. That's why so many Chinese go abroad. Unlike in the past, such as in North Korea, people can only watch one TV channel, central TV channel. They considered themselves the best TV channel. When they came to Dan Dong, they said, well yours are better, so we became the second best one of the world. But the world isn't like this. Nowadays, people know better the outside world. Even though a lot of people never come to the US, they at least know there are a lot of good things in the US. When you go to visit Europe or Japan, we discovered that their societies are more stable than ours, very harmonious. I have a book called 日本市县政府不胜防 20: 26。 Their counties are equal to our provinces. Their municipals don't have any guards. You can enter as you want. You can go and check look for some information, drink some waters or go to the bathroom, no one will keep an eye on you. In China, it's not the case. They won't allow you enter. Da Ping County in Japan, their building is just inside the ordinary residential area. Our provincial or upper level of agencies all have guards. Even in the mayor's home, there will be guards. Japan doesn't have that because they are democratic country. The royal family has specific time to visit.

In China, it would be impossible. They claimed to be very democratic, but they are afraid to receive their own people. There are still a lot of distance from a democracy. 21:30

21: 47

Chinese political system is very different from the American system, incomparable. We don't have upper house or lower house. In the US, both houses have the rights of decision and veto. The People's Consultative Conference (PCC) doesn't have those rights. National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China (NPC) has this power. As for the nomination of municipal government, the people's congress have certain power on that. The working plan and budget plan on the municipal level, People's congress should approve it, even for the local level. PCC doesn't have this power. It represents the function of democratic supervision. We can discuss but not necessarily to be listened. And those who work for PCC, a lot of them used to work for the local government, local CCP, they won't say the bad thing on they used to work on. Although the slogan of PCC is to participate and discuss the politics, consultation and supervision, eight words. Consultation can be achieved, but not the supervision. I have the sense that in the US, both houses were defined to have the power to execute their rights, but PCC isn't. Although the constitution has defined PCC to be a basic political organ, but its function is very ambiguous. It's difficult to operate and still very immature. What is more mature? like the US Constitution, it has not been modified since 200 years. But the CCP is constantly changing the constitution less than 90 years for 5 or 6 times. It's still very immature. In this country very often, we listen to the people instead of obeying to the law. Because people are above the constitution. The court is the form of incarnation of the constitution. The constitution is meant to the leverage of social justice. The political and legislative affairs committee and municipal committee of Communist Party of China are in fact above the constitution. If they think the case should be judged in another way, then the court should modify its decision. I don't think this kind of situation will happen in the countries of rule of law. The power and the function of the Court is defined by the Constitution. Thus the court is below the Constitution. In addition to the Constitution, Party committee has even greater power. So it's difficult. 24:49

Relation between the political regime and the economic development.

25:18

I would say, the Chinese political regime used to learn from the Russia, the centralization and planned economy. The country is not small but all the decision has to be made by the central government, decision such as in which field you should develop and which not. This kind of method sometimes are legitimate, but most cases are illegitimate. Because it's very difficult to allocate the resources and manage the production in an optimized way. Now China learn the market economy. But it's still immature. For example, if a product seems to be attractive to the market such as refrigerator, 10, 12 or even 50 people would invest in it.

The market demand might only fit for 20 suppliers. As a result, no one makes money. Most of them go bankruptcy. The market economy still seems to be immature. Some people wish to go back to the planned economy. That's impossible. But the market economy without sound macroeconomic management seems to be immature. We have paid a lot to learn lessons. The impact of the open policy and reform is that more autonomy has been give to the companies. For example in Dan Dong, some big companies now can decide by themselves according to their interest on whether they will produce, what they wish to produce, whether they have to make changes, whether to cooperate with the foreign companies. For example, Zhang Ke's Ke Long Group (克隆集团) produces seals, they produce for a domestic company called Da Qing Petrol Group. Another called Dong Fa Group (东发集团) they produce gas meters. They are collaborating with a German company and now planning to work with a Japanese company. The reason why the company was able to develop since the past years is because the access to the foreign market. If only depend on the domestic market, they won't have had such benefit. 27:32

28:04

For a political regime, it should benefit for the most of the people. Like in the US, the voters' interests are taken in to account. The Chinese regime also has this objective. However, in the reform, Hua Xian Factory in Dan Dong, a lot of workers were making a petition yesterday night till 3 am and policemen were there also. Why, because some workers are 买断, which means to be paid for a certain amount of money and laid off. The workers don't think that amount of money is not sufficient to compensate their loss. Some have worked half of their lifetime in this factory, now they are all mid 40 or 50, what they can do next? The compensation money can only last for 3 and 5 years. What they are going to do after 3 and 5 years. Several years ago, there is a system called 共产转制。 Government sold the factory at zero cost. (零值企业) The government sold to someone. This person became the head of the factory. The factory couldn't worth nothing. Even though some machines are still unpaid but all the assets of the factory can't be zero. 29: 44

30: 04

Deng used to say to Mrs Thatcher, HK won't change in 50 years, even 100 years. No change means keeping the British democracy regime in HK. In 100 years, the reason why Deng consider HK still won't change is because the two regimes will become similar. So Deng, considered as a great man in China, thinks that China will follow the road of developed country. In other word, no matter Mr. She or Mr. Zi, we are following the road of capitalism. Basically, HK and China are going in the same direction. The Communist Party didn't accept the private ownership. The most obvious example is the land reform. Land reform is to deprive the land of others, and then distribute to the poor, even deprive people's lives, for the sake of distribution. It won't be easy to be justify in the history. While as for me, the

legitimacy of capitalism is based on the acceptance of private ownership. The private ownership is sacred. The Constitution should protect it. In the past, it was not protected. We used to have the communist idea. Now we don't talk anymore about Mr. She or Mr. Zi, because we know that we are eventually going to follow the path of capitalism. This is the mainstream. 32: 00

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1. Self introduction 01:10-2:43
 2. Relatively more open and free society, life quality better off than before. (in the past, scared of getting touch with foreigners) 03:02-06:22
 3. Living standard has been improved in general. But there are still areas in China are suffering the poverty. 6:53 - 8:35
 4. Dong Bei has a good basis for development since the Japanese occupation has built up some railroads, counties, infrastructures and factories 8:40 - 10:10
 5. Economic reform in Dong Bei has created a lot of social tensions inside of SOE. People went petitioning. 10:39-12:08
 6. Foreign investment is very few because of the geopolitical reason with North and South Korea. 13:10 - 14:39
 7. China is still very backward in the political regime and social transparency compared to Europe, US and Japan. 15:40-21:30
 8. Explaining the role of People's Consultative Conference: PCC, contrary to the Constitution, it has only the function of deliberation, not supervision. Constitution is above the law. Other political organs such as Political and Legislative Affairs Committee, Municipal Committee and Party Committee have much more power on the final political or judicial decision than the Court and the Constitution. 21:47 - 24:49
 9. Market economy has allowed companies to have ore entrepreneurial autonomy. 25:18 - 27:32
 10. The SOE reform has caused some social unrest in Dandong. 28:04-29:44
 11. The future of China is on the clear direction of capitalism. 30:04 - 32:00

General comment from Nika:

1. He has a strong accent and talk pretty fast.
2. Interesting observation on the impact of reform in Dong Bei area.
3. Interesting interpretation and analysis on geopolitical reason of the lack of FDI in Dan Dong.
4. His thought on People's Consultative Conference is also interesting

The full-length video of this interview is available in the online repository of Rutgers University Libraries: <http://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu>