

Interview of Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard

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Interview conducted by Julie Yu-Wen Chen

Transcribed by Toivo Qiu (裘瀚雲)

Chen: Could you tell us a bit about your family and schooling background and why you started learning Chinese or sinology.

Brødsgaard: I was born in Jutland in a small village called Hvejsel not far away from the city of Vejle and close to the old Viking city of Jelling. I went to primary school in the village and afterwards went to middle school in Jelling and then to gymnasium in Vejle¹. After that, I started at the university of Aarhus, where I studied from 1969 to 74. Thereafter, I moved to Copenhagen where I have stayed ever since. I have a younger brother and an older sister. I am married and have two daughters.

C: Why do you have interest in China?

B: That is very difficult for me to explain. Many people have asked me why I am interested in China and I think it is related to the fact that I was originally trained as a historian and became very much interested in modern history, especially the contemporary history of East Asia. As you know, historians want to read sources in the original language. I thought of studying Japanese or Chinese in order to read the documents, but finally opted for Chinese. So, I started studying Chinese at Aarhus University in, I think, 1973. From then on my interest shifted to Chinese studies. In 1975, I moved to the University of Copenhagen to finish my studies. After graduating I studied in China for a year and later went to Stanford University for year on a scholarship from the Danish Social Research Council. In 1986, I was hired within sinology by the East Asian Institute of the Copenhagen University and also got my PhD there.

C: What was your PhD about?

B: My PhD was about China's economic development or rather readjustment and reform of the Chinese economy with a focus on the early 1960's when there was a very intense debate in Chinese journals about the direction of Chinese economy. I focused on the issue of investment, which is a recurrent issue in Chinese economic thinking and discussion; some economists think that investment ought not to be too large in scale and one ought to have a more balanced economic development and yet, the investment rate has gone up year after year so that China nowadays invests about 45 % of its GDP based on a savings rate of around 50 %. This is very high, even higher than in Singapore. Investment has been going up even though the official thinking and rhetoric has been about reducing it. This whole economic debate and discourse was looked at in my dissertation which I did at the University of Copenhagen.

¹ similar to the British upper secondary school and the American senior high school

C: Were there a lot of people doing Chinese studies or relevant areas at that time?

B: No, actually there were not. I think I belong to the generation which was to a large degree self-taught. When one looks at the situation in Denmark nowadays, many of the senior Professors started their studies at the University of Aarhus in the early 1970's. The Professor at Copenhagen University, Jørgen Delman and Anne Wedell-Wedelsborg Professor at Aarhus University in Chinese literature, Carsten Boyer Thøgersen, the head of Confucius institute here in Copenhagen and I all studied together in Aarhus in the early 1970's because contemporary China studies were very difficult in Copenhagen, where the university at the time concentrated on classical China studies. This was the case in most of Europe, actually. Most universities had an institute with a focus on classical studies and a very strong Professor who was almost like an emperor. This was certainly the case in Copenhagen with Søren Egerod who really controlled the East Asian institute which he had founded. He was a key person who was also Director of NIAS for many years. So, he was extremely influential in whole of Scandinavia and he did not favor modern studies. That was the reason why modern China studies were established at the University of Aarhus by Else Glahn, a scholar who had actually done classical China studies. She founded the East Asian institute in Aarhus in the late 1960s. However, she actually also one of Karlgren's students like Egerod, Henry Henne and Göran Malmqvist. So, when we were doing our studies on contemporary China, there was no one around to advise us. My MA supervisor was a historian who was a specialist in German history but had once taught a course on China based on Schurmann's Ideology and Organization in Communist China. The university staff thought that he was suitable as he was one of the few who had taught about China.

C: How did you learn? Did you just go to the library?

B: Well, one had to develop one's own skills as there really was no supervision. At Aarhus, my first supervisor was a specialist in Russian history, so his field of expertise was regarded to be a little bit closer to my own, but when I moved to Copenhagen in 1975 and was finalizing my MA thesis I was given a Professor of German history as my supervisor who only knew very little about China, but had once taught a course on Chinese history and politics. All in all, we were very much self-taught.

C: Did you go to China then?

