

# Interview with Jørgen Delman, Professor of China Studies (politics and society)

Venue: Department of Cross-cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

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Interview conducted by Toivo Qiu (裘瀚雲)

Transcribed by Riina Pesonen

Q: We usually start with the question about one's background. So, what is your family background, how were you schooled, and how did you become a sinologist?

D: I come from an ordinary non-academic family, and I got interested in China during my high-school years. It was during the Cultural Revolution in China, so we heard something in the Danish media about what happened there. I was a bit leftist, but I had a distinct anti-Soviet attitude, so I was not interested in Communism in Eastern Europe. Then, the former General Secretary of the Danish Communist Party, who had broken with the Danish pro-Soviet Communist Party in the late 1950s and founded his own party, came to my school to give a lecture as an alumni. His party was a new left-wing party called the People's Socialist Party, and he came from the same school as I did. He had a working-class background and I was quite favourable towards this party. He talked in general terms about his life and political experience, and he mentioned that he had been to China in the mid-1950s, and that he had written a travelogue about his visit.<sup>1</sup> So, I thought I should read it, and then I got very interested in China and wrote an essay on a Chinese topic. I do not have it anymore, and I have unfortunately forgotten what it was about. Then, I sort of forgot about China. I started studying English language and literature at the University of Aarhus in 1969. It was at the time of the so-called 'student rebellion' and I was actively involved in the politics of my department. It was a quite conservative department, so things were not really moving the way we wanted, although, I was very interested in the U.K, what happened there, English literature, and also the language, especially linguistics. I got a very good BA education there, but I got more and more interested in doing something else. I then realised that I could study Chinese at my university. It was a relatively new subject. Together with a friend, I decided that I wanted to go where the action was. Part of the students' movement was very inspired by China's Cultural Revolution and the Chinese anti-Soviet stance. So, there was a fight within the student movement between different left-wing factions. Pro-Soviet, Pro-China, Pro-Critical Marxism in Europe, and in China, I thought, there was some combination of Critical Marxism and what happened on the ground in the country. So, that is one of the major reasons, that I chose Chinese. I wanted to get away from this conservative environment and I had some idea about China beforehand, and we were very inspired by what happened in China.

Q: Yes. So, what was it like studying China back then in the late 1960s, early 1970s?

D: I started studying Chinese in 1972.

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<sup>1</sup> Larsen, Aksel (1964). *Dagbog fra en Kina-rejse*. København: Hans Reitzel.

Q: Yes.

D: Actually, we were about 40 new students; the first and the only time for many years that there were so many new students. A lot of us were inspired by the Cultural Revolution, some were sort of Maoists, and we all had a great appetite for learning the language to be able to go to China and interact with Chinese people. It was a very lively environment. We had some language teaching and that was more or less what we got during the first year. We came to realize that it was really, really, difficult to learn Chinese, I have to say. Many stopped quite quickly.

Q: Yeah?

D: A really difficult language, but, anyway, a good part of us stood through the first year due to good teachers. Then, we were fortunate enough to host the first Chinese language teacher from the PRC in Europe after the height of the Cultural Revolution. This was a big boost for us, and he stayed for, I think, four or five years. He became a key partner for language learning. He was a very open-minded person, despite the fact that he was, of course, subject to supervision by the Chinese embassy. He was also supposed to communicate politically correct language teaching, but who cared? He was a real Chinese teacher from real China. We could have many sorts of discussions with him, we could play ping-pong with him. He was actually very good at the game. We developed a sort of private relationship with him, invited him home and also to our parties. Still, he was extremely professional. So, he was really the first Chinese I learned to know on a personal level. Academically, his focus was mainly on language teaching.

Q: Yes.

D: We were also taught how to use handbooks, which was an essential thing at that time; pre-digital age, right?

Q: Yeah.

D: We spent a lot of time on how to use the Chinese handbooks and resources, classical and modern, and studying the history of sinology. But we didn't really have any modern content teaching. It was more or less up to ourselves to acquire that knowledge. Our department was located in a rather isolated old factory, and we were basically just us. We had a very good and enthusiastic student environment. We were very close with each other, and you have probably already heard that some of us have become professors or leading people in the China field in Denmark and that some of us still stick together?

Q: Yeah.

D: Basically, you could say that it was not a complete education, but we managed to... When I say "not complete", I mean, it's not like what we offer today. The teachers we had were fine, no problem, but the education was only language focused. Only language. All content had to come from there.

Q: Yes. Before that in the Nordic countries, it was very much what Karlgren<sup>2</sup> and his pupils were doing.

D: So, at the time, there was a Sinological tradition that did not focus on modern China, and we really wanted to focus on modern China. Still, we did not want to give up on classical Chinese because our teacher, the main teacher, the person who started the department, Else Glahn, was a sinologist, you have probably heard about her -

Q: Yes, yesterday.

