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Interview conducted by Dusica Ristivojevic

Transcribed by Dusica Ristivojevic

**DR:** Thank you very much for accepting the invitation for this interview. Let's start with your family background - can you tell us a little bit more about it?

**MH:** I was born in 1953, in the same little fishing hamlet where I live now, which is now more of a suburb to Copenhagen. My parents had a hotel-pension, and my father was originally from Siam, now Thailand. He was adopted by a Danish couple. He grew up in Denmark from when he was six, in boarding schools. He became a member of the Danish resistance movement during the German occupation. He and my mother married in 1949. My mother was a very Nordic Danish woman, blonde with blue eyes from a rural town called Slagelse, and her parents were wealthy - although her father was originally from a very poor family where the father died when my maternal grandfather was a boy. He took care of the family and became quite well off. He was trading in cattle and meat. So, my mother grew up in a small town in the countryside, and my father grew up in various boarding schools outside Copenhagen after having spent his first five or six years with his mother in Siam, in Bangkok. They were very much a mixed couple. Originally, we thought he was Siamese (Thai). It was only... maybe some 10 years ago we realised that my father's real father was Chinese, we had thought he was Thai, that's what he had learnt and that's what we had learnt. But it turned out that his father was a Chinese man whom we don't know anything about. My father was born in 1919. Anyway, my parents got together, they had three kids. Sadly, my sister died recently, so now, we're only two, my younger brother and myself.

I have taken an interest in China since I was maybe nineteen, in the 1970s. I spent most of my time focusing on China one way or the other... First, while studying anthropology at the University of Copenhagen. While still at university, I went out to China as an exchange student, and there, obviously, my interest increased from being mostly theoretical to a different kind of fascination. I was impressed and moved by all the big achievements ... Like the Great Wall, the Long March, all these, whether good or bad, all these amazing projects China takes on.

That's how I got interested originally. And then, the more you get to know about China, the more you realise that there is to know - so it's just like a road opening and opening and opening ahead of you, always. And it's been more than 40 years for me.

It was in China I got engaged in human rights. I realised how lucky I have been to grow up in Denmark with all the protection of my rights and so many possibilities to choose from, my line of study, my spouse, work, my life. When I got to China and I realised what little space they had, the individual has, that's how I understood the importance of human rights. Obviously, I do understand that the individual has to fit in, that society comes before the individual in China, the Confucian way, as opposed to the Christian view where the individual is in the centre. Both models are, of course, extremely important ... Initially I wondered, why does it have to be very tough to be of a slightly different opinion in China? Why don't they let you have much of a differing opinion? So anyway, that's how I got involved. I don't know that I had thought I'd spent most of my life focusing on China, neither did I know that it would become my occupation as such. This has been the centre of whatever I've done ever since.

I don't know whether it has anything to do with my father being Asian, he had a number of strokes and heart attacks. He died in 1991, and I had got an assignment as a correspondent for a major Danish newspaper, as their correspondent in China and Hong Kong. I moved out there in March 1991. My father died in February 91. Some years before that, he had had stroke and become aphasic, which means that you hear, you understand, you know what you want to say, but basically the wrong words come out of your mouth, so he couldn't really speak anymore. It was highly frustrating for him. He wasn't really making sense, but we knew each other well, so I knew what he was saying. Anyway, he saw my moving to Hong Kong and to Beijing as a way of returning home. He felt the same when I went out to China as an exchange in 1981, that was his

view, and I thought, what nonsense. But perhaps he was right? At the time, I didn't feel I was returning to my roots or origins. And at that time, we didn't know that he was half Chinese, he himself never got to know that he was half Chinese, he thought he was Thai. So, there is this idea in my family that I was finishing something or continuing something. It took many years for me to agree or to even consider that an option. But I suppose it could very well be the case. And I actually live only some five hundred or eight hundred meters from where I was born, now, and I've been away, obviously I've been in China for years, and I've been all over the place, and lived and also in the city, but for the last 20 years, I've lived in the place where I was born. So, it seems after all that I am someone who returns....

Also, in the 70s, maybe as early as late 60s, there was a lot of the Maoist people... they came out to study in China, and the friendship organisations were everywhere... I was never a member of any of them, but my Danish grandmother was the member of the friendship China-Denmark organisation. And they would go on these organised trips, where they would be taken to model towns and villages, and model factories...

**DR:** Your grandmother went to China?

**MH:** Oh, yes! She started studying Chinese at the age of 72! She was a wonderful woman. She was my father's adopted Danish mother, and she was not very old compared to him. She was only about 19, when they adopted him, and he was five or six. After some 15 years with my Danish adopted grandfather in Siam/Thailand, the couple returned to Denmark in 1939. They lived a very normal, maybe not so incredibly exciting life. But then, just about the day my grandfather died, or very soon after that, she started studying Chinese and started traveling to China. She used to be a communist. I don't know that she was a party member, but she was a communist by conviction. But then, after the Soviet invasion of Hungary, a new left wing political party was created in Denmark by communists who got upset with the Soviet Union and the invasion of Hungary. She became a member I think, or at least she started voting for them. She'd always been interested in China. She was incredibly proud of my going to China, covering China, my knowledge of China and writing about it. And one of the greatest disappointments in her life - because she was a great admirer of Deng

Xiaoping and happened to have the same birthday - was the massacre in Beijing in 1989. That was like the second time she had been hugely disappointed in a system, a model that she really, truly believed in. And she had thought that, OK, but Deng is not going to do anything like they did in the Soviet Union. And then, in her perception, that's what they did. And she was deeply disappointed. She died soon after, in the early 1990s. So, come to think of it, which I didn't mention initially, she too felt that I was on a mission of sorts for the family. And this is the first time I think of that in relation to her.

**DR:** So, throughout your life, what would be your feeling about the influence of your family on your life and career as China expert?

