

Interview of Professor Torbjörn Lodén

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Lodén: My name is Torbjörn Lodén and I was born in 1947 in the town of Nynäshamn just outside of Stockholm. As a baby I moved to Kiruna in northernmost Sweden, north of the Arctic circle, where I grew up and graduated from high school in 1966. As a young student I was very interested in languages. In particular I enjoyed learning English, and have retained a love of the language throughout my life. I was also curious about other languages, and took the opportunity to learn some German, French and Latin. I was interested in the big world, but Kiruna is a very small place and I had a natural curiosity and eagerness to engage with the wider world.

Sometime in the early 1960s, I saw an interview on television with Bernhard Karlgren, 高本漢. He came across as a very charismatic person, and talked about his adventures in China at the time of the 1911 revolution. I was fourteen or fifteen years old at the time, and very impressed with what he had to say. I considered him a very worthy role model and, after finding one of his popular books about the Chinese language and then very much wanted to try to learn Chinese myself. I also wanted to know more about China. At that time the country was secluded, a world in itself. There were so many people in China and yet we knew so little about it. I asked myself why, and thought that by learning Chinese I could understand more about China as a civilization and a country

In 1964, I was chosen to represent Sweden in an international youth programme in New York called the New York Herald Tribune World Youth Forum. I spent more than three months in the U.S. from late December 1963 to the middle of April 1964. This was the winter in which John F Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963. All in all, there were thirty-six countries represented. There were a few Asians among us. There was, for example, an ethnic Chinese young woman who represented Malaysia and a girl from Vietnam. We had many fascinating discussions, about the world, the future and so on. I became even more convinced that learning about China and Asia would be worthwhile. In late March or early April we were received by Robert Kennedy, then the Attorney General, and I asked him one question: why does the USA not recognise red China? I was only sixteen years old and I do not think that Kennedy took me very seriously, but I noticed that answering the question seemed to be a bit awkward for him. He eventually referred to the UN Charter and said that the U.S. only extends diplomatic recognition to countries that are “peace-loving” and abide by the principles spelt out in the UN Charter. Explaining this to me, he didn’t look altogether convinced of what he was saying. Returning to Kiruna I went back to the first grade in senior high school and had two more years before graduation. The months I spent in the U.S. had been a very stimulating experience for me, but I did not learn anything about China. I graduated in 1966. At that time, we had compulsory military service in Sweden¹, and I began to be trained as an

¹ Sweden abolished universal male conscription in 2010. Before that the system was very similar to that which is still at place in Finland. However, due to severe problems in recruiting new personnel and the worsening security situation in

interpreter in Russian in the army. But I didn't like the army and left after half a year, asking to do non-military service instead. But my time in the army was still useful in that I learnt some Russian.

C: So, do you speak Russian?

L: I used to, but don't any longer. I mean, I wouldn't starve to death if I was together with people who only speak Russian, but I can't have an intellectual conversation in Russian. Anyway, since I did some Russian in the military, when I got out, I continued Russian at the University, and my B.A. – or the degree was called “filosofie magister” which should perhaps be translated as M.A. – is in Russian and Philosophy. Only after that, in 1968, I took up Chinese.

This was a little about my background. I was the first one in my family who graduated from senior high school, so I do not have an academic background in my family, but I was a good student and I became interested in intellectual questions quite early. In 1965, when I was still in high school, I heard that a dynamic man had returned to Sweden from Australia to take up the position as Professor of Chinese at Stockholm University. That was Göran Malmqvist, 馬悅然, who came back to Sweden from Australia in 1965, a year before I graduated from high school. I then more or less made up my mind to take up Chinese, which I also did after completing my basic degree in 1968.

I found it exciting to study Chinese and loved studying with Malmqvist and his wife Chen Ningsu, who came from Sichuan. At that time, Sven Lindqvist had just finished teaching. I didn't get to meet him until later. Anyway, I took up Chinese and Göran Malmqvist was very encouraging. After one and a half years of Chinese studies in Stockholm, he helped me and three fellow students to get scholarships to continue our studies in Hong Kong at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (香港中文大學), in the Yale-in-China Language School. Maybe as a Taiwanese, it may be interesting for you to know that in those days going to Taiwan to study was not really an option for me. Rather typically of students of my generation, I thought Taiwan was too conservative. In fact, I knew very little about what it was really like in Taiwan. I wanted to study in Mainland China, which I knew was not democratic but still thought was dynamic and developing in the right direction. But going to Mainland China was not possible at this time, in the middle of the Cultural Revolution, so I went to Hong Kong instead.

C: But Hong Kong was actually an interesting option, wasn't it? It's not exactly Mainland China.

L: It was very interesting

C: How was your impression of Hong Kong at the time?

L: I was quite shocked by the social injustice and the discrepancy between the rich and poor. Thousands of people were living in so-called squatter areas under awful conditions. I don't think this observation was mistaken, but my idea that conditions in Mainland China would somehow be more promising was mistaken. While in Hong Kong I was lucky to be able to visit Beijing for the first time. In August 1970, I went by train from Hong Kong to Beijing.