B: Yes, after having finished my studies in 1978, I was in China in 1978-79 before Deng's reforms started. However, at that point I had actually finished my MA thesis which I did on Chinese foreign policy. In China I first studied at the Beijing Language Institute (北京語言學院) and then at Nanjing University (南京大學) which was a great university to be at during that period of time. Thereafter, I spent a few months at the university service centre in Hong Kong. Then I came back to Denmark having reinforced my interest in China and as I felt that I wanted to continue my research I applied for a research scholarship at the Social Science Research Council and the project included a stay at Stanford University. As I received that grant, I went to the Stanford University for a year and that turned out to be a good choice. The contacts which I established there and at Berkeley have been very important for me. After the year in Stanford, I returned to Denmark and continued for a year with my grant. While at Stanford, I met Robert Scalapino, Frederic Wakeman and Harriet Mills. Wakeman found out that I had collected underground journals while in China and suggested that I wrote an article about them. I talked to Harriet Mills about Wakeman's suggestions and she made me write a letter to Scalapino who at the time was head of Berkeley's East Asian Institute and editor of the journal Asian Survey. Scalapino thought that the idea was interesting and agreed to publish the article which was about the democracy movement. This was my first article in English.

Published in *Asian Survey* in 1981, it was actually one of the first English-language articles on the democracy movement in China. Even though I was actually at Stanford to do economic studies, I wrote this article and then I handed over my collection to the Hoover Institute at Stanford University who incidentally still has it. The article was my first peer-reviewed article in English and therefore very important for to my career. After having finished this paper I continued my economic studies based on my research grant and subsequently did a couple of articles, which were published in the journal *Modern China*. This whole process helped me get into international scientific journals and to write in English. Until then I had written all my papers in Danish. So, it was quite a learning process.

C: Did you write your PhD in Danish?

B: Well, my social sciences grant ran out in 1982 and then I went to the Peking University for almost a year to do some economic studies at the department of economics and did interviews with a number of prominent Chinese economists like Dong Fureng (董輔弼), Yang Jianbai (陽堅白), Liu Guoguang (劉國光) and others and collected material for what then became my dissertation. However, when I came back to Copenhagen, the situation in Denmark was really bad in terms of available positions. There were no positions; it was terrible in the mid-80's. However, I then received a Carlsberg research grant which helped me escape unemployment. The Carlsberg Foundation has a Research Council and supports research. The Carlsberg brewery is actually run by five professors and some of the profits go to the Foundation which then allocates funds for research. So, I got a Carlsberg grant for two years and went to the US again for a couple of months. That sort of saved me in a situation where most of the young scholars had difficulties finding jobs. When I finished my Carlsberg grant I was then lucky to get an assistant professorship in the East Asian Institute at the University of Copenhagen, and since Egerod was so much against modern China studies, we had to call it something else, so it was called "Assistant Professorship in Third World Studies". So, in 1986 I got this assistant professorship and started teaching. At that time one could actually become an assistant professor without a PhD. But when that opportunity arose, I thought that I had better write a PhD because if I were to supervise students in the future, it was better for me to have PhD. So I wrote my PhD while I was an Assistant Professor and turned in my PhD dissertation in 1989. Then, in 1990, I was promoted to Associate Professor in East Asian history and society with a reference to China. Egerod was finally fine with contemporary China studies; he had made a full turn. Anyway, I was the first to get a position in contemporary China studies at the University of Copenhagen. At that time it was totally classical sinology. I stayed as Associate Professor at the University of Copenhagen from 1990 to 2003. For some time, I was also the head of the Centre of East and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Copenhagen. It was research centre just under the president's office. We did a lot of work interesting work; many PhD dissertations were actually done there and it was a very productive working environment. The centre was later closed down because it was placed outside the normal faculty structure and the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities demanded that it be incorporated into the East Asian institute after which it died out. However, it was a very interesting experience and we actually started the journal which I still edit today, *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*. I took the journal with me when I moved to the Copenhagen Business School.

C: Why did you change to the Copenhagen Business School (hereafter CBS)?

B: Well, around 2003, Egerod and Lidin, the Professors of Japanese studies retired, and the Institute of East Asian Studies could not really decide whether to open these positions for classical or contemporary studies. There were people in classical studies waiting for their turn. They had been waiting for a very long time and were very hopeful for their turn to finally arrive. On the other hand,

there were people thinking that Copenhagen University should concentrate more on contemporary Asian studies. However, this really could not be solved, and I became tired of waiting for the professorship to be reopened, and as there was a professorship opened here at the CBS, I applied for the position and got it. I moved to CBS in 2003 and was also charged with developing the Asia Research Centre here, which I did and which I headed until 2016.

C: What is your research focus here at the CBS?

B: Well, it has not changed all that much over the years. The Asia Research Centre which we established was for some time the largest China research environment in the whole of Scandinavia. For a period of time we had three full professors and several associate and assistant professors and PhD students. All in all, it was a quite big and active research centre, but many of the scholars here are really not educated and trained as business school scholars specialised in marketing or international business. One of the scholars is an anthropologist by education and I am a historian and a sinologist. Two of our younger people are also from the University of Copenhagen, one graduated from the Faculty of Humanities, another from the Department of Political Science. Our research environment is quite interdisciplinary. Currently my own research centre very much around the question of how China is governed.