**MH:** My parents, they didn't always quite understand what I was doing, but they were always totally supportive. I covered the uprising in Beijing in 1989 for the National Danish TV, so I was on TV news every day for two months or so, and they were very proud of me. They were always very supportive and very proud of me. As it worked out, my siblings and I never had what you might call normal jobs, where you go to work at nine and return at five. We've mostly done our own thing, been independent or self-employed. My sister did textiles, and she founded a cooking school, she became the most prominent Thai chef in Denmark, which was obviously also from our background. And my brother became a consultant and founded a company. All of us have gone our own way. So, yes, our parents have been very supportive and very proud, even if they haven't always quite fully understood what I was doing. But when I was an exchange student in China, I think they thought "she probably knows what she's doing, and we must support it" but they did think I was quite far away. And at that time we didn't communicate a lot. Christmas Eve I called them, and I think I waited for six hours in the post office for the connection. We didn't communicate other than by mail, physical snail mail. And the Chinese, of course, took and censored all my letters going out and coming in, so sometimes I didn't hear anything for up to six or eight weeks, almost two months. That was a long time. And I had to keep convincing myself that of course, they'd written and of course the Chinese had taken my correspondence. And, at one point, I got a letter from home with a Japanese page. So, we all knew that our correspondence was being censored. This was just a fact of life in China. Every time I got really upset about something that I felt violated my rights in China, it always reminded me that being Chinese, and being born there, and having to stay there, and having no option to leave,

being Chinese meant that they had no choice. I always had a choice. When I was there on my own, because I wanted to, and because I had chosen to do that, and anytime I wanted to go back, I've been able to do that. So, the worst I've been risking while working in China is to be beaten up or deported. Much worse for the Chinese, if they didn't – or don't - act in accordance with whatever prevailing wind. So, there's a big difference between being there of your own choice, to be able to choose, and to be able to leave any time, and being born there, it being your country and your life.

**DR:** And what about your husband? It is a little bit problematic to always ask a woman about her husband [laughing], I don't like it [laughing] but I know that in your case he has a role in your work, and I think that it is good to reflect on this...

**MH:** He is a feminist, always has been, but he just happens to have been a government minister, speaker of parliament as well as president of the UN General Assembly. He's been in government and politics for most of his life – and thus is considered a VIP in China.

**DR:** [laughing]...So, can you say something about what do you feel that it was his role in your access, or sometimes probably the lack of access to certain segments of China and life in China?

**MH:** My husband and I got married late. We met in China. In 1993, he was a minister for finance, he was on official visit to China and I was covering it for the newspaper that I worked for at the time. We have a lot of interests in common, China being one of them, but foreign affairs, the world. He knows a lot more about Denmark than I do. We became good friends over the years and met a lot privately and so on. Even if I lived and worked abroad, I would go by the ministry for a glass of wine or something when I was in Denmark, every so often. So, we kept in touch. And then, after about 10 years, both of us were divorced and then... Whatever [both laughing] ...He joined the kayak club where I kayak, we got involved, and then we married. So, with regard to China, I have always been on the ground, he's always been a high-ranking political figure. We've written several books together, the first one being on China. And all the books we've written together have been interesting in the way that because I know all these countries from the grass root level, I've been in the smallest villages and spoken to all kinds of people and taking public transport and whatever, and even in the tiniest little

restaurants and holes in the ground, I've visited war veterans, poor people and thus have a much clearer idea of daily life. My husband, on the other hand, has always had high level negotiations and meetings. So, between us, we have considerable experience and knowledge; and every day, breakfast, lunch and dinner, we talk mostly about international affairs. It's just part of our ongoing conversation ... that's our life. So, once we got married, the Chinese realised they could no longer deny me access or detain me. After my marrying a VIP, they no longer feel comfortable with threatening or bullying me. It is difficult for them to deny me entry, or at least they have to refuse both of us, which they have done on occasion, but seem to perceive as embarrassing. What they can do, because according to their protocol he's very...VVIP, and they treat us accordingly, which means we get picked up in the airport in a chauffeur driven Mercedes with the tinted windows, and get taken to big hotels, often placed somewhere far from the city. No public transport or taxis, so that we can't really move about on our own. And that's part of the very hospitable side of China, they are generous hosts. And it's also part, of course, of their control. If they place us in some 20 kilometres outside Shanghai, in a fantastic resort, we can't go anywhere. And that's just the way it is.

**DR:** Do you have any opinion, do you have any feeling that your relationship, the fact that you husband is considered a VIP in China, influenced your approach to China?

**MH:** Well, I was quite aware that things would change. We travelled there together also before we got married in 2005, and at that time my husband made lectures at the Communist Party's International Department on environmental issues. So, I knew that we would be afforded a different kind of reception than when I was on my own, where they could both more easy going, but where it was more difficult for them to keep track of me. And I could meet people that I will not expose to meeting us as a prominent couple. So, it's granted more access in some ways, but also restricted movement and possibilities considerably in other ways. I knew that in advance.

**DR:** Have you ever noticed that you had to censor yourself because you knew that your partner would have difficulties in his own career or life?

**MH:** No, not with regard to China, possibly with regard to Danish domestic politics, but not with regard to my work at all, ever. Before, I was married to a photographer, and we were detained in China 1991, and they separated us. And, you know how Chinese walls

are very thin, so he was on the other side of the wall, and they were shouting at him in Chinese, and he spoke absolutely no Chinese, and he was coughing all the time. And that's probably the worst thing I've ever experienced, because I could hear him clearly, and it was not going well. And he didn't know what they were saying. That, of course, meant that I was basically willing to say almost anything in order to protect him. It was very unpleasant. We got out, both of us, and in one piece, and much the wiser. The people I've protected ... I think, like I said before, the worst that could happen to me would be that I'd be beaten up and deported; maybe I'd be roughed up a bit, but they wouldn't kill me, they wouldn't keep me for twenty five years. That was what I've always believed. But I have done a lot, gone out of my way, of course, to protect Chinese. Covering their identity or not even writing their story, if it was so specific that they would get in trouble. I've not really restricted myself, or I have changed the identity, the name, the gender, whatever, to write my stories, but I have never, ever put any Chinese's life, or freedom, or anything at risk. Because I would rather keep a story untold than do that. So that's another way... That wasn't your question, but yes, I have restricted myself, not because of my own relationship, my private life, but to protect my sources.

**DR:** It's interrelated...What I wanted to know more is about this awareness that there is someone else with us in the whole writing situation, and how do we deal with this? What we know and what we can show that we know? And how do we make these choices? So, it's interrelated... I just want to know a little bit more about your China-related education back in the time... You mentioned that you studied anthropology in Copenhagen. So, can you tell us more about your education, or about your experiences with China-related subjects?

**MH:** I studied anthropology between 1978 and 1983. I have what is the equivalent of a bachelor's degree. But that was not the way it was constructed at the time, so I have what they called Part One, it's a little more than a bachelor's degree. I took all the subjects that were China-related, one way or the other. I focused more on Asia than Latin America and Africa-related subjects, which were also offered. And I spent six months in preparing my thesis with Hatla Thelle. Have you heard about her? She's one of the women I think you should definitely talk with!