C: That must have been a long trip.

L: I believe it took thirty-six hours, and I was travelling in what they called the hard class (硬臥), since I wanted to see how “ordinary” Chinese travelled. It was fascinating! People were still

the Baltic region after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Sweden is currently considering to reinstate some sort of conscription. In the meantime, the previous commander of the Swedish Defence Forces has claimed that Conscription in Finland is Sweden's primary defence against the threat posed by Russia.

studying the Little Red Book with quotations from Chairman Mao (毛主席語錄). People on board the train to Beijing were studying the Little Red Book and I joined them.

C: So, were you reciting together?

L: I couldn't really recite, but I could read in my clumsy Chinese. This was a fascinating experience. I mean, in those days I still believed that the people I met really liked studying these quotations. Afterwards, I have understood that it was not so much reading the quotations that made them so cheerful as meeting me, a foreigner who tried to speak Chinese. I think they found that very interesting. I spent a week in Beijing, had been invited by a friend of a friend who was working in our embassy. Beijing was of course very different back then. Perhaps I should tell you a little story. You have been to Beijing, haven't you?

C: The new one we know today.

L: Perhaps you know the old main railway station and the old legation quarters not far from Tian'anmen Square. There was a hotel called Xinqiao hotel, where I was staying. The morning after I had arrived, I decided to go out for a walk. The streets were rather empty in the late morning. I could see two young boys on the other side of the street. I caught their attention and I could see how they started to whisper to each other. Suddenly I could hear the one of them say to the other: "Look an Albanian" (看看! 阿爾巴尼亞人!). They thought I was Albanian. Now afterwards this seems very interesting, doesn't it? I mean today I suppose nobody in China would assume an unknown European person to be Albanian, but in those days it was different. Albania was a very important ally of China, and one could read about Albania every day in the newspapers. They didn't think I was American or British or German or French, but Albanian, isn't that funny?

C: Did you see stark differences and the diversity of China when you travelled from Hong Kong to Beijing?

L: You mean between Hong Kong and the rest or within Mainland China?

C: Between and the rest.

L: Of course! Hong Kong was a highly industrialised place, lots of cars and noise everywhere. Mainland China was quiet. Everything looked so calm and serene when I looked out of the train window. I had a rather positive impression of that. I did not see the startling poverty, though I could have seen it. However, with my mind-set, my preconceived notions of Mainland China as a developing country in the process of building a more just society, I did not see it.

You know, this has taught me some lessons. We tell our students that they should read books, and of course it is good to read books. But reading books can also have some negative effects. One may pick up prejudices from them. When I came to China I thought I already knew a lot about China. I arrived with many preconceived notions derived from my reading, and so I set my observations in a pre-conceived frame, and I got many things totally wrong. It took me a long time to realise how bad the situation in China was. I spent one week in Beijing at that time, and when I returned to Hong Kong, I gave my first talk in Chinese. At that time it was still rare for people to visit Mainland China, so the university asked me to give a talk.

C: Very brave!

L: Well, I suppose in a way yes, because in those days my Chinese was very primitive. Anyway, I think managed to get my message across. I gave my audience the impression of a society moving forward towards better conditions for the great majority of people. I knew that China was poor, but people seemed happy and I thought they were on the right track. My teachers in Hong Kong, being cultured Chinese people, did not say much. They smiled and probably thought that I would gradually come to understand what it was really like. I spent fifteen months in Hong Kong and had a wonderful time in many ways.

C: And you learned traditional Chinese characters then, didn't you?

L: Yes, I did.

C: Did you learn the simplified characters here in Stockholm?

L: We started with both. I have never thought of that as a big problem. Of course, writing Chinese is difficult. I forget characters all the time. However, the differences between traditional and simplified characters are not really a big deal. If you can recognize the traditional characters it is not difficult to decipher the simplified ones. It's a little more difficult in the other direction, but I don't think it is a big deal. It surprises me that many Chinese seem to think that it is difficult. Maybe this reflects some psychological blockage?

C: How about Cantonese? Did you pick it up in Hong Kong?

L: Very little. I feel stupid that I did not pick up more. I recently spent two years in Hong Kong, but even then I did not learn much. Anyway, my year in Hong Kong back in 1970 was very rewarding. My main impression of Hong Kong was that of a very unjust society.

C: Maybe that had something to do with your Swedish ideals.

L: Yes, I am sure it did. I was a leftist, and this was at the time of the Vietnam War. In Hong Kong I even took part in a small group which disseminated an insignificant mimeographed journal called *Liberate Hong Kong!* (解放香港!) I didn't write Chinese myself back then, so I did not really contribute much to it, but I helped distribute it. The circulation was very limited and it exerted no influence whatever. But we thought we did something important.

C: Do you think you were influenced by the revolutionaries?

L: Yes, I suppose I was. But I was never a communist. I was a liberal, even a member of the Liberal Party of Sweden.

C: Right- or left-wing?

L: Left-wing liberal, certainly. Democracy has always been very important for me, but I still thought Mao and his comrades were good for China. Many of us had this idea.

