I was rather surprised when, completely unexpectedly, Prof. Zhi-Rong Zhou contacted me to inform me that he was translating the book version of my Phd thesis, The Pleadings Game, into Chinese, for inclusion in a series entitled "The Collected Translations of Western Classics of Legal Logic". To be honest I was a bit skeptical at first, until I had received confirmation from the publisher of my book, now Springer. I couldn’t believe my modest thesis was worthy of inclusion in a series of “classics”, and surely not during my lifetime. Anyway I am greatly honored, even if this honor comes with the price of making me feel a few generations older than I am.

The PhD thesis was completed in 1993, two years before the book version was published, 24 years ago. The field of Artificial Intelligence and Law was still rather young then. I like to think of myself as a founding member, but more precisely I belong to the second generation of AI and Law researchers, after the generation of Anne Gardner, Carole Hafner and Thorne McCarty, my heros then, among a few others. But I did participate in the inception of the International Conference of Artificial Intelligence and Law (ICAIL) and its associated International Association of Artificial Intelligence and Law (IAAIL). I will never forget when Carole Hafner approached me to discuss the idea of organizing the conference, during one of the Logica, Informatica and Diritto conferences hosted by Prof. Martino in Florence, Italy. It seemed a bit like a conspiracy at the time. Sadly, Carole Hafner passed away about two years ago, before the ICAIL in San Diego. She is and will be greatly missed in the AI and Law community.

The first ICAIL conference took place at Northeastern University in Boston, in 1987. I am just returning from the 15th ICAIL conference, 30 years later, which took place at King’s College in London, during some difficult times for the city. This was the largest ICAIL ever. Artificial Intelligence is a hot topic again, with a growing number of companies and billions of dollars of investment, or so I have heard, including quite a number of companies targeting the legal services market. Hopefully this renewed interest from industry will also have a positive impact on academic research and development in the field of Artificial Intelligence and Law. So far, not many of the results from the research field have had much of an impact on commercial products and services, but now that companies, academics and practicing lawyers have established contact with one another, there is good reason to hope that there will be fruitful collaborations, where we can learn from each other.

The Pleadings Game was one of the first formal and computational models of legal argumentation to take a procedural and dialectical perspective, which viewed legal reasoning as a process of constructing, evaluating and comparing the pros and cons of theories of the facts and law, from conflicting evidence and conflicting interpretations of legal texts. The model covers the procedural rules governing the distribution of burdens of proof as well as multiple proof standards for resolving particular types of issues. The book is rightfully cited most often for its contributions to understanding and modeling these procedural aspects of legal argumentation. In addition, the thesis made what I would like to think are significant contributions to the topic of modeling defeasible legal norms, that is legal norms subject to exceptions or in conflict with other legal norms, as wells as argumentation-based methods for reasoning with such norms and resolving conflicts among norms. The rule language for modeling legal norms was based on Thorne McCarty’s Clausal Intuitionistic Logic. An inference engine for this rule language was used to construct arguments. Conflicts among these arguments were resolved using an argumentation logic based on Conditional Entailment, by Geffner and Pearl.

Much work has been conducted on the topic of computational models of (legal) argument since the Pleadings Game. If you find the Pleadings Game interesting, I would encourage you to also see the proceedings of the biennial conference on Computational Models of Argument (COMMA), which began in 2006, as well as the open access journal of Argument and Computation, now published by IOS Press. In addition, let me mention that an open access Handbook of Formal Argumentation is in preparation, to be published by College Publications, probably in 2017.

My own work on computational models of argument since the Pleadings Game focused first on developing practical tools for supporting argumentation on the World-Wide Web, in the context of eParticipation research on ways to make democracy more rational, deliberative and inclusive. Since about 2006, I have returned to the topic of formal and computational models of argument, mostly in collaboration with Douglas Walton. Together we have developed a series of versions of a computational model of structured argument, called Carneades, after the Greek philosopher who invented dialectic, which builds upon the work begun in the Pleadings game on modeling defeasible reasoning as an argument construction and evaluation process. The latest version of Carneades, presented at COMMA 2016, provides better support for balancing conflicting arguments and for modeling argumentation schemes, including schemes with second-order schema variables, such as argument from expert witness testimony and argument from analogy, in such as way that they can be used as “executable specifications” by an inference engine to automatically construct arguments.

If I could return to the early 90s and make revisions to the Pleadings Game, I might be tempted to omit Chapter 6, presenting an implementation of the formal model presented in Chapter 5. It might have been better to publish the description of the implementation as a technical report. I fear its inclusion in the book may be viewed by some readers as a distraction from the main contributions of the work, to legal theory and to formal models of argumentation. That said, the development of the implementation was of critical importance for me, as a tool for “rapid prototyping” and testing various versions of the formal model, in an incremental fashion, leading up to the version of the formal model published in the thesis. Today I would probably use a proof assistant for this purpose, such as Coq or Isabelle. Such tools were in their infancy in the early 90s but are much more mature today.

I hope Chinese scholars will find the Pleadings Game useful for their research. Again, it is an extraordinary honor for me to have my book be included in this series on legal logic.