**DR:** Yes, yes! I will definitely try to contact her.

**MH:** She was my faculty advisor while I was preparing my thesis. Once a week the professor looked into what we were doing. He followed us very closely, and once we got around to submitting my synopsis, which was all on China, he turned it down! He said, we can't do that here, too much economics, which was nonsense. It wasn't economic at all, I'm much more of a social science-oriented person than an economist. So, I got really, really upset when he turned me down. And when I returned from university that specific afternoon, this university paper advertised for applicants to a new China exchange programme. I was so upset with my institute that I applied. This was in May, and I didn't offer it much thought over the summer. And then in August, I got a letter of acceptance. So that is how I came to China, because I was so upset with my professor [both laughing], and anthropology, and that Hatla and I had worked six months to formulate my thesis ...

**DR:** And do you maybe remember what the thesis was about?

**MH:** I don't remember the exact wording. My focus was the vast *social* importance of gaige kaifang, the economic reforms, not the economic consequences. Gaige Kaifang was introduced in in 79 and this was 81, so very soon after, Deng Xiaoping's big speech. I was about ordinary people's life in China. It was about how society was changing under the new regime, reform and opening. It was quite soon after the Cultural Revolution, and at the very beginning of modernisation and - come to think of it while talking to you - that may be why he turned it down, if he read it as economic in its substance. Anyway, he turned it down, and I was really upset because he'd had every chance in the world, once a week, to tell us that we were heading in the wrong direction, if that's what he felt. Anyway, that was how I actually went to China. By no means had I considered becoming an exchange student in China. And I could only go to observe. I had no Chinese language background, and in China, you couldn't study social sciences at the time. So even if I had been proficient in Chinese I might have studied history, but everything was censored, so if you wanted to do anything along the lines of social sciences, it would have to be just by going and talking to people, and not looking like any kind of a researcher in any way at all.

**DR:** And as an exchange student, where did you study and what subjects?



**MH:** I had no Chinese language background, so all I could do was study Chinese – at Yuyan Xueyuan, in Wudaokou, which at the time was a very small village some 20 kilometres North-West of Beijing city centre, a bit further out than the university area, Haidian.

**DR:** It now counts as a pretty central part of Beijing [laughing].

**MH:** Yes..yes..[laughing] So that's where I lived on a campus with ten thousand students, ten thousand teachers, and ten thousand others...janitors, cleaners, craftsmen. There was a massive statue of Mao Zedong on campus, which only had two entrances, exits, as it was walled in like everything else.

**DR:** So, you spent one year there?

**MH:** Yeah, and I played truant a lot.

**DR:** [laughing]

**MH:** I went travelling. At the time you had to have an exit permit from the city and a travel permit from the school and one from the authorities. I got really good at getting my travel permits...I skipped school a lot and I travelled. The first thing I did, was to go up to Inner Mongolia. The very first day I arrived, maybe the 10th or 12th of September, and school was supposed to have started maybe the 14th, but it got postponed two weeks. So, I jumped on a train and went back up to Inner Mongolia. I spent two weeks up there on my own, which was fantastic. So, every time I got a chance, I took off to other places. Sometimes, like during the spring holiday, all the foreign students planned to go all sorts of places, and at the end, the Chinese ended up upgrading us on the trains, so we all had to travel together in soft sleeper, even though we had all booked hard sleeper, because it was cheaper, and because there we got a chance to talk with the Chinese. But they told us, “we are upgrading you; this is very nice for you...” What they were really doing was to keep us away from the Chinese.

And also, I told you that Wudaokou was the village where our school was located, and, five hundred meters away was another village, Sidaokou, which we weren't supposed to visit. The market in Wudaokou didn't have a lot of food at the time, but they had much

better supplies than in Sidaokou, maybe three different types of tea, a bit of meat. Wudaokou had a much better selection than villages which didn't have foreigners. In Sidaokou, they had nothing. The occasional peasant would come cycling in 20 kilometres with four tomatoes or a small piece of fatty pork. They were really trying to convince us, in the way they always have: Wudaokou is the way the Chinese live, which it wasn't, because at the time most Chinese lived like Sidaokou where there was very little to buy. Food, cooking oil, cotton, rice, these things were all rationed, and we were issued coupons, only not for tea. And there wasn't much of a selection. If you needed glasses, they had children's glasses, women's glasses, and men's glasses. And they had a big bicycle, a small bicycle and a child's bicycle. And everyone wore Sun Yat-sen uniforms in different kinds of materials; the only way you could distinguish between people, between influential people and ordinary people was that ordinary Chinese wore ill-fitting uniforms of not necessarily very good fabric, blue, army coloured or grey, and the lingdaos [the leaders] wore tailored suits in much better fabric, really nice wool in winter. That's how you could distinguish important people from the masses, because they had better clothes, better shoes. Everybody was ill during winter, and there was very little food. We mostly had garlic sprouts and this horrible, horrible cabbage, which I haven't eaten since, you know, the Chinese white cabbage... All winter. And the rice had little pebbles in it, it wasn't the best jasmine rice you could get [laughing] So it was different. And it was exciting!

**DR:** And, who were the other exchange students at the time at Wudaokou?

**MH:** We were 10 Danes. Do you remember Deng Xiaoping introduced this exchange student system where they sent 800 Chinese students, the best and brightest Chinese students at the time, the ten most clever went to the US, ten most stupid, which were none the less brilliant, went to Norway, and the next bottom ten, went to Denmark. They all got high degrees and most of them remained and became naturalised. One returned to China because she was very uncomfortable living alone. The others have remained to become Danish citizens. In exchange for these 20 scholarships of five to ten years, the receiving countries were granted 10 scholarships to China. The foreign exchange students stayed for a year or perhaps two over a total of 10 years. There were 20 Chinese students in Denmark, and 10 Danish students in China, mostly for a year at a time, 10 years for us wasn't an option. But some of my friends stayed for two years. At

Yuyan Xueyan, the Chinese studied foreign languages, and we foreigners studied Chinese.

**DR:** So, would you say that it was very international?

**MH:** At the time, it was incredibly international! I mean, really, really, really international. But not compared to now, of course. The good thing was that the main body of students were Chinese. We were a couple of thousand people from Asia, Australia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, Europe and everywhere. I shared a room with a girl from Skopje [laugh] for a while.

**DR:** So socialist brothers had good relations [laughing].

**MH:** We met a lot of people. We also had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with Chinese, but the Chinese had to report on us. Such was the condition. And if we had visitors, particularly Chinese, they would have to register at the campus gate, and again at the dorm, and it was terrible. We had our dorms, and we had our rooms, and there was a door, and above the door a window with no glass, only a mosquito net. And then the janitor, or whomever, the guards of the building, they would bring a small ladder and just watch you through the mosquito net. There was no privacy. There were hardly any doors between the latrines, and we had hot water twice a week, I think, for three hours. We foreigners didn't complain though, because we had much better conditions than the Chinese.