C: Maybe you were also influenced by the political stance of Sweden and its government at that time. I'm just guessing.

L: Maybe to an extent this was so, but one could also say that I was part of a youth movement which influenced the government. The government was more conservative. You know, we had a social democratic party in power, and social democracy has always been very anti-communist. One could say that the social democrats are socialists in some ways, but they are extremely anti-

communist². Up until the Vietnam War, the world outside Europe and America did not figure much in the public discussion, although Africa, with its liberation movements and the abominable Apartheid system in South Africa had begun to catch the eye of some people in Sweden. In the early 1960's some young people like Sven Lindqvist (other pioneers in this regard were Jan Myrdal and Göran Palm) started to discover Asia. As a high-school student, I had a couple of cultural heroes, Swedish university professors. One of them was a political Scientist and newspaper man – Herbert Tingsten – who wrote very influential works about democracy and different political ideologies. The other one was a professor of philosophy – Ingemar Hedenius – who explained why there can be no God. These were my intellectual heroes. They do not seem to have paid much attention to the world outside of Europe and North America. Herbert Tingsten once visited Japan, and the story goes that he spent almost all his time in a hotel room writing about Japan. It was very difficult for them to take in Asia and non-European cultures. So my generation, or people a few years older, started to discover this Eurocentric worldview, Eurocentric here including also North America) and to revolt against it. They wanted to see the world as people in Asia, Africa and Latin America saw it.

In China many people know that Sweden was the first Western country to recognise the People's Republic of China. This was very much the result of the work of the then Swedish foreign minister, Östen Undén³. A scholar and a leading authority on international law, he exerted enormous influence over Sweden's foreign policy. He was perhaps a little bit anti-American and played a crucial role in defining the role of Sweden as pursuing a policy of non-alignment aiming at neutrality in the case of war. When it came to establishing diplomatic relations, his focus was on de facto control over a territory as the crucial criterion of diplomatic recognition. When the People's Republic of China was set up, its government controlled all of China, except Taiwan, and so it was natural for the Swedish government with Undén as foreign minister to recognize this new China.

There were some leftists who liked communist China, but in the eyes of the broad public it was mainly seen in a negative light up until the Cultural Revolution. That is of course also a paradox, isn't it? At the time of the Cultural Revolution, when the situation in China got worse, people in Europe, and also in North America, started to like China more.

C: Why was that?

L: Because when we read the writings of Mao Zedong, he appeared to be against the rule of experts and bureaucratism (官僚主義) and for a combination of “redness and specialization” (又紅又專). We felt that this was relevant for us, because in Sweden experts and bureaucrats seemed to have so much power that it threatened democracy.

C: But you eventually became an expert!

² *Social democrats and communist have been sworn political enemies in Europe since the time the original socialist parties split into social democratic and communist parties in the aftermath of the World War I. This can be seen especially clearly in Germany, where during the founding of the Weimar Republic the social democrats allied with centre-right parties and the Freikorps militias in order to crush communist revolts and revolutions around the country. Later in the 1920's and 30's before the Nazis rose to power, the social democrats considered the Nazis, Communists and Reactionaries (Monarchists) their three sworn enemies. After the World War II, the Western European social democratic parties were determined to stop the spread of communism and Soviet influence and considered different communist movements their worst enemies. The main reason for this is that the social democrats do not accept the communist doctrine of using violent revolutions to achieve a dictatorship of the proletariat. Instead, the social democrats favour working within the frameworks of democracy to advance step-by-step towards socialism or, nowadays, towards social democracy.*

³ *Undén (25.8.1886 – 14.1.1974) was a Swedish lawyer and a social democratic politician. He served as the minister of justice in 1920 and as the foreign minister from 1924 to 1926 and again from 1942 to 1962. He was an MP in the Swedish parliament, the Riksdag, from 1934 to 1965.*

L: I thought that the issues that Mao Zedong seemed to address were relevant issues to us and probably very good for China. He talked about “diminishing the three big differences” (縮小三大差別), that is diminishing the differences between the cities and the countryside, between physical labour and intellectual labour and between men and women. That was very good and I still think that these ideas are good. What I did not understand was that Mao’s words often bore little resemblance to reality. I think that many people in Europe were attracted to the Cultural Revolution because they thought that the Maoist propaganda identified issues that were relevant for Europe also. In retrospect you may think that we were easily misled.

C: But you were not there to see the reality.

L: True. After a year in Hong Kong, I returned to Sweden in 1971. I supported myself financially by teaching Chinese and things about China in evening courses. At the same time, I continued studying Sinology with professor Malmqvist.

C: Were those your PhD studies?

L: Well, I registered for the PhD programme in the winter 1971-72, but then, suddenly and unexpectedly, in 1973 I was offered the job as cultural attaché at the Swedish embassy in Beijing. At that time, I had already started work on a PhD dissertation, which I never finished, dealing with historiography, the periodization of China’s ancient history (中國古代歷史分期問題). As I just said, I never completed this study, because I went to Beijing as a diplomat. When my term in Beijing came to an end, professor Malmqvist approached me and told me that he had received funding for research on modern Chinese literature, and he asked me if I wanted to join the research project and write a PhD thesis within this project. For me this was an attractive offer, which I accepted without hesitation, but unfortunately this meant that I never finished my first Ph.D. project.