D: ...she was in many ways a very unusual person. She started her career as a carpenter, then she became an architect. She was also a left-wing person; she was engaged in, what at the time, was a group of Danish left-wingers who were interested in China, former Pro-Soviet type of communists, who had broken away from the Danish Communist Party. In early life, she got interested in traditional Chinese architecture, and she developed a very good network within Sinological circles around the world. She brought some of these people to Aarhus. So, some of the old famous sinologists, also some adventurous China travellers from outside the Nordic countries came to our department as guests, which was extremely good, and they gave guest lectures. That was quite stimulating. She was also a very open-minded person and agreed that we, as one of the first departments in Europe at the time, should primarily focus on modern China.

Q: Yes. Did you go to China as an exchange student?

D: I did, for one year from 1977 to 1978. I went with Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg, professor of Chinese at Aarhus University and Verner Worm, professor at the Copenhagen Business School (CBS), I think he has been interviewed at an earlier stage?

Q: Yes.

D: And, finally, Hatla Thelle, who worked for many years at the Danish Institute of Human Rights on their China program. So, we were four Danish students who went together and stayed there for one year. Actually, Verner stayed for longer, but the rest of us came back after one year. We joined the last batch of foreign students during the Cultural Revolution and we all ended up at Peking University (北京大学, PKU). I wanted to study Marxist political economy, but that program was not open to foreign students at the time. Instead, I joined a modern history class with the last batch of Chinese worker-peasant-soldier students (工农兵学员). Unfortunately, the program offered Cultural Revolution type of content and it was not good at all. For me, however, it was interesting to be at PKU because they started criticising the Cultural Revolution there late 1977 and the campaign continued when I left in July 1978. We quickly realised that attending classes did not make a lot of sense. The textbook could be read in one day, and the teacher did nothing more than repeating it. We were then offered a monthly discussion session amongst students who did not attend class. Meanwhile, big character posters were going up all over PKU criticizing the Cultural Revolution. At

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<sup>2</sup> Bernhard Karlgren (1889 – 1978), a Swedish linguist and sinologist. He was the first to pursue reconstructing historical Chinese phonology with the usage of modern methods, and he had a tremendous influence in establishing Sinology as an academic field in the Nordic countries.

first, it was a very controlled campaign against the so-called “Gang of Four” (四人帮)<sup>3</sup>, but then, it became a, you know, a campaign of revenge by those who had been persecuted at PKU during the Cultural Revolution. To keep track of the campaign, we organized a group of foreign students to copy all the big-character posters that we could manage to read and we kept a common record of them that we could bring home. When I came home, I wrote an article about the campaign at PKU.

Q: Yes.

D: Later, the campaign moved into the city, and we followed it and travelled by bike to Xidan and later Tian An Men for days on end to read posters that now covered much broader issues. This is how the Xidan Democracy Wall started, really from the spring of 1978 and onwards and later became a hub of the Democracy Movement at the time. So, the campaign moved from being a university-internal thing to becoming a citywide, if not a nation-wide movement spelling the eventual settling of records with the Cultural Revolution by the new Party Leadership under Deng Xiaoping. But eventually, it also challenged the leadership to open up for a more democratic political order as it was taken over på political activists and moved out of the control of the Party.

Q: Yes. What was your MA about?

D: Well I wrote my MA thesis together with another student; his name is Per Møller Christensen. We wrote about the introduction and transformation of Marxist political economy in China from 1949 until 1976. We also joined a group of students in Aarhus who translated into Danish what we thought was an innovative Chinese manual on Marxist political. It was published by Modtryk, a Danish publisher.

Since its start, the Communist Party had been struggling with Marxist political economy: “How do we actually teach what we preach and do?” They needed a manual for that. In the 1950s, they translated and introduced an authoritative Soviet manual on political economy, but Mao Zedong was quite unhappy with the contents of it, because it was based on the paradigm of a Systems Theory. He was more critical and wanted a political economy that critically reviewed China’s socialism. So, from the mid-1950es and onward, and especially during the Cultural Revolution, this new critical Marxist political economy gradually emerged. We translated an early version of it, but then Per Møller Christensen came back from China with a new, updated version. We started comparing the two editions, and realised there had been substantial changes. Finally, we published the latest published version in 1979.<sup>4</sup> Eventually, our master thesis documented and analyzed the development of Marxist political economy in China from 1949 until 1976. Actually, the Chinese manual went through five different iterations and the last revision from 1976 was never published since it was said to have been sponsored by the Gang of Four. However, it was criticised in the Chinese press, so we collected all the criticisms, and it was very easy to make an overlay on the previous version that we had translated to identify where it had been revised. While we focused on this development of China’s Marxist Political Economy, we also tried to put it into the context of Chinese economic thinking in general and of China’s economic development.

