

Looking Back on My Academic Career at the Age of 84

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I had the good fortune of having published two award-winning monographs (the Fairbank Prize for The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China, 1985, and the Levenson Prize for The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1990), received an “outside offer” from Princeton University, and was advanced to “above-scale” salary at UCLA for “retention” – at the age of fifty, still a relatively young age for someone in the humanities.

Yet those rather superficial honors actually all came at a rather heavy price. Being among the most highly ranked and paid faculty members in the department brought multiple kinds of problems and difficulties. In a department full of distinguished scholars, there could not help but be the following kinds of reactions, sometimes aired publicly in meetings: what has Huang accomplished that I haven’t? Why is he at “above scale” salary and I not? Why is his spouse, Kathryn Bernhardt, admittedly a respected and distinguished scholar, a full and regular member of the department while mine (the speaker’s) is not? It did not matter that Bernhardt had been recognized and brought in mainly by the efforts of our department chairwoman in 1988, and that she and I only got together a considerable period after she had joined the department. But those facts mattered not at all to the resentful individuals. Needless to say, their resentment made life difficult and uncomfortable for me and Bernhardt. The fact that I am a rather straightforward person, not good at getting along with everyone, nor prone to modesty or false pretenses, made things doubly difficult.

Under those circumstances, my taking early retirement was the best possible decision I could have made. It freed me from the incessant open and not-so-open undercurrents of criticism and fault-finding by the aggrieved individuals. In fact, early retirement has made for the most productive years of scholarship of my life: compared with five books in the thirty-odd years before retirement, or one book in six years, I have been able to produce ten in the twenty years since retirement, or one book every two years. A simple matter mainly of full versus partial concentration, perhaps also with some measure of accumulated knowledge and greater scholarly maturity.

Now, at age 84 and slowing down in energy and productivity, I can reflect back in a detached manner on the two main periods of my professional career – the 30 years before retirement versus 20 years since retirement. To be sure, there is a significant difference between younger and less experienced years, and older and more matured but still full-energy years. But the main factor is without doubt merely part-time engagement in scholarship and research, in addition to teaching and sundry service obligations and the hassles of interpersonal relationships in the department, versus full-time undisturbed concentration.

Looking back, I admire those few colleagues who somehow have the wisdom and the personality to maintain cordial, conflict-free relationships with everyone -- a virtue that I sorely lack. I am by

nature a rather straightforward person, with fairly strong reactions and likes and dislikes toward people, not good at getting along with everyone, much less at modesty, feigned or genuine. On hindsight, considering those shortcomings of my personality, early retirement was liberating for me. It is what made possible the completely focussed and greater scholarly productivity of ten books in the 20 years after retirement, as opposed to five in the 30 years before. I am fortunate and privileged to have been able to afford to make such a choice.

Now, as I near the twilight of my scholarly career, I sometimes wish I could have been a person who is more skilled at getting along with others, whether of like minds and values or not. But, given the realities of my character and personality, I have no regrets about the choices I made. Early retirement in fact made possible the 20 most productive and most fulfilling years of scholarship of my life, something I would certainly choose to do again. I was fortunate to have been able to afford such a choice and enjoy the luxury of a long period of undisturbed and complete engagement with nothing but serious scholarship.

Appendix: my 15 monographs

Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Modern Chinese Liberalism, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972. 中文版《梁启超与中国的自由主义》，王圣译，西北大学出版社，2023 年版。

The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1985. (Based mainly on Mantetsu surveys of the 1930s and local gazetteers. **Awarded the Fairbank Prize of the American Historical Association.**) 中文版《华北的小农经济与社会变迁》中华书局 1986 年版，2000 年、2004 年再版，法律出版社 2014 年版，广西师范大学出版社 2023 年最新版。

The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350-1988. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1990. (Based on Mantetsu surveys of the 1930s, local gazetteers and agricultural treatises, and my own ethnographic research. **Awarded the Levenson Prize of the Association for Asian Studies.**) 中文版《长江三角洲的小农经济与乡村发展》中华书局 1992 年版，2000 年、2006 年再版，法律出版社 2014 年版，广西师范大学出版社 2023 年最新版。

Civil Justice in China: Representation and Practice in the Qing. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1996. (Based mainly on 628 Qing period cases from Baxian, Baodi, and Danshui-Xinzhong counties. Supplemented by magistrate handbooks and the Mantetsu ethnographic studies). 中文版《清代的法律、社会与文化：民法的表达与实践》上海书店出版社 2003 年版，2007 年再版。法律出版社 2014 年增订版，广西师范大学出版社 2024 年最新版。

Code, Custom, and Legal Practice in China: The Qing and the Republic Compared. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001. (Based on 875 Qing and Republican cases from four counties,

supplemented by detailed ethnographic information on village-level disputes in the period.) 中文版《法典、习俗与司法实践：清代与民国的比较》上海书店出版社 2003 年版，2007 年再版。法律出版社 2014 年增订版，广西师范大学出版社 2024 年最新版。

Chinese Civil Justice, Past and Present. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010. 中文版《过去和现在：中国民事法律实践的探索》法律出版社 2009 年版，2014 年增订版。广西师范大学出版社 2024 年最新版。

China's Hidden Agricultural Revolution. 《中国的隐性农业革命》，法律出版社，2010 年版。In Chinese only.

Beyond the Left and the Right: The History of Practice and China's Rural Development. 《超越左右：实践历史与中国农村的发展》广西师范大学出版社 2024 年版。[原题《超越左右：从实践历史出发探寻中国农村发展的出路》，法律出版社 2014 年版]。In Chinese only.

Practice and Theory: The History and Present of Chinese Society, Economy, and Law. 《实践与理论：中国社会、经济与法律的历史与现实研究》法律出版社 2015 年版。广西师范大学出版社 2024 年最新版《实践与理论：中国社会经济史与法律史研究》。In Chinese only.

China's New Justice System: Practice and Theory 《中国的新型正义体系：实践与理论》，广西师范大学出版社 2020 年版。In Chinese only.

China's New Informal Economy: Practice and Theory. 《中国的新型非正规经济：实践与理论》，广西师范大学出版社 2020 年版。In Chinese only.

Experience and Theory: A History of Practice Study of Chinese Society, Economy, and Law. 《经验与理论：中国社会、经济与法律的实践历史研究》，中国人民大学出版社 2008 年版。广西师范大学出版社 2024 年最新版。In Chinese only.

Practice and Theory: A Study of the History and Present of Chinese Society, Economy, and Law. 《实践与理论：中国社会、经济与法律的历史与现实研究》，法律出版社 2015 年版。广西师范大学出版社 2024 年最新版。In Chinese only.

The Dualistic Unity of State and Society: A Retrospective and Prospective View of Chinese History 《国家与社会的二元合一：中国历史回顾与前瞻》，广西师范大学出版社 2022 年版。In Chinese only.

The Social Science of Practice: Method, Theory, and Prospective Vision 《实践社会科学的方法、理论与前瞻》，广西师范大学出版社 2023 年版。In Chinese only.