C: Okay, so you actually wrote about modern Chinese literature.

L: Yes, I did.

C: On what literature, to be precise?

L: I decided to write about literary discussions. In 1927-28, there was as you know a debate in China about “proletarian literature” (普羅文學). This debate became the topic of my dissertation. Anyway, I spent three years in Beijing and those three years became very important for my intellectual development.

C: Why was that?

L: Because I had a chance to observe Chinese society rather closely. I discovered that much of Mao Zedong’s propaganda was just propaganda and that people in China suffered from oppression. At that time there was this campaign to “Criticise Lin Biao and Confucius” (批林批孔運動). It was really about politics, about criticising Lin Biao but also indirectly criticizing premier Zhou Enlai. There was campaigns to study “the struggle between Confucians and Legalists” (儒法鬥爭), to “strike back against the rightist wind to reverse the verdicts [on the Cultural Revolution] (反擊右傾翻案風), a campaign against Deng Xiaoping, and a campaign to “appraise the classical novel *Water Margin* 評水滸. This novel was based on the story of Song Jiang 宋江, who Mao felt that was a “capitulationist” (投降派), because he accepted amnesty at the end of the novel.

C: You were in China during a very difficult period.

L: That is true, but for me it was an interesting period, because I could learn a lot. I had just reached a stage where I was able to read Chinese, even though very slowly. Had I had the knowledge of Chinese and China which I have today, I would probably not have been able to read those things available to us at the time, because I would have found them too tedious. But at that time, they were still interesting for me to read.

C: From the perspective of a scholar, or were you really feeling sympathetic towards the campaign?

L: I discovered very early that it was not a scholarly campaign and I was not sympathetic towards it, but it was interesting to try to understand it. At that time I began to understand that Maoism was a closed ideology. During those years, perhaps in 1974, possibly in 1975, the Chinese started to publish a journal called *Dialectics of Nature* (自然辯證法). That was originally the title of a book by Friedrich Engels. The reason why I followed that journal was that during those times, as a foreigner, there were very few newspapers and journals in Chinese available for me to read. There were two newspapers, *The People's Daily* and the *Guangming Daily*, and there was the Red Flag journal and two journals about archaeology, *Kaogu* 考古 and *Wenwu* 文物. Then they started to publish the journal *Dialectics of Nature* and two journals in Shanghai, *Study and Criticism* (學習與批判) and *Morning Glow* (朝霞). Anyway, I read them all. Beginning with the first issue of *Dialectics of Nature* there was a series of articles concerning modern physics. At the end of the series Einstein's contributions to physics were evaluated. That evaluation ran somehow like this: "Einstein was a very talented physicist. Considering this fact, it is all the more surprising that he could not understand some basic things. For instance, he believed that the universe is finite, but of course, the universe is infinite. If only Einstein had studied the brilliant work of Friedrich Engels *Dialectics of Nature*, he would have understood this." This, I think, tells us a lot about Maoism as an ideology. Maoism was described as if it contained all the important truths about everything. What remained was for scholars to extrapolate what was already implicit in Maoism. There was not room for creative thinking.

C: It was an authority.

L: Yes, and it provided a framework for everything. One was not allowed to operate outside of it. A few years after the death of Mao, a Chinese scholar published a book with a title, which tells us a lot about this period. The title was *Right to be Absent* (缺席的權利), which addressed the right to be silent. In Mao's time it was not considered enough to keep your mouth shut, you had to express your support for Mao and his rule, for example, say that the latest editorial in the People's Daily was a wonderful piece of writing. Otherwise you would be considered a class enemy. You would not only be criticised for saying the wrong things, but even for keeping silent. After the death of Mao people got the right to keep silent, and this was a very important step forward, a great improvement.

C: So that's why you were working a lot on intellectual history. It was because of your background.

L: Yes, but I suppose it was also because of my personality. Even before that, I was very interested in ideas.

C: During your academic career, you have done a lot of work on intellectual history.

L: Well, I have not done as much as I would have liked to, but what I have done has dealt with that, so yes, maybe. I have done some research on Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724-1777), on Confucius and Mencius, on Hu Shi 胡適 and Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀.

C: And what else? I have the impression that you have also worked on more contemporary stuff.

L: Yes, but also from the point of view of intellectual analysis. For example, I wrote a book in Swedish entitled *From Mao to Mammon*⁴. The title captures what I write about in that book: how the ideology in Mao Zedong's time was everything and then how after Mao becoming rich became glorious. How everything was turned upside down, really.

C: What do you think about those transitions in the ways the Chinese think? What did they value throughout those years? I mean from Mao to Deng and even further. Did the values really change?