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<sup>3</sup> Part of the Cultural Revolutionary leadership. It included Mao Zedong’s wife, Jiang Qing.

<sup>4</sup> *Grundlæggende viden om politisk økonomi*. Aarhus: Modtryk, 1979.

Q: Yes. And, after your MA, what did you do then?

D: Well, I became unemployed for a couple of years, which meant that I was part of the precariat. I was doing all kinds of things, giving public lectures on China, writing stuff for the media, writing a textbook for high school, part-time teaching at university, i.e. different sorts of things to fulfil my professional ambitions. And then, in 1981, the Danish Ministry of Education launched an initiative to improve employment opportunities for jobless graduates from the Humanities, and at that time, we were quite a few from China Studies who had not been able to find a fixed position. Therefore, we applied for a project called “China Information Service”, and the idea was to develop a consultancy that could help Danish businesses going to China. The idea from the ministry was that this should be located within the university, but gradually sort of make itself financially sustainable and eventually superfluous. Through this activity, which had very generous funding, people could prepare themselves for employment in private companies, which was quite unusual at that time. So, the timing was perfect, because at that time China opened up, and the major Danish companies did not know anything about China. They came to us and it became a big success. I was one of the three founders, and I was also employed full time there for two years. And then, one day, I was called by the Danish the Danish Ministry of Agriculture, they were looking for an employee for the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO) representation in Beijing. At the time, the United Nations was developing a program in China through its different technical organizations, and Denmark had an agreement with the United Nations that they could fund the junior experts. They were looking for an economist or agronomist who could speak Chinese, and they wanted somebody who could analyse the Chinese debates about agricultural issues and report back to FAO headquarters in Rome. So, I told them: “I’m sorry, to my knowledge there are no such people in Denmark who can speak Chinese.” I was quite certain this was the case and therefore asked: “Why don’t you take one of us?” And they said: “Okay, if that is the case, let’s consider it.” Luckily, they came back, and said that they would be interested in talking to potential candidates and asked us to submit proper applications. So, we were a few who thought this would be a fantastic opportunity to go to China and work. And then, eventually, after going through a recruitment process, I got the job and I was there with my family from 1983 to 1986, how much do you want to hear?

Q: You can continue.

D: About my career?

Q: Usually we have about half of the interview about one’s personal background.

D: Okay. So, I went to China, I knew little about China’s agriculture, but of course I had written this thesis on political economy, so we had also been dealing with agricultural policies. Technically, I knew nothing about agriculture and only very little about international development assistance. I had not worked with it, so it was a very steep learning curve at the outset. I anticipated that I was going to read a lot of Chinese material on agricultural development and sort of analyse it, but when I arrived there, my Egyptian boss told me that: “I’m sorry, but we don’t have time for this. Here are twenty projects that you can take care of.” So, I was put in charge of these projects as an international project manager together with the local Chinese staff members. The job was really to make sure that the projects were going according to plan. I did not know anything about project management, either. So, I had to learn all these things on the spot while I was working. I brought my family, my wife and two

kids, so it was a pretty tough first year, I would say, very challenging. But then eventually, of course you get into it, and I learned a lot. I had some very good international and Chinese colleagues who were very patient with me and who really taught me the, let's say, the "nuts and bolts" of how the FAO and the UN system were operating and how projects operated. Then, at the end of it... I actually felt that I could do a meaningful job, I could actually make a difference. I also got the necessary respect of the Chinese counterparts I worked with, in many different ministries and around China in the provinces. I worked with provincial authorities project managers at grassroots level around China. The projects covered anything from production to processing, marketing, quality assurance, but also research and development within agriculture, fishery, and forestry. So, a very varied, very comprehensive type of portfolio of activities.

Then at the end of the second year, my boss died during a trip to Fujian. At that time, I had a colleague who had been extremely helpful, but he had just left, so I was, basically, the last international professional who could represent FAO in the representation. By coincidence, I thus became the functional boss of the FAO representation under the supervision of the UNDP Representative for four months until a new FAO Representative had been found.

Q: It must have been very interesting because Chinese food production was changing quite a lot back then.

D: Exactly. So, China was changing so fast. Extremely interesting time to be there. And then, my new boss came; he was from Sri Lanka, and he was extremely professional in his approach, in a different way than the previous one. I liked the previous one, but he came from Egypt, he, sort of, had a more Arab approach to management, I thought at the time. But he was also very committed and took good care of me. Just a different approach to management with the new Representative. He had a British education, so he had a very British approach to the running of things. Very useful to work with him. It was a three-year position. After three years, I was offered to stay on in FAO, but I decided with my wife that we did not want to travel around the world for the rest of our lives. I wanted to stick with China, and we wanted to go back to Denmark.