**DR:** How would you estimate the influence of this year for what came later between you and China?

**MH:** Probably the most defining year of my life. And my very best friend to this day is one of the Danish guys. It reminded me of the way my father described the resistance movement, where you endured hardship together, and sometimes ... like I told you about the letters, they withheld my correspondence for so long, which my most depressing experience, the worst on a personal level, because, of course, I missed my family. So, we got to know each other very well and we helped each other out. We still stick together, four of us that call ourselves the Gang of Four [both laughing]. We spent some really tough times, and interesting times, and crazy times together, and have

done the weirdest things together in China. So, it's been defining, personally, and obviously professionally as well. I had no idea when I was there that it would define me that way, but one of the Gang of Four, a woman called Vibeke, says that I said at the time, I wanted to be in Hong Kong when it was transferred back to China. She remembers this very clearly. I don't remember it, but I was in Hong Kong on July 1st, 1997. So, my entire professional life was defined by that rejection of my thesis and anthropology in 1981.

**DR:** So, was it after you came back from this exchange year that you became China expert, or China reporter?

**MH:** Maybe in my own view, I guess, yes, but not necessarily in the rest of the world - that was only in 1989, when I was identified with the reporting and the uprising in 89 in Denmark, because I covered it for national television. So that was a defining moment for my further career. But in 1982, not a lot of Danes had been to China, mostly the old Maoists. I was never a Maoist, I just came out of interest and curiosity. But a lot of the old Maoists were defining the narrative of China in Denmark at the time, so I started very carefully [laugh] doing lectures and writing articles about what I had experienced, and also supported by other knowledge and studies, but basically always from the anthropological angle. What is life like for the people out there? How does it differ from ours? Are there similarities? So, it's always been and still is, making Chinese society intelligible for Danes, and anybody else who's interested. That has been what has driven me.

**DR:** You mentioned that you started to be identified as China expert and the China reporter after 89. What happened in between your return from the exchange year and 1989? How did you get to the reporting on the events in 1989?

**MH:** I came back in 1982. And then, I had all this experience, and I had so many things I wanted to do and explain and write about. And then, what struck me at the time was, anthropology was a very isolated study. There were maybe twelve hundred people in the entire world who wrote meaningful articles to one another about their experiences, theories and field work. And it never got outside of the anthropological circles. It was like writing for some 1200 people.

**DR:** That sounds a lot! [laughing]

**MH:** That was not fulfilling at all, and not what I wanted. I had another interesting experience at university, when I did my first little thesis, my bachelor's theme. They said, why don't you use the scientific terminology? And they were going to give me bad marks for that. And I said, I want to communicate with everyone. I want to know everything there is to know [laugh]. And I want to communicate it to anyone who wants to know it too. I want to share my knowledge. And because I had a point in using normal terms, of course I knew all the professional terms and terminology for anthropology, but it just didn't make sense to write to those 1200 people. I wanted to write for my mother and everybody else. So therefore, I got away with writing my thesis in a more colloquial language. If you look at it that way, there's not very far from anthropology to journalism. If you want to communicate your studies, or whatever you wish to call them, your research, to a wider audience, you have to communicate with them in terms that makes sense to them and not only yourself. And that is what I did.

I came back in 1982 and switched to journalism in 1983. I graduated in 1987 and immediately started working at the foreign desk at the Danish National News Agency. In Denmark journalists are entitled to one week's educational leave a year, and you can accumulate those weeks. So, in 88, I returned to return to China for two or three short weeks, travelled around to visit my old turf. When I returned, I was offered a job at the National Television News, at their foreign desk, which was of course, very flattering, so I took it, and then, the following year, in 1989, in April I was on another two weeks' course in Japan, organised by this educational leave system, and we met government, industry, cultural and social circles.

In May 1989, there was to be a summit between Mikhail Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping. And this colleague, a good friend and a good colleague, had covered all the summits. He'd been our correspondent in the Soviet Union. And he said, "I'm not going to do these summits the rest of my career. I want someone along to assist me. And I don't know anything about China." I doubt they would have sent me alone without Leif, but as I was in Japan and knew my way around in China, I went to Beijing and met Leif along with his video photographer his sound engineer; they were both from the Soviet Union. So his old team came out early and the four of us did some curtain raisers on society, the country side and whatnot. Then things developed. And suddenly Leif proclaimed,

"Oh, you're doing fine on your own, I'm going home. This has got nothing to do with me." [laugh]

So, I was out there in Beijing for seven weeks, part of the time with the Soviet TV crew. They got frightened because it looked so much like home, and they were terrified over what might happen, so we had to send them home. So, I worked very closely with my colleagues from Finland, Norway and Sweden who was SVT's Moscow correspondent and had a crew of sorts. Anyway, we shared a crew, and it was very difficult to get our footage out. There was an emergency situation. The demonstrations were fantastic. It was very personal to me. And I tried, like I said before, I didn't want to put any of these people in a bad situation. I knew it had to end badly, there was no way the Chinese government could let the greatest challenge to the Communist Party for 40 years pass peacefully. Initially, the Chinese government and Party were at a loss about how to handle the situation, let it continue and develop, and the further it got, the worse you knew for sure that the end would be. So, for me, it was very important to protect the people I talked to.

## Mette Holm, 9.5.2020, audio only.m4a

**DR:** What happened then?

**MH:** Because I had covered the uprising in Beijing in 1989 on TV, I became relatively well known in Denmark. And from there, I was able to basically do what I wanted professionally. So, I suggested to a major Danish newspaper that I became their correspondent in China. This was the Danish newspaper with the biggest foreign desk at the time, 20 full time correspondents based abroad, 19 men and one woman, as it were. So, I became part of the biggest foreign news desk in Denmark for six years. Sadly, no Danish media outlets have news or foreign desks with anywhere near that many correspondents these days. I've always covered mostly China, and also other Asian countries. I've always been a foreign affairs journalist, never a domestic.