L: Yes, I think they changed. My thinking about this is quite conventional. In order to understand all this, one has to go back to the Opium Wars. In the wake of the Opium Wars and the burning of the Summer Palace etc. the Chinese elite felt that China as such was threatened. So they needed to find a recipe to rescue China. The main thing was to find out how to make China rich and powerful again. Mao Zedong tried one way but it did not work so well. It worked in some ways, because at the end of his life, China became again respected in the world. Different countries broke their diplomatic relations with the ROC and established them with the PRC. So in some ways Mao succeeded, but we cannot say that he succeeded in making China rich and powerful again. Deng Xiaoping tried another way and he succeeded. His policies of "reform and opening up" 改革開放 have made China rich and powerful. Most people in China are still poor, but the state is rich. Deng succeeded in realising the basic goals that had been defined during the late Qing dynasty and the May Fourth New Culture Movement. I belong to those who believe that bringing about a renaissance of China was really more important for the communists than achieving social revolution. Social revolution was a means of achieving a rich and powerful China. This was so for Deng Xiaoping, and Xi Jinping also stands for this. He explicitly defines his "Chinese Dream" 中國夢 against this background. Now we also have increasing Chinese nationalism emerging as a result.

C: Talking about nationalism, did you also study that? You know, how the Chinese view themselves in the intellectual histories. What are your own observations?

L: Well, my own observation is that the Chinese empire was a very special construct. China has been a very special country. One characteristic feature of it was that the empire could not recognise other countries as equals. The Son of Heaven had a Heavenly Mandate to rule "all under Heaven". Of course, there were other countries, but they were considered inferior. The foreign relations of the empire were administered by an office called the Office of Administering the Barbarians. In the 19th century this had to change, and in 1861, if I remember correctly, a foreign office was established. Around that time China decided that it had to become part of the international system with embassies and ambassadors and so on. So only around the end of the Qing dynasty did the Chinese start to think of their country as a national entity, one of many in principle equal countries. One can say that only then did China enter the family of nations. In the early twentieth century Chinese intellectuals discussed how to define China. Should one do it on cultural terms or in territorial terms or how? It was very complicated with people like Liang Qichao 梁啟超 and Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 formulating different alternatives. Today we can see in Europe and North America that the nation-state has become much less important, but in China, it is more important than ever.

C: I'm sorry about this sudden jump to another subject, but I would like to ask about the quality of students of China studies overtime. How have the students changed since you started as a professor?

⁴ *Mammon* means great wealth. The word comes to English from the Postclassical Latin word *mammona*. The Latin word has also entered Finnish as *mammona*, probably through the Bible like its English counterpart, and carries an identical meaning, but is much more commonly used.

L: I think on the whole we have attracted very good students and I think, especially if we look at the teaching of Chinese language, much progress has been made. Until a few decades ago, studies of the Chinese language in Europe focused mainly on Classical Chinese and people did not learn to speak Chinese. The knowledge of the contemporary Chinese language was limited even among many sinologists because they concentrated on classical studies. My professor, Göran Malmqvist, who speaks fluent Chinese, is an exception in his generation. Modern Chinese language and literature were often not considered worth doing research about. Today students acquire a better grasp of the modern Chinese language than earlier generations. I also think that Chinese attracts many talented students. Yet, if one compares the teaching of Chinese with the teaching of English, French, German or Spanish, I am afraid it is still lagging behind in pedagogical terms. But progress is being made.

C: Do you think the teachers of Chinese are more old-fashioned?

L: Perhaps they are, and I think this has to do with the tradition of teaching Chinese. Take, for example, something like pronunciation and intonation. We have been so focused on the four tones of Mandarin that other aspects of pronunciation have been ignored. Even textbooks don't give much information about, say, intonation and stress. So even the teaching of the pronunciation of Chinese cannot be compared with the teaching of, for example, English and French pronunciation. I have heard that there are some excellent new teaching methods in Taiwan, and the teaching of Chinese is also improving in Mainland China. However, too often teachers of Chinese are highly qualified teachers but with too little training in teaching a foreign language.

C: Was your professorship on Chinese studies or what?

L: My professorship is called "professor of Chinese language and culture".

C: And you are at the University of Stockholm.

L: Yes.

C: Have you ever worked at other universities?

L: Not much. I have been a visiting professor here and there, most recently at Beijing Normal University (北京師範大學). I have also been in Hong Kong and Paris for some time and of course I'm rather familiar with the situation in the Nordic countries. In terms of learning Modern Chinese, we have improved a lot.

C: Has there been an increase in the number of students too?

L: Oh, there's been a very dramatic increase in the number of students.

C: How dramatic?

L: Well, let me say that when I started, at the most fifty people applied to start that semester and we thought that was quite a lot; it was at the time of the Cultural Revolution when people were interested in China. Nowadays there are maybe five or six hundred who apply every year who apply to study here in Stockholm.

C: Really?

L: However, the universities are conservative and slow to adapt to the new demand, so we cannot receive that many students. Many students who now apply cannot be accepted, I think.

C: So, in the end, how many do they roughly accept?

L: I have been away for some time, but I think they accept about a hundred students.

C: Okay. So, once they enter the programme, some of them would probably drop out.

L: Yes, the drop-out rates are high.

C: Yes, this is common.