Q: Yes.

D: Then again, I was out of job, but my old colleagues at China Information Service asked me to re-join them. First, as a freelance consultant, but then I gradually took on some projects. I also had the idea that I wanted to do a PhD because I had realised that in FAO the core people had a PhD on their visiting card. This was a new thing in Denmark, we did not have this type of education before, so I decided to apply for a PhD project and funding for it. I was fortunate to get it from the Danish International Development Assistance Agency (DANIDA). What interested me was the state-farmer relationship in China, and how it changed after the reforms in the rural sector starting in the early 1980s, because I had witnessed these reforms in practical terms when I worked for FAO. I had seen a lot of change. I decided to study the agricultural extension system in China, since one of my pet projects at FAO was focusing on the reform of the agricultural extension in China. Do you know what that is?

Q: Agricultural what?

D: Extension. It focuses on professional organizations that link the farm with research and development. China's agricultural extension used to be organized by the state, under the Ministry of Agriculture. I had very good contacts in the Ministry of Agriculture, and they had a whole system that had drawn world-wide attention during the Cultural Revolution for their innovative approach. The people who were working with development around the world knew very well that China had a system for agricultural extension. So, I decided to make that a case study, and then, of course, I was interested in how the relationship between the farmer and the agricultural extension system had changed when China went from a state-run centrally planned economy to a more market-based agricultural economy. This put a lot of pressure and demand on, not only the farmers, but also on the service providers. And, of course, in China they had a hybrid of semi-commercial service providers who were also part of the bureaucracy. So, it was an interesting interface to study. I did the project from 1988 till the end of 1990. I did a lot of fieldwork, particularly in a remote agricultural county, Renshou County, in Sichuan Province. During that period, I was contacted by Ramboll, a Danish consulting company that wanted to take on an assignment for the European Union to formulate a new project in China, called the China-EU Centre for Agricultural Technology (CECAT). They wanted me on the team that should do a feasibility study of the project. I got leave of absence from my PhD project and participated in the mission. We developed an approach to how the centre should operate and its anticipated services as well as the concrete plan for how to develop it. It took a couple of months or so. I was also in China as a consultant on a DANIDA team, to evaluate a number of projects in the dairy sector in China. The reason why I did that was that, while I worked with FAO, I had worked a lot with the dairy sector in China.

I thus did some consulting while I was doing this PhD, and then in 1990, Ramboll informed me that they had been offered to bid for the CECAT project, which I had been part of the formulation of, and they wanted me as a team leader. This meant that I was going to be based in China, if they won the bid. As a team leader, I would become the co-director of this centre together with a Chinese director.

So, I participated in writing the bid and they sent it off to the EU and, I mean, you're in competition with six, seven different consultancy consortia, I did not really have any idea that they would win. But then, they called me and said: "We have won! We have to start early next year." It was, I think, maybe in August 1990. So, I had three years for my PhD, and I was just starting my third year, but I had to start in this new job on 1 January, 1991. Then, of course, I had to talk to my wife again, she had her own job. We must decide whether we should go or not. We decided to go, if it would be possible. So, I had to finish my PhD dissertation in a very, very short time. I managed to do that, and I delivered it on 23 December 1990, and then, on 1 January 1991, I started in the new job. We had to establish this China-Europe Centre for Agricultural Technology (CECAT) from scratch. It still exists. It was meant as a development assistance effort to help the Chinese government. It was based in the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture, I don't know if you know the concept, but it is a 事业单位, i.e. a kind of operational agency under a ministry. CECAT was meant to stimulate and facilitate collaboration between China and the EU in agriculture, fishery and forestry. Exactly what I had worked with in FAO. It had an information component, it had a consulting component, it had a training component, and it had a language component on translation, interpretation, language training also.

At the beginning, there was me, a Chinese director, a few Chinese employees, and a couple of European long-term consultants. At the end of the day, when I left in 1996, we had built a centre in Beijing, right opposite the so-called Lufthansa Centre at Liangma Bridge, close to the third ring-road, north of the Ministry of Agriculture. The size was 10 000 m<sup>2</sup>, and we had a staff of around a hundred and fifty people. So, all of these people had to be recruited, they had to be trained, some of them in China, some of them in Europe. It was very, very heavy on organizational and human resource development.