I've been very lucky, and I guess it all started with my being a liuxuesheng in 81, 82, because that seemed to have defined the rest of my career. China in Denmark has always been controversial. I didn't know that beforehand, but people with an interest in and knowledge about China have fought over very few positions, be it in academic

circles or journalistic. Quite a few men got upset with my being around... I would come into the office, you know, to say "Hi, I'm Mette, and I've lived in China, and I'm really looking forward to working together", and then the people who - which would usually be men - who were responsible for China would just not want to talk to me, much less work with me, and some even tried to complicate my work. But I have always had very, very good bosses, male actually, whom I respect and like. They have always had faith in my work, and trusted me, and liked what I did. So, they have even argued with some of the sinologists at the University, who said, why do you employ her? She's not a true academic, and she's not a sinologist...and they would reply "Well, you know, we chose her because she capable and she's a good communicator". But even quite a few male colleagues had difficulty in accepting a woman. And, I mean, I've always felt that I was capable, I don't feel that I've gained access in any way that I haven't deserved, I've worked very hard, but it's been an issue for many of the men that I was a woman, and that I turned up at all, but my gender has never been an issue for me.

**DR:** I just want to focus a little bit on your reporting of the Tiananmen demonstrations. How was it for you to be there in 1989?

**MH:** I arrived maybe on 17th or 19th of April, and the summit between Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping was supposed to start in mid-May. So, because I'd been to Japan, like I told you, I stopped over in Hong Kong for a few days and went up to Beijing. I was supposed to hang around there and prepare for the others to come from Moscow and my Danish colleague as well. So I moved into the Sheraton Hotel, it was brand new at the time, the Great Wall Sheraton, and it was really on the outskirts, by the third ring road, and now it's pretty downtown...So when I came from the airport, with my suitcase, in a taxi, we crossed over Dongzhimen, you remember Dongzhemen?

**DR:** Yeah, yeah, now it is a big airport express train station [laughing].

Yes. At the time, it was a big crossroads, underneath you had the main road, at the top you had the more local street, and you could look down on the ring road. So, I just saw all these people, hundreds of thousands of people coming down Dongzhimen from Jianguomenwai, and I said to the taxi, "Stop, stop, stop, I have to go out..." So, I got out, and I saw the biggest demonstration ever in the history of New China coming towards me ... I was on the bridge, the overpass, or whatever this is called, and looking down on

the road. It was peaceful; people were singing the International and the national anthem.

There were lots of people along the road, offering cigarettes, water and ice cream lollies to the marchers. It was very peaceful and incredibly impressive. I was shocked, because already then I started worrying. Thinking, what is going on? How is this going to play out? But on the other hand, it was just like a homecoming. I was very moved and touched by the atmosphere and by what was going on. And people were much nicer to each other in 1989 than I have ever seen the Chinese being, because usually, they start quarrelling and fighting over the slightest issue, a bicycle crash or whatever. They have always been short tempered because they live very closely and at the time also in poverty. The late 1980s had developed a completely new atmosphere and sentiment in people, which to me was very heart-warming - they had become interested and engaged in one another, and how they felt, and how their life was, whereas before it was just - go ahead and do what they tell you, try to stay out of trouble. They certainly weren't staying out of trouble in 1989.

**DR:** Why did you leave before June 4th? Was it your decision to leave?

**MH:** I left on 28th or 29th of May. I thought about it the other day. This was one of the biggest events in international journalism in a long time, and even perhaps ever. There were eight hundred journalists flying in to cover the summit between Deng Xiaoping and Mikhail Gorbachov, and it was also the first time a Taiwanese government minister came to Beijing to attend the Asian Development Bank's first meeting ever in China, in Beijing. And so there were ministers from all over Asia, the member countries, and thus also the minister for finance from Taiwan, which was an issue, as China didn't accept that they had a government at all. So that was also an interesting issue in global journalism.

So there were these two major events, the Asian Development Bank was very much an Asian one, but still interesting, and the other one was Gorbachov. There were hundreds of journalists who wouldn't normally be there. The reason I left is quite interesting. I had my probably best boss ever, the director TV News in Denmark, he said he was extremely pleased with my coverage. But then, in late May, he said that now "you alone have spent more than half of the budget of the foreign desk of the Danish National TV



News. You've got to come home." In seven weeks, I had spent half the annual budget. And this was 1989, so it made sense, because at that moment in time, nobody knew that China was only the beginning, that Eastern European communist regimes would collapse, one after the other that autumn. It only proves that you can't really draw a budget for news, as it were. But that is why I was recalled.

**DR:** Do you know, did they regret it? [laughing] They lost the first-hand account of what came to be "the" event in the last 100 years of imagination related to China, of China's image of the West...

**MH:** Some of my colleagues remained. Yrjö Lansipuro from Finland, a wonderful man. He remained and I stayed in touch with him. And Fritz Nielsen, my Norwegian colleague, remained. And of course, they closed down the telephones and all communication, but when the telephones were open, I could be in touch.

A lot of footage did come out, however, and was distributed to other TV channels, which meant that I actually saw a lot of the events going on where I had just been. My colleagues at home had no idea what or whom it showed, or where, street names, or what people were saying, or anything like that. Yes, I should have stayed. We all agreed. But by that time I had lost seven kilos [laughing]...

I think they were glad to get me home alive. Perhaps they weren't certain. No foreigners got killed, but it was pretty crazy at the time. And I was devastated to have to go home. I was split because upon entering the plane, I just slept for 12 hours, during the entire flight. But I felt terrible leaving, I felt related to these people, it was not my story, it wasn't my people exactly either. But it meant a lot to me. And I felt very close to what was going on. And I worried incredibly for my friends and for everyone else. So, it hurt to leave, but I did understand the financial logic. The following year I quit in order to go to China. And my terrific boss actually said, "you know, nothing's going on in China", and I said, "you know you're wrong, but you can't afford to send me". So I quit.

**DR:** When we talk about your career, what were the professional societies, associations, research teams that you were a part of and that you find important for your work?

**MH:** You mean academically? Hatla [Thelle] and I kept in touch over all the years, and that was very important to me, and also my way into the Danish Institute for Human Rights. She started working at the Danish Institute for Human Rights, (DIHR) which at the time was one of the leading in the world, helping to create independent human rights organisations all over the world. Hatla worked there, and Hatla is probably the most important individual to have contributed to trying to do away with capital punishment and torture in China. A lot of people want to do that, lots of people shout at China, but she has worked patiently with prosecutors, police trainers of trainers, and she was my faculty advisor on the thesis that nothing ever came of.

When she started at DIHR, she got in touch with me so that I could follow and report on their work. My connection with DIHR was quite loose until much later, when a right wing government wanted to close it down, which of course, they couldn't, because they were founded by parliamentary decision. But anyway, I quit journalism for three years to work as an information officer at the Danish Institute for Human Rights, in 2003 until 2006.