L: I am quite critical of the way our universities deal with the task of teaching Chinese. We should have more teaching hours, smaller groups, and our students should as teachers have both native Chinese speakers and native Swedish speakers. As a language for beginners, the focus must be on acquiring practical knowledge of Chinese rather than on scholarly analysis of the language. At the same time it is stimulating for the students have a chance to attend scholarly courses on Chinese culture.

C: I think this is a problem everywhere. So the key thing for the students should really be to learn to use the language.

L: Yes, to know the language and be exposed to the language, to learn the contemporary language, to really get a grasp of it. Of course, we should let our students know something about scholarly studies of Chinese. In Stockholm we have the wonderful legacy of historical linguistics going back to Bernhard Karlgren, and I think our students should learn something about this, but it cannot be the main thing. By the way, I should give you a copy of my textbook. In 2013 I published a textbook for beginners together with my colleague Dr Wan Xinzheng. Unfortunately it has not been used much, which is a disappointment.

C: Oh, why is that?

L: Well maybe it was not so good as I and Dr Wan thought. Also it was especially designed for our Confucius Institute, which was closed down in 2014.

C: Yes, I have heard that the Stockholm Confucius Institute was closed down. Can you tell me something about why it was closed down? Your institute was one of the first institutes to be set up, wasn't it?

L: Yes, it was set up as early as in 2005, and the decision to establish it was taken already in 2004. Our institute was the first one in Europe, and number two in the world, after the institute in Seoul. Actually our institute was the first one to begin to operate in the whole world, even before the one in Seoul. Our collaborative partner was Fudan University, with which we had excellent collaboration. From the beginning they sent us very good teachers of Chinese and our cooperation was smooth and stimulating.

C: Why so early in Sweden?

L: I am not sure. Maybe Hanban 漢辦, the agency in Beijing responsible for the Confucius Institutes, thought that Stockholm was an important place. Another reason may have had to do with the fact that relations between the sinologists in Stockholm and the Chinese authorities had been quite strained ever since the June 4 massacre and decision-making people in Beijing thought that these relations needed to be improved. I, my teacher Professor Malmqvist and many other China scholars criticized what we thought of as oppression and lack of respect for human rights in China. We were anxious to maintain and develop good relations with Chinese colleagues and writers, and

especially Professor Malmqvist was very successful in inviting a number of promising writers to come to Sweden. But our relationship with the Chinese government was strained. In the year 2000 I was informed by the Chinese embassy in Stockholm that they would probably not be able to grant me a visa, if I applied. That was largely because I had invited Mr Lien Chan, then Vice President of the Government in Taipei, to visit Sweden to take part in a scholarly conference. The same year Gao Xingjian received the Nobel Prize in literature, which angered the Chinese authorities, who knew that Professor Malmqvist as a member of the Swedish Academy was deeply involved in this prize. I also published a very positive article about Mr Gao and his works and gave many talks about him. One could say that our relationship with official China became deep frozen. In the early years of the 21st century it seems that the Chinese authorities felt that this situation was unfortunate. So the embassy contacted me and suggested that we should try improve our relations and promote mutual exchange based on the principle “to focus on what unites us and put our differences aside” (求同存異). This started a process of fruitful cooperation. The Chinese made clear that they respected our right to be critical of China and felt that more contacts and cooperation would still be good both for China and Sweden. I very much agreed, and so mutual trust between us grew. Soon the Chinese Ambassador and his educational counsellor suggested that a Confucius Center should be set up in Stockholm. This, in brief, is the background of the establishment of the Stockholm Confucius Institute. Throughout its lifespan of ten years I think our institute did a great job, especially in offering courses in Chinese with excellent teachers, Chinese teachers from Fudan University in Shanghai and Swedish teachers from Stockholm and Uppsala. For me it is an important principle that at least at the beginners’ level our students should meet both Chinese and Swedish teachers. The Confucius Institute also arranged seminars and conferences, invited first-rate scholars and writers to visit Sweden.

C: But why did the institute then close down?

L: Well for me this was very sad and unfortunate. The background was largely ideological and had to do with a deeply rooted mistrust among Swedes in the Chinese government. From the beginning there were vocal critics among media people and also scholars and intellectuals in Sweden, who argued that it was wrong to let the Chinese government in the form of a Confucius Institute enter into a Swedish university. Inevitably the Chinese side would use this, our critics said, as a platform for propaganda. My view was that the institute was indeed a risk project and that Stockholm University must be alert and never give in to political pressure from China. For me it was most encouraging to see that the Chinese actually did not try to use the institute as a platform for political propaganda. For example, we were encouraged to try to develop Swedish teaching material that would be suited for Swedish students. One thing that I do believe the Chinese authorities wanted to achieve with the institute was that it would promote China’s goodwill in Sweden. This I did not mind. I often find reason to criticize the Chinese government, but when I find that it does something that I think is good, I am happy to express my appreciation. Anyway, many people in Sweden were still suspicious, which one can also understand. But as a Swede I am sorry that so few if any of our critics took the trouble to really check carefully what we were doing. Many of them seemed to think that they knew that we were spreading Chinese propaganda without really checking the facts. They were mistaken, but their criticism was probably one of the main causes behind the closing down of the institute. No matter how the leaders of Stockholm University looked upon the institute – and I think in general they realized that the work we did was scholarly solid and valuable – the constant criticism began to have a negative impact on the image of the university. Moreover, when I stepped down after ten years as director, it would not have been so easy to find a suitable successor. It is

unfortunate that the institute was closed down. This was not good for academic contacts between China and Sweden. Yet, we should not exaggerate the negative impact. Contacts, exchange and cooperation in the fields of education and research will develop and expand, with or without a Confucius Institute.