We also had to do a business plan. China changed a lot again during those years, and these types of organizations had to earn their own incomes, so we also became a business, a government-run business, you could say. We had a lot of international and Chinese clients and many of them paid happily for the services provided. So, all of these things were happening during those six years. I think that we succeeded quite well, and many of the people we trained and worked with all have very important professional or leadership positions in China today. The Centre is still there and doing similar things, but now it is not working for the EU. It has been turned around; it is an international centre under the Ministry of Agriculture that conducts many of its international affairs, especially development assistance assignments around the world. Again, it was a very, very interesting period, and a lot of our focus was on business, on helping European businesses into the Chinese 'situation', we would call it. At that time, they did not have a lot of background for understanding what was happening in China and how they should act, what was the legal regulatory framework, how to get in touch with lower administrative levels,...all of these things. So, we did a lot of consulting for them but we also did many consulting assignments for international development organizations like the World Bank, the UN organizations, and the bilateral development agencies. We, also, involved ourselves in dialogues concerning trade matters, that is, regulation, phytosanitary issues relating to trade in animals and plants. So, a lot of issues where there was a need for a go-between, you could say. Want to hear more?

Q: Ah yes, what happened afterwards? How did you become a professor here?

D: Yeah. Then, when I came back to Denmark in 1996, I was still employed at Ramboll, and they have their headquarters in Copenhagen. I became the head of a department called Private Sector Development. So, for all those years, I primarily worked with development assistance, primarily to China. But actually, when I worked in China, I also did some work on sending Chinese out on international and Chinese development assistance projects, so I also looked into how it worked the other way around. I had also worked a lot with international and Chinese businesses. Anyway, I had worked with development assistance, and this particular department in Ramboll was concerned with a new area within development assistance called Private Sector Development. For many years, international development assistance had said that we could not work with the private sector because it would create unfair competition if we support specific enterprises, or whatever. But now, in the mid-1990s, it was realised that, despite all the money we had spent in Africa and elsewhere on public sector programs, there was not much happening within the private sector, right? So, the idea was to look at how we could stimulate the private sector. Actually, I had worked a lot with this business development and business matching in relation to and within China, so I had some ideas about how to work with these issues, that is basically what this department did. I came to work a lot in Africa, actually, with development of new private sector development programs. But also in Russia and



elsewhere, I managed a big program in Russia, and one in Peru. We worked on export promotion, establishment of agencies that could support the development of small and medium sized enterprise (SME). And, in Africa, I worked a lot with DANIDA on development of their strategy for support to private sector development in different countries. After that, I was sent there as a consultant to initiate the implementation of their programs. Gradually, I realised that if I went on like this, I would continue as a development consultant for the rest of my life.

I did, however, also maintain my engagement with China. Jointly with some other European consulting firms, Ramboll had a big project in China, the biggest EU project at the time, and I was part of the management team. The project supported dairy development in China. It was a comprehensive program that had had different donors over time, and for the last 10 years of its life, the main donor was the EU. Other than that, we also had bilateral activities. I do not know, of course, if you know how this world works, but the way the EU does it is that they ask – through tendering – consulting companies to put together a consortium for a big project like this and provide the technical expertise. So, I was part of the program management and the leadership of this project on the European side, and I went to China maybe four times a year during those five years from 1996 up till 2001. And, I was also a consultant on institutional development, primarily looking at how we could help establish farmers' organizations in China. So, I did maintain my contact with China but I realised that it would be difficult to continue; China was moving out of the development assistance area, and was not eligible for assistance anymore, and then I would, sort of, be confined to work in Africa for the rest of my life. Although it was interesting and challenging, I was not sure that I was interested in doing that, so I decided I had to find something else.

Then the job as director of the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) came up. They were looking for a person who had management experience because they wanted to refocus the activities and come up with a new strategy. So, I applied, and I got the job. I had actually succeeded to maintain my 'research CV' during those years, amongst other things on this huge dairy development project on which I was manager of a big research component.

Q: What year was this?

D: From 1996 to 2001. I participated in the formulation of the research projects and helped put together the research teams from China and Europe. I followed the projects until they had been completed and helped deliver the results to the appropriate authorities. I had also written a few things myself, so I maintained my research CV. Adding to that, I had also got considerable research management experience. So, I got the job at NIAS. I was there until 2009, and managed to do a lot more research.

And then, this job as Professor of China Studies came up. I was at the end of my contract with NIAS, and I thought maybe I should return to the China Studies field as teacher/researcher; it would be a good place to be for the rest of my career because, I mean, I had almost always worked with China. I applied for it and I got it, so that is how I ended up here.

Q: So, you have been here as a professor for nine years?

D: Yeah.

Q: When you compare China Studies here, right now, to your own period of studying in the 1970s, how has the quality and the source of students changed? Of course, this is a different university from Aarhus.