Both before and after, I always worked very closely with the China team at the Danish Institute of Human Rights, which has meant a lot to me and I suppose to them, as otherwise it probably wouldn't have happened. Academically, I became an associate senior fellow at NIAS [Nordic Institute of Asian Studies], which works very well for both sides. I meet a lot of their experts when they visit, I have done a lot of interesting interviews. But I haven't really researched or produced academic papers. I did some when I was at Columbia University, 2015 to 2016, where I looked into the legal system. I've followed the legal system intensely and very closely all along, and I've done that via particularly my connection with Danish Institute for Human Rights. My link with NIAS is, of course, official, I have a title, and a name card, and apart from when I actually worked for the Danish Institute for Human Rights, I did a lot of freelance work for them as well over the years.

I created a radio programme about rule of law at the Women's Media Center in Cambodia. I coached the journalists and experts, and they ran it themselves. I was out there four times a year, for many years. I went to Beijing, to visit various project and people several times over the years. Also, I wrote a book for the DIHR called "Asia and Human Rights" on human rights in 14 Asian countries. That would be considered academic work, I guess. But to me, it's just one more book on a subject that is near to

my heart. I don't know where one thing stops and the other stops. Although, of course, all my work is founded in facts, and research, and interviews, and reading, so whether it is published, as far as I'm concerned, in a newspaper or as an academic publication for DIHR, doesn't really make a lot of difference to me. But I know it does to especially academics.

**DR:** Yeah... Academics...[laughing]

**MH:** It's true, I am not an academic, or I am, I was, but I have worked as a journalist for several decades. To me, the distinction isn't very deep. And somehow some academics here uphold a very strict distinction. But of course, I think the best academics don't care, Hatla doesn't care, Cecilia [Milwertz] doesn't care, Stig Thøgersen doesn't care. There used to be very few academic positions for these people. So they have fought so hard against each other, and some of the men – luckily only very few – seem to hate what they consider competition from women [laugh], and so all the men are in these positions that look good on paper. And of course, some of them are very decent people, but some of them are not.

I've worked with whomever wanted to work with me. When I started, I was young, I had a lot of things I wanted to do and say, and then there was this wall of serious men [laugh] Some of them have been very nasty to me, but they've always been nasty to the female colleagues, so it hasn't been personal. It's worse for them than it is for us. Some of them seriously tried to get me fired, criticizing my work with my bosses. And there was this one male colleague who was a colleague also originally at the agency, and he just never accepted that I was there. And he's always talked badly about me. But most people don't, so it's OK. It was difficult when I was younger, but it really doesn't matter now.

**DR:** Can I ask you about one topic that is maybe not most usually talked about in most transparent way - about the funding. Where did the funding for your work come over the years?

**MH:** If you are an educated journalist and you have a job, or even if you're a freelancer, even if you're out of a job, we're entitled to this paid study leave that I mentioned earlier. I could be a language course, travelling abroad, or one could attend an organised trip or

a course. The courses or trips are specifically not work but meant to strengthen your knowledge and broaden your horizon. I've been a journalist since 1987 and have earned more than a week annually. So that month in China and 88 was funded via the study fund. Many of my study trips have been funded that way. I think I mentioned I've been to China several times, to Japan, I went to Southern Africa to look into China-African developments in 2011. I went to Brazil, to Cuba. Most of it I've organized myself. At one point the American government invited me on a study trip and gave me access to and organized whatever I asked for, like the Foreign Department in DC, Human Rights organizations, NGOs, universities and a lot of brilliant Asia Pacific think tanks, both military and civilian. This was one of the most interesting trips I ever did. But I visited all these think tanks and talked to a lot of professors and researchers who did Asia-Pacific things, both regional security and trade and so on. Anyway, many of my trips have been like that, wonderful access and no strings attached. And we can also apply for information grants from the Danish development agency, Danida, funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' development branch. Over the years I have been looking into restorative justice – always hoping that China would come to terms with some of its past, with the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution and other destructive campaigns. It may sound silly, but I've tried to prepare myself for that situation. What have other countries done? What has Cambodia done? Not very successful, but what did they do? South Africa is possibly the most successful. What happened in the Balkans? I've been looking into this over the years with all kinds of grants, some of them come from the Journalists Association, some come from the press, and then through work and assignments from the Danish Institute for Human Rights. So I think it's been easier for me than traditional academia to get funding, because I've always been able to show, I could prove some kind of product, that's the way it works in my circles. I've never thought about that either before you ask me, but that's the way it works. The way I work is much more adaptable, because scientific work is a long process, but mine is sort of collected over time, and assembled like Lego bricks. So it all adds to the same big picture. There have been very few scientific reports as such, but I have written more than a dozen books on mostly things Asian, and I have produced an immense amount of reports, print, radio and television as well as web.

**DR:** You mentioned that your work was evolving around the different areas of human rights, and even in different areas of Asia, but concerning human rights. Do you want to say something more about this work?

**MH:** Well, I think that it was only when I came to China, in 1981 that I realised how incredibly important human rights are as the framework for human life, a universal framework for all of us. My way into that was sort of backwards, I got sucked in, so to speak. I've contributed to very few completely academic works, but I've contributed to a lot of literature on all things Asian, or all things Chinese, basically. I have written lots of books, and essays in books, and for instance I've lectured on Article 19, which is freedom of expression. Also, at DIHR I've written articles, books and essays that were published in other people's names.

My main focus has been rule of law and freedom of expression, in China, but also in some of the neighbouring countries, and I've worked with several lawyers who were sent out from Denmark to work in Vietnam, Cambodia and of course China. At some point DIHR in charge of the entire EU-China dialogues, from 1992 onwards, when Zhu Rongji in fact, decided to accept that government ministers from other countries, high ranking individuals, could mention human rights to their Chinese counterparts. They would listen, but they wouldn't necessarily react. This is when the human rights dialogue between the EU and China started. And that was important. And Hatla was the most instrumental person in getting things done with regard to torture and capital punishment. I mean, they only got defence lawyers in 1997, and all these issues I've been following very closely over the years and reporting on it – as well as on culture and society in general.

**DR:** How would you reflect on your relations with your colleagues and sources of your knowledge about China, in Denmark, in China and around the world?

**MH:** At the time in 1989 when we were in Beijing, and there were all these journalists, and I realised that I had a very close working relationship with my Nordic colleagues. We shared everything, footage, information, interviews. And you could do that with the British a little bit as well. Perhaps the Dutch. Further from home colleagues would be exclusive, like the Japanese and the Americans who never shared. They were frightened about competition and had all these closed circuits. They may have had exclusive stories, but they certainly also missed out on others, because they had limited input. Journalists are just as different as everybody else, as academics are. There are

people with whom you share everything, we've even written each other's stories if someone has been ill, or indisposed, that's not an issue for good colleagues.