C: I would like to ask you about the relationship between the Swedish and the Chinese governments. What are your observations?

L: It has been a long relationship because we have had diplomatic relations since 1950. Since 1989, many European countries have had a fairly strained relationship with China, and Sweden may have said more about the lack of respect for human rights in China than perhaps any other West European country. Some of the Eastern European countries like the Czech Republic have also been very critical of the human rights situation in China, but if one looks at Western Europe, Sweden has probably had the highest profile with regard human rights.

C: Since we are going into politics, maybe the next question should be about your views on the future of China and also the future of the relationship between Sweden and China.

L: My basic point is that it's not possible to predict what will happen, but I can say that I'm worried. I'm worried about the future of China and I'm also worried about the future of the relationship between China and the West. Since the death of Mao great improvements have taken place in China. Up until a few years ago, a major trend in Chinese politics was towards increasing openness. Two important aspects of the policy of reform and opening up were (1) the beginning of a separation between the Party and the Government and (2) the beginning of a development in the direction of greater relative independence for the Judiciary. Unfortunately, there are now signs that these trends have been interrupted or even reversed. I hope I am wrong but there are some bad signs: human rights lawyers getting arrested, tightened ideological control by the party over the Government apparatus, the universities etc.

The Chinese economy has developed in a remarkable way. However, the level of development has now reached a stage where a lot of reforms are necessary. It is no longer possible to continue to develop relying entirely on exports. One has to have greater consumption in China. This means that the Chinese economy has to be restructured. Also, innovation and creativity have to play a greater role in the future. This is all difficult. How can this be done under the present system? I worry that China may now be going in the wrong direction, and I worry about the relationship between China and the West because of these developments but also because many people in the West are becoming too hostile towards China, which leads to increasing polarization and tensions. Again, we can take the Confucius Institute as an example. We should be critical of China but it is also very important to communicate with China, and it would definitely be wrong to try to isolate China. China's opening-up is important for the whole world. Interdependence is a key to a peaceful future. I am a great admirer of president Barack Obama and I also believe Hillary Clinton would pursue a reasonable foreign policy. However, the idea that one a republicans such as Mr Trump or Mr Cruz would become the president really terrifies me.

Taiwan and Japan are also important issues when considering the future of China. The lingering widespread hostile attitudes towards Japan among the Chinese population worry me. I realize that Japan did atrocious things to China during the occupation more than seventy years ago. But since World War II Japan has been the most democratic country in the Far East, and today Japan is a very civilized society. When I visited the memorial museum in Hiroshima I was very impressed to find a text about the Nanjing massacre reminding the visitors that not only the Americans but also the Japanese had caused much human suffering. I hope that more and more people in China will pay attention not only to the atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese military

during World War II but also to these positive aspects of Japan. There are some promising signs. At least since the rule of Hu Jintao, and perhaps since Jian Zemin, relations with Japan, although pursuing a zigzag course, have improved. Increasing numbers of Chinese people, not least young people, visit Japan and often come back with favourable impressions, and many Japanese go to China. This promotes mutual understanding and is good for peace. The risk of war between Japan and China has decreased, but as we know there are still difficult questions to resolve – the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, Japanese apologies for war crimes etc. – which can flare up and threaten peace.

With regard to Taiwan, I am much more optimistic than I was twenty years ago. Exchange – trade, tourism, culture and research – has increased tremendously and this promotes mutual understanding. Taiwan is in many ways admired by people in Mainland China, and I believe the leaders in Beijing realize this and understand that reunification by means of force would have disastrous effects. I would like to see increasing contacts between the outside world and Taiwan, and I think this is possible without repudiating the notion that there is only one China, a notion that should remain open to different interpretations. The democratic breakthrough that has taken place in Taiwan in the period after Chiang Kai-shek is important for Taiwan, for “cultural China” and for the world.

C: I would like to ask about your self-perceived contribution to China studies.

L: I think my main contribution in Sweden has been to draw more students to the importance of the history of Chinese thought. My contributions are very minor.

C: Were you ever involved in policy?

L: No, not really.

C: As a scholar, they did not consult you on China?

L: I have had and have friends in the foreign ministry, and we have often discussed China and Sino-Swedish relations. But I have never really been approached for specific advice. In 1994 I took part in a Swedish human rights delegation to China. We visited Beijing and Lhasa and we wrote a report. The delegation was sent by Sweden officially, but it was still an independent group, we did not represent the Swedish government in our discussions with the Chinese.