D: I think several things have happened that are important to consider this. One thing is that in Aarhus, as I said, we, the students wanted the program to focus on modern and contemporary China, and we had the power to write a completely new curriculum for the program. We introduced the novel idea of language-based area studies. But we did not have the teachers who could actually match what we wanted. At that time, the University of Copenhagen was still very traditional. The professor was one of the eminent sinologists, he was very influential being the only professor in this field in Denmark, and he wanted to maintain the focus on classical Chinese and historical China.

Q: Søren Egerod?

D: Søren Egerod, yes. We were actually having our fights with him because he did not like what we were doing in Aarhus. But, eventually the situation also changed in Copenhagen after he left his position. Copenhagen decided to introduce an area studies type of program. This is what we have now, but we still maintain classical Chinese to some extent. I am not really sure where our inspiration came from back in the 1970s, possibly from the US, but the model introduced in Aarhus back then is now predominant in the two Danish China Studies programmes. Of course, the programmes have developed continuously since the 1990s, and in Copenhagen we have integrated language fully with disciplinary content all the way through BA and MA. I call it China Studies v 2.0.

So, the quality of the students, I think, from the time when I started, the university was changing from being an elite institution to becoming a mass university. So, if I compare the forty students that I was amongst during the first year, I think they are very much like what we see now, so it has not changed in that sense. I do not think that, when I started studying Chinese in Aarhus in 1972, there was any sense of being member of an elite institution. I mean, it was more like being in a very, very new environment, the universities were democratized and we could have a big influence ourselves on how the program developed as well as on the daily operation of the department.

Q: Yes.

D: At that time, there were no entry requirements for the university. Now, this year, we are having a grade-based entry requirement for the first time at the University of Copenhagen.

Q: Yes. So, your generation of students quite developed the modern China studies in Denmark, and also the methodology used here. What kind of research have you been doing as a professor?

D: Well, as a professor, I am still interested in the state-society perspective, but I have shifted my attention from rural areas to urban areas. In the past, when I worked with rural development in China, I was interested in China's agricultural environmental issues. I am still very interested in the environment; now I am focusing on climate change politics in China with a special focus on energy issues. I examine what climate change does to the Chinese political system as one of the most complex political agendas that the Chinese political system has ever had to deal with. Basically, I am interested in political processes that lead to political change....in how, the local governments in China address

climate change and how they interact with society, both civil society and businesses, to address climate change. So, my research has centred around these issues for some time.

Q: Have you supervised PhD students?

D: Yeah, some.

Q: What kind of thesis are they generally doing?

D: We do not have many PhD students here, so they are very different. There is no general trend. Before I started here, I had supervised two PhD students. Here I have supervised four and co-supervised two over nine years, so it is not a lot. They have worked on different individual projects, such as citizens' climate change attitudes and behaviour, contentious politics, and Korean contemporary popular culture. Right now, I am supervising a historian working on biographical history centring around a very successful Danish entrepreneur in China at the turn of the last century as a case. He applies an entrepreneurship angle, using contemporary theories on entrepreneurship on a historical case.

Q: Are there any students who are more inclined to classical sinology here, or are all inclined to modern China studies?

D: Yes, we have some who attend are interested, and they are offered teaching, they are supervised, they can do a thesis, also a PhD thesis. We also have a strong focus on China's intellectual history.

Q: Do you focus on Modern China studies?

D: Yes. When I started, my charge here was contemporary society and politics, but since we now have a colleague focusing on contemporary society, it has become more and more politics for me. But I also teach modern history once in a while and I teach science theory every spring semester.

Q: Yes. Have you been involved in academic debates on China, or China studies? And especially about human rights.

D: No. Well, you know, I give a lot of public lectures on different topics, and this issue will always come up, about human rights. There is always somebody asking about it in Denmark. So, in that sense, yes. But not in academic debates, no. It has not been a big issue in Denmark, really.

Q: Yes, it is more about Norway and Sweden, basically?

D: Yes, of course, we have a human rights institute in Denmark (Danish Institute for Human Rights) that used to work on human rights in China. I was a member of their reference group for the China program, so there we had some debate about human rights. But, in the public, I have not... I mean, I write pieces in Danish media once in a while, sometimes touching on human rights. I have always been interested in China's 'rights based' resistance and the role of lawyers in these movements. Some years ago, I actually wrote a piece on one of the rights lawyers, Xu Ziyong. But, as said, there is not a lot of debate about this in academic circles in Denmark.

Q: Yes. Are you currently involved in any transnational research projects?