But there are lots of colleagues out there who don't feel that way, and who don't want to share, and therefore also get much less nuanced stories or impressions. I have many friends and colleagues in many countries' academia, with whom I work wonderfully, and then there are those arrogant ones that just don't count, because you can't talk to them, you can't walk with them, and they're arrogant, and condescending. Some people say it's better to educate women because they share knowledge, while men will keep it to themselves.

**DR:** [Laughing]

**MH:** ... I mean, it's not exactly science, but...

**DR:** [Laughing]

**MH:** To me, it's not necessarily a gender-based issue, but there are colleagues who will share everything. And there are other colleagues who just sit on their knowledge.

**DR:** And what about Chinese colleagues? Human rights are not the topic to be always easily and directly addressed...So, did you have collaborative work China-based Chinese colleagues?

**MH:** Yes, of course. I have worked with Chinese colleagues, and also in the media. At the Danish Institute of Human Rights, Chinese scholars would visit, and some would study or do a thesis, a Bachelor's degree, or a PhD, whatever. They are always interested in what the rest of us do and think. It's much more difficult in China. I have friends, and I have met colleagues and academics with whom I have worked. And I've lectured on human rights, interestingly, at the biggest legal university in China, which is in Xi'an. And I have lectured a very, very small class of human rights students in Beijing at Beida, a very small department out of the university. So some of these sensitive issues, I find we could talk about in very, very small groups [laugh] and almost secret. And from their point of view, it always had to be carried out discreetly, particularly if it was in China.

I've had a lot of friends and meetings at the Academy of Social Sciences over the years. In times like these, however, friends I don't call. My husband and I talked about a good friend, whom we don't get in touch with right now, because maybe it's not the right time for him to be in touch with people like us. That's how it is, and that's terrible. Even if our relationship is totally legitimate, we can't be in touch. Things are not necessarily logical, it depends on the prevailing wind, doesn't it? So, there were people I couldn't talk to for years. And you sort of have to wait until they maybe open a small window for communication. There are good forces everywhere, but sometimes they just have to lay low.

**DR:** And what has been your relationship with the government over the years? I suppose that we could talk about both Danish and the Chinese governments [laugh]

**MH:** Well, the Danish government, it's very easy. I haven't had any problems...We've had various governments, but most of the foreign affairs people, whom are usually the ones that I have anything to do with, are highly professional with regard to politics. And there's great mutual respect, and they've always been helpful. I have written a few books for the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The grants I told you about come from government, with no political or ideological strings attached. The Foreign Ministry's Department for Public Information is not politically run, it just happens to be public money. I've never had issue with them, we don't have to agree on everything, but that's not a problem in Denmark. And through my work with China, I've known every Danish ambassador to Beijing for 40 years, simply because we always run into each other.

Because I travelled so much, had many connections, and did many things which were impossible or awkward for diplomats, and also knew many diplomats, the Chinese often considered me a spy. This was of course utter nonsense, but it is a fact that an outgoing reporter gets much information that diplomats don't necessarily have access to.

Obviously, I've never been an agent for the Danish government. So to me, it's not a big issue. The other way around, I've always had what I consider a fine relationship with the Chinese government, but it has not always been mutual. They find people like myself irritating, and for a long time, they could punish me by denying me entry, which they've done occasionally. And at other times, like the late 80s, everything, everything was possible. And they just loved letting people in, and it was - liberal is a big word, but, considering what they were used to, it was very liberal. But in 1989, everything went in

reverse. So, up until 88, 89, everything was easy, you could enter, you could basically do what you want. After 89, I was not allowed entry for two years, which was a bit of an issue because I was actually hired to cover China for a Danish newspaper and then we ran into this problem [laugh]. But this is a common problem, I'm not the only one who's been locked out, lots of journalists always have a problem with Russia, with China, with whatever.

Eventually the Chinese got over it. And the reason they got over it, I can tell you now. A Chinese gentleman at the Danish Embassy in China who was familiar with my situation, which meant at the time I was only allowed single entry visas. That way they could control my entry and exit. But the said gentleman was familiar with my longstanding application for a residence and work permit. The embassy had tried to assist me, but it wasn't really their issue, it was mine. But then, I think it was it was People's Daily, applied for a work and residence permit in Denmark for a correspondent in the Nordic countries, who was to be based in Copenhagen, to cover Denmark, Norway and Sweden. So my Chinese friend at the Danish Embassy, who doesn't work there anymore, strongly suggested to the Chinese counterpart that if Denmark was to grant a Chinese journalist permission to work in Denmark, they had to grant me the same. The Danish Embassy and the ambassador had nothing to do with it, and had he known he would have been really upset. That's how I got my work permit and residence permit, thanks to an ingenious Chinese friend at the Danish embassy who was going way out of his responsibility and what he was allowed to do.

Obviously, when you think someone is a spy, you are hesitant to grant this individual a work permit. The Chinese think foreign correspondents are spies, because their own correspondents might very well be. Many years ago, I visited the People's Daily, and I had this interesting conversation with the editor in chief and the head of foreign desk. They said, "Ah, but we have correspondents all over the world, and only about 25 percent of what they report reaches the media. The main part goes to the foreign department." So they were, for all intents and purposes, spies for the Chinese government. And anyway, the major media are government media. So, it's not so strange. That's just the way they work. So they could never, and they still can't, get over the suspicion that someone like myself is a spy. They simply don't understand a friendship between a journalist and an ambassador, it's got to be something suspicious. So there's been a lot of cultural misunderstanding. And after 1989 they wouldn't let me



in, and then I came in, which was good. But then they detained me for hanging out on Tiananmen. They had video cameras and lots of bogeymen, and so they just picked me, and my husband at the time, kept us for six hours or so.

**DR:** So what did you do? You were just at the Tiananmen Square?

**MH:** First they sat us down on the pavement, and then they came in two four-wheel drives with out of town plates, which really frightened me, because I thought they were going to take us out of town. [pause]

**DR:** But why?

**MH:** It was June first. We sat and watched the square. It was just a few days before the second anniversary. The pavement hadn't been repaired, so one could still see how the tanks had ripped up the pavement two years earlier. And there were gunshot holes in some of the buildings at Jianguomenwai. We were just looking, taking it all in, because I hadn't been allowed in for two years. Naturally, they had all my reports, but that was before digitalisation. Otherwise they would have definitely put me in jail [both laughing] ... But we weren't taken out of town, we were taken to the security police station just within the Gugong [Forbidden City], just before the ticket office. That's where I told you that my husband coughed and coughed and coughed, and they shouted at him. That was there, that police station. They said where's your passport? I told them that it was at the Danish embassy. So they knew we were staying there, which was a kind of protection, I guess. So we said, let's go and we can pick the passports up. They didn't really want to confront the Danish embassy at that point in time. So after maybe six hours or so, they let us go.