C: I hope this is the last question. It’s about the evaluation of China pedagogics in Europe and in the Nordic countries.

L: Do you mean western or Chinese teachers?

C: Let’s talk about both, because we want to improve.

L: I think that in terms of teaching the Chinese language we still have a lot to learn. We have to have more specialised language teachers. As a teacher of Chinese I would have liked to know more about pedagogical research. I also think it is important not to separate language teaching from the teaching of Chinese culture, since our students are often very interested in Chinese culture. I think one should bring in studies of Chinese culture as soon as possible and also use language classes to transmit knowledge of Chinese culture.

C: So, one should do it simultaneously.

L: Yes, I think one should. I know there are people who think that language teaching should only be about the Chinese language. But I think it is often very stimulating for the students to bring in

culture, which makes it also pedagogically sound to do so. For example, finishing a language class with introducing a Tang or Song poem can be a very good idea.

C: Are the teachers of Chinese nowadays Chinese or Swedish?

L: The tendency is for a greater proportion of the teachers to be Chinese, but still most teachers are Swedish. I think that the combination is crucial. Ideally students should be exposed to both. When I started doing Chinese, we had one class a week with a Chinese teacher and the rest was with Swedish teachers. I think that perhaps the situation today should be the opposite, so that the native speakers carry the main burden but with one or two classes with Swedish teachers too.

C: Should the Chinese teachers be those who teach the most basic courses, or what do you think?

L: Both, I think. I don't distinguish between the two categories of teachers in terms of levels. Even at advanced levels, Chinese teachers will often be more competent than their Swedish colleagues to teach good written and spoken Chinese. But Swedish teachers also have a lot to contribute, for example in teaching grammar and vocabulary. A Swedish teacher is often more competent than his or her Chinese colleague when it comes to comparing the two languages, and a contrastive perspective can add a lot to the teaching of Chinese to our students.

C: Apart from Stockholm, which other universities are also teaching Chinese?

L: We have full programmes in Lund and Uppsala, and Chinese studies in Gothenburg (Göteborg) and Uppsala are quite dynamic, and so I expect that these universities will soon also have full programmes. In Luleå in the North, there is a Confucius Institute, the only remaining Confucius Institute in Sweden. The University-College of Dalarna has a great number of students studying Chinese and their work shows seems very promising.

C: Do they focus on language, culture or politics?

L: In Sweden we have all kinds of studies. I mean, there is a tendency that one finds an increasing number of scholars in disciplines like political science or economics who are specialising on China. However, this has been too slow. I am now sixty-eight and I am very disappointed that we don't have more positions for scholars in many different disciplines dealing with China. Even today there is not one professorship at any Swedish university devoted to Chinese or Asian history!

C: Is it because nobody considers it necessary to have one or because there's no money?

L: I think it is an unfortunate effect of a rather decentralized decision-making structure. Nowadays a Swedish university receives the greater part of its government funding as a lump sum of money that it can use as it wishes. Within the university, the money is then divided between the different faculties, and each faculty decides how to use its money. This decision-making structure often makes it difficult to introduce new subjects or fields. I would think that many scholars in different disciplines are of the opinion that there should be a chair in, say, Chinese or East Asian history, but when it comes to deciding how the money should be used in their faculties, they would still prioritize, most of the time, their own subjects. Be that as it may, there is definitely a great need for positions specializing in Chinese art, history, literature, philosophy etc. When I began to study Chinese in 1968, I thought that such positions would soon be established. It is very disappointing that this has still not happened.

C: How about SIPRI? I think it is more like a think-tank. They have more people doing China-related studies.

L: Yes, we actually have more one institution serving as a kind of think-tank dealing with China. There is SIPRI, but also the Institute of International Affairs and the Institute for Security & Development Policy (ISDP). By the way, ISDP will soon establish a China centre.

C: So, it's a think-tank.

L: Yes, I think it is both a research institution and a think-tank..

C: I noticed that in Sweden you have more think-tanks than in other Nordic countries and their interests are related to issues related to foreign policy. Why is that?

L: Sweden has for a long time been very active in the field of foreign policy. Sweden speaks with a much louder voice on international issues than, say, Finland.

C: So, that is part of the Swedish mentality? You think that you have the capacity to speak out?

L: Perhaps it has something to do with our history. Sweden was once a major power⁵. Most Swedes today have a very negative view of the period when Sweden was a major power, because we were then involved in wars that caused much hardship and suffering. But it is still possible that one reason why so many people today feel that Sweden has an important role to play as a moral voice in world affairs is that Sweden was one a major power.

⁵ *From the 1630's up until to 1721, Sweden was a major European country which dominated the Baltic sea and ruled modern-day Sweden, Finland, Ladoga Karelia, Ingria, Estonia, Latvia, large parts of the German Baltic and North Sea coast and had colonies in North America. Sweden took parts in major European conflicts (the Swedish army had a nearly invincible reputation from the Thirty Years' War until the Battle of Poltava in 1709) and in the 18th century Sweden even had its own East India Company which had a trade office in Canton.*