D: I have just finished one. We are actually wrapping it up now. It is on urban green governance in China. It was a Nordic-Chinese project. It involved some China scholars from the Nordic countries, including Outi Luova from Finland and Oscar Almén and Mattias Burrell from Sweden, and quite a number of Chinese colleagues. The publication we did together will soon be out. I have joined another project on translation; actually, that project is run by a Chinese researcher at the University of Sydney. Translation is a new field for me, and yet maybe it is not, at least I am trying to convince myself of that, because, when I wrote my PhD thesis I combined different strands of theory, and one of them was learning and innovation theory that focuses on the spreading of knowledge and acquisition of new technologies, so-called 'Diffusion Theory'. It is based on ideas about institutionalized learning, patterns of communication, uptake of new technologies, and so on. I also did another project in the 1980s on learning in connection with technology transfers to China. I interviewed many Danish companies. Actually I have been working with technology transfer to China for many years. Technology transfer always requires translation. So, I think that I will position this new project in relation to policy learning and diffusion and uptake of new policies from abroad in China. I have decided to look at the Chinese interest in policy learning and policy translation from abroad. I use the well-established Sino-Danish collaboration within energy as a case. I have actually worked as a consultant for the Danish government on this program in the past. It has the Danish and Chinese national energy agencies as partners.

Q: What kind of study structure do you have nowadays at Copenhagen for China studies? What kind of a program is it for the students?

D: It is a full program. From BA, over MA, to PhD. We have our own study program while we also coordinate with the other Asian studies programs (Japan, Korea, India).

Q: Yes. Do the students have to go to China as exchange students?

D: Yeah.

Q: One year?

D: No, half a year, but we encourage them to go for an additional half year. And, I think most of them do, actually. They can also go on internships for half a year, and many of them then go to China for that.

Q: How often do you personally go to China, and what kind of relations do you have with Chinese academia, the researchers, there?

D: I go two to three times a year, adding up to maybe four to six weeks a year in China. Well, it depends on what I am doing, obviously. I go there to do my research and for conferences, but we also had a language program for many years with Peking University, then with Zhejiang University and now with Beijing International Studies University. I was responsible for that for some years and I also went there to negotiate and supervise the programs. Research-wise, a lot of my work for the last few years has actually been in Hangzhou where I have worked on climate governance.

Q: What is the relationship between the Danish and Chinese governments in your opinion?

D: The two countries have a very strong relationship, also-called a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Q: Like Finland does.

D: Yeah. Actually, I did a special issue of a Danish journal on this a couple of years ago, together with a colleague from political science here at my University. Right now, it is being translated into Chinese and it will be launched in October this year in Beijing. It will be published by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press. I have written the introduction together with my colleague and contribute my own article about what is called the strategic collaboration between government authorities. As I said before, I have been working as a consultant between on the program between the Danish Energy Agency and the Chinese Energy Agency in the past.

Q: The officials, yes.

D: I took energy and environment as a case study and looked at both the national level agencies but also sub-national level agencies. I addressed it from a relational public diplomacy perspective.

Q: I assume most of your research funding comes from the university funding.

D: Correct. In recent years, it has come from the university and from, you know, various smaller grants from the Nordic countries. The network behind the book on green urban governance came from Nordic funding and – for my part - from the Sino-Danish Centre for Research and Education in Beijing.

Q: What is your self-perceived contribution to China studies?

D: I think I have had a long-term commitment to make China studies a viable enterprise. To sophisticate the way we do our education, to make language a fully integrated part of our education, to integrate language skills with disciplinary approaches. We have achieved that in Copenhagen now. So, I participated in introducing this area studies concept from early on, then I was out of academia for many years, and then came back, and continued developing the ideas; that has been a contribution, I think. I am not sure it will last because I think the next step for China studies will actually be something like we see in the States and in the United Kingdom, that the China studies specialists will be based in the disciplines. But we would then have to integrate the language component. How it is going to be done in the future is very difficult to see because it would reduce me to a language teacher, right? And, right now, I teach everything. I teach theories, methodologies, I teach language-based courses, in politics, political economy, and also other topics. But, anyway, I think it will change.

The other contribution, I guess, is that I have been very active on Danish public platforms in contributing to deepening the knowledge of China in Denmark for many, many years. And maybe research-wise, some of the research I'm doing now is, if I can continue pursuing this, I think some of it is quite new, but I need to get it further developed. I am looking at governance, and I see that there are elements, in what I am doing that really points to new ways of understanding the way the Chinese state operates and how we could explain political change in China. So, I pursue that also.

Q: Yes. So, you predict that, in the future, there will not be one China studies but, like, researchers and students specialised in China, in Political Science and in Area studies...

D: No, that is not what I predict. Certainly, I would hope that there would still be a curriculum called China studies. But we need to integrate more with the disciplines, that's what I mean.

Q: Yes.

D: How that is to be done is, of course, a different matter, and universities around the world have different solutions for that. But I think the disciplines would benefit from that, and we would benefit from that.

Q: Yes. In Finland that has been mainly through minor subjects, so...

D: Yeah, and we also see that here now, and we actually encourage the students a lot to be more strategic about their choice of minor subjects.