And I saw something which I'd never seen before or since for that matter: when we were seated there, just forced to sit on the pavement, most of the passing Chinese sent us worried and caring looks. They seemed ashamed, and they felt sorry for us. They were really trying to express how bad they felt about what was obviously happening to us. And only the week before, a few TV crews from CNN and BBC or some other station had been beaten up. But a day or two before, it had been decreed that there was no more beating up of foreign journalists. So, we weren't beaten up, which was lucky, but had it been the week before, we probably would have been. So they finally let us go.

And as I remember it, they didn't take us home. I think we made our own way back to the embassy, but they probably followed us. Anyway, for a long time after 1989, they've never really approved of me.

**DR:** And then you made an interview with Dalai Lama..[laughing]

**MH:** Yes! You can watch it on YouTube, twenty-five minutes. They're not keen on that either. So, occasionally they'll just make it my life really difficult if I want to enter, and they will give me only a single-entry visa... Once they held up a whole group, 10, 12 journalists were going to be invited by Tivoli, the amusement park in Copenhagen, which was doing a China festival in 2000, I think it was. Tivoli invited a group of Danish journalists out to China, and I was one of them. And because of me, we didn't get the entry permits until the morning where the flight was leaving in the afternoon. The others were going crazy and I was just saying "Sorry about that guys, but I just know that we'll get it", which we did – in the last minute.

**DR:** [Laughing]

**MH:** I've spent so many days in Chinese public offices, with my thermos, saying "OK, I had lots of time". I've just outwaited them...Because they are used to foreigners being impatient, so I just always said, it's OK. I'll be back tomorrow, don't worry, take your time [laugh]. I knew we'd get the visa, they just want to show you who is in charge.

Since I married Mogens, whom they consider VVIP, they haven't denied us access – except for a trip to Tibet. They had a rule, which denied precisely politicians and journalists entry into Tibet, so it took us more than a year. Normally now, they will wrap us up in fancy limousines and fine dining. However, we have been able to go about a little bit on our own, but we're quite conspicuous. Especially when we're two, and they tend to want to protect us, which is nice, but I never feel threatened by ordinary people in China, only ever by government people. There's one thing I have to say in this regard as well: I really, really like China. I like the Chinese. I'm not critical. But I'm honest, right [laughing], and that can be an issue.

**DR:** I have just few more questions for you [laughing] How do you see your own contribution to the views and theories on China, to the knowledge on China in Denmark or in Chinese studies?

**MH:** I think I am one of the leading commentators in the media, who is being asked about to analyse what's going on and why; On TV, radio and print. I'm frequently asked to comment. And over the years I've written lots of books, and one of them has been published in second edition and third edition. It's an educational book for high school students, originally published in 2001. I have been told that it is the most used book in high school in Denmark. Maybe "the" book on China. Which is, I guess, considerable. And then, over the years, all my reports and talks and lectures, I have made several dozens of talks on China. Annually, in associations, churches, church gatherings, political youth organizations, activists, retired people, University of Copenhagen, University of Aarhus. I have made several hundred public talks, lectures and the like over 20 years and more. So, I guess, I have contributed to the general knowledge of China. Also, I have done several essays and talks for museums, which is really enjoy. Not about Chinese art as such, but about the space in which Chinese artists do and can express themselves. I find it incredibly interesting, and this is arts and culture in the broadest perspective, on how they go about their subjects. And why are some people allowed to work while others are not? Another issue which I am very interested in is why China always seems to shut up their best and brightest, the people who could really contribute to making China a better place, a more wealthy, healthy and developed country. They just shut them up, and beat them up, and lock them up. It really makes no sense. So I guess I have contributed to the knowledge and understanding of China. Politically and socially and about the way society works...

**DR:** That is really impressive! The closing question of our conversation would be - what are your views on China's future?

**MH:** China is an Asian country with a very important [role in the] future. China has always swallowed up whomever tried to conquer them, be it the Mongolians, the Manchu, and even communism. China swallows up foreign influence, and tints it with its own Chinese characteristics, like socialism. I think the Communist Party's plan is to remain in power at all costs. And this means keeping the vast majority of the Chinese relatively happy, well-fed, afford them choices and opportunities, allow them to travel,

albeit not at the moment, due to covid, they can't go travelling. Life for the vast majority of the Chinese has become so incredibly much, much better over the last 40 years.

And the Chinese party-government, sadly, doesn't have the imagination to trust the Chinese people. They seriously believe that they are the only ones who can rule this country and know what's best for the Chinese. I have I never understood why the Chinese government, in whatever shape and form, has not trusted the Chinese people to understand what's best for themselves. It's that old Confucian thing, that they expect a benevolent leader who knows what's best for the masses. And therefore, they have to obey.

I think the Belt and Road Initiative is created in order to keep the wheels spinning in China, in order to be able to satisfy the vast majority of the Chinese – and all this in order to keep the Communist Party in power. That's a ridiculously small ambition, but I think that is what is driving Xi Jinping. And I think that is what will happen. I hope that some of the continents in the world will be able to hold on to their own, and not be overruled and overrun by China. Obviously, there is quite a risk for Africa because Europe made such a mess of it over the last 400 years. So it's like "Why not the Chinese? The Chinese bring money, expertise, investment, education, doctors, nurses, hospitals, clinics, cures for malaria..." The Chinese government can basically do what it wants at the moment. Because there's no challenge inside or outside.

And even if there were people who would want to topple the Chinese government, there's absolutely no institution in place to be able to take over. There's no alternative to that party-government. And if China implodes, that would be a dramatic catastrophe for the rest of the world. So it doesn't matter what I think, or believe, or approve, or what I don't approve of. What I do believe is that the Chinese government, the Communist Party state, will remain in power, and they will do almost anything to hang on to power. I don't think they're interested in truly swallowing up the rest of the world, but they need supplies, raw materials, energy, work, they need food and drink.

The Chinese people don't starve any longer, which is wonderful. Millions of people have been lifted out of poverty. The Chinese live longer and are healthier than ever; they eat more and more, and better and better, so it takes much more to feed them and keep them happy. This Chinese government wants to make sure that the Chinese get what

they need in order for China to remain a stable society with the Communist party in charge.

**DR:** Thank you very much for your time!