Q: Yes. Do you have any experience with China studies in other Nordic countries?

D: A lot. We have had a lot of collaboration in different frameworks with Oslo, Stockholm, Aarhus, mainly.

Q: How would you compare China studies in Denmark to other Nordic countries? Is there a big difference in your opinion?

D: In relation to Norway, it is more or less the same.

Q: Yes.

D: They have developed different degrees with some measure of specialization, right. So, in a way, I think that could also be a way to go. They have one in politics, they have one in culture, and one in history, as I recollect.

Q: Yeah.

D: So, I think this could be one way of going for us. The other way is to internationalize our program, so it will be a degree taught in English.

Q: Yes.

D: We are different from Stockholm. Of course, we are under the same system, but it seems it has been difficult for Stockholm to re-define their approach away from being purely humanistic studies, at least up till some years ago. Here in Copenhagen, we are clearly a mix of humanities and social sciences.

Q: How do you see the development of academia in China?

D: In China?

Q: In China, the Chinese scholars.

D: In my field?

Q: In your field.

D: I think they are under tough pressure. Meaning, it is one of the most sensitive areas you can work in...Chinese politics.

Q: Yeah, I imagined so.

D: Yeah, so I think they are finding ways around it. I mean, governance is an acceptable approach to studying Chinese politics.

Q: Ah, yes.

D: But generally, it is not a healthy situation for political science.

Q: What are your views on China's future? This is the last question.

D: I do not know, I cannot answer that. I think it is too big a question.

Q: Yes. If I ask, like, for example, in a political way in the near future, I mean.

D: Yeah. Well, I think Xi Jinping is a very smart and clever operator, right. He is not a grand thinker, he is an operator, an *apparatchik*, as they called it in the past. He's been groomed and schooled and trained for the role he has now, and he seems to be able to operate the system purposefully. I think it is quite stable for the time being.

Q: Yes.

D: And the question is for how long a time will it remain stable, because, let us say, the checks and balances are not really there on the top leader.

Q: Yes.

D: So, the top leadership is not open to public criticism or supervision.

Q: Yes.

D: So, it is hard to say, but I think for the time being it looks quite stable. China's in a good economic position, China is being respected for its achievements internationally, for its role. You cannot bully China anymore.

Q: Indeed!

D: So, you cannot contain China. I mean, Xi Jinping is still on..., the leadership is on... a course that is sailable. But I think... I see a lot of democratic mechanisms being introduced at the local level in local governance but, at the central level, you see less and less plurality. I wonder if that is a viable sort of configuration of the political system for the long haul?

Q: Yes. So, do you think that if changes are going to happen, it is going to be from the low-level governance up to the higher level?

D: I am not sure. The issue, if you would believe in that proposition, I think you have to reflect on the fact that local leaders are not sitting for a very long time. Actually, shorter and shorter. So, local governments have a bifurcated structure in a way. You have a top leadership at local level that is circulating all the time, right. Then, of course, you have a local bureaucracy that is quite entrenched in the local situation. But they do not have a transmission belt in relation to the centre, because they have a top layer at the local level who are circulating all the time, and who will never really get familiar with the local situation. Whether this is the optimum solution for the Chinese case, where you will always have this conflict between the centre and the localities, I am not sure, but it will be interesting to follow.

Q: Yes. Do you still have something more to tell me what I have not asked about?

D: Well, I think one big thing that is happening here is that the Copenhagen Business School has decided to close its Chinese language program.

Q: Yeah.

D: And transfer it to here.

Q: Okay.

D: So, from this year, if they register as many students as they had in the past, we will become the biggest China Studies program in Northern Europe, from September this year.

Q: How many students would you have?

D: Then, we would take in about a hundred and ten.

Q: Oh! In Helsinki we are going to have sixteen new students of Korean and Chinese, so it might be sixteen Korean students and no Chinese students.

D: Is that so?

Q: Or sixteen Chinese students and no Korean students, or half and half, and whatever.

D: Only sixteen?

Q: Yes, and it is only every second year. Every second year, we will take in sixteen students of Japanese but that is a new language program. Then there is a Cultural Studies [program], where they can only study language for one year.

D: Incredible. That is amazing.

Q: But this is the newest reform.

D: Yeah, yeah.

Q: But, yes.

D: But then, you cannot maintain a program, it is impossible.



Q: Yes.

D: So, how many people are employed now in China studies in Helsinki?

Q: We have Professor Janhunen, Professor Chen, Tiina Airaksinen. Of course, we have a Confucius Institute with quite a few staff. Then, we have Gao Mingming, our teacher of Chinese language, and then we have a few postdocs.

D: Okay.

Q: That is about it.

Q: That is it. I thank you for this interview.

D: Okay.