This has been stimulated by research stay at Peking University and at the East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore. I stayed at Peking University for a year in 1998-99 as a visiting Professor at the School of Government. When I returned to Denmark, I got the opportunity to go to Singapore with my family for a year to do research at the East Asian Institute in 2001. This was a very good experience and gave me a lot of contacts in Singapore. For example, I came to know Zheng Yongnian (鄭永年) who was a research fellow at the time and we started working together on the Chinese Communist Party. We later published together on this subject, including two books on Party reform. This stay in Singapore has been important for my studies on the Party, cadre management, and nomenklatura, etc. and I often go back to Singapore for extended period of time as a Visiting Professor. I am now a member of the International Advisory Board of the East Asian Institute. The institute has more than forty scholars focusing on contemporary China. It is actually one of the world's largest and best research environments when it comes to contemporary China research.

I'm very much interested in Chinese governance and that includes the Chinese Communist Party. Recently I published a four volume anthology "Critical Readings on the Chinese Communist Party". I read and chose the articles included and wrote a long introduction. I also recently published a book entitled "Chinese Politics as Fragmented Authoritarianism" which is also very much about the Party.

C: That has been a very popular topic recently.

B: Yes, we have been trying to see if the concept is still valid and useful. My contribution is actually about Chinese state-owned enterprises. I am very much interested in how SOEs in China are formed, governed and structured and in the connections between them and the CCP. The leaders of these 102 largest SOEs are at a very high level. The leaders of 53 largest of these have a vice-ministerial rank and are appointed and managed by the Central Organisation Department of the CCP. Many of these leaders are circulated to become governors of provinces and party secretaries of ministries. I have been studying this whole system very carefully and wrote an article in the China Quarterly about it and another article on it in China: An International Journal.

C: I know Daniel Brombal, who contributed to your book on “fragmented authoritarianism”. He was a visiting scholar in Helsinki last year.

B: Oh, good, I have also done another book where he contributed. All this research has been possible here at the CBS, because we are not a business school in a traditional sense. It is more of a business university or at least it used to be that. We had a broad range of courses and centres from language and culture and even philosophy and history in addition to hardcore business studies; that used to be the profile of the CBS. There have been some changes now with the new leadership. They are slowly getting rid of languages because they think they could be better studied at the University of Copenhagen and the University of Aarhus, so there are some changes going on at the moment. However, we used to be very broad in terms of disciplines.

C: Could you tell me a bit about the study programmes now? Need the students not learn any Asian languages now while still writing something about Chinese politics and economy?

B: Well, we have an Asian Studies programme and as part of that the students can study either Japanese or Chinese, but in 2015 Japanese was abolished but we could continue Chinese. However, there is a great debate about language teaching and it was very recently decided that the Chinese language programme should be outsourced to the University of Copenhagen. We will have to negotiate with them about that.

C: Do they have more teachers there to offer the language training?

B: Actually, they do not, but the rectors of various universities have decided that language teaching be concentrated in just two universities, because languages very expensive to teach and the students are not that many. This is the general idea. When I was at the University of Copenhagen, I sometimes had classes of four or five people. At CBS, we do not want to have such small classes. Here classes should have at least 40 students.

C: Does that mean that one can learn the Chinese language at the University of Copenhagen but still do one’s MA programme here?

B: Yes.

C: How about the Confucius Institute? I thought they also offer Chinese language courses for your students.

B: We will have to wait and see what happens and if the new language policy also will have consequences for the Confucius Institute. That will be interesting to see. I was involved when we had discussions about founding it, and originally. We also held talks with the University of Copenhagen. Actually we agreed about some kind of a cooperation, but then they got a new Dean at the faculty of humanities and she did not think it was a good idea. Therefore, we went alone. Being head of the Asia Research Centre, I was interested in maintaining the independence of ARC and not merge it the Confucius Institute. We had the Asia Research Centre with its own governing structure and budget and then the Confucius Institute with its budget and mission and these two entities were separate entities, although we have always cooperated. Ever since its establishment, I have been on the board of the Confucius Institute.

C: Do you have both BA and MA level programmes here?

B: No, the Asian Studies programme is only a BA level one.

C: Is that three years of studies?

B: No, actually, it is four years of studies, including a preparatory year.

C: What do the students learn at the programme?

B: During the first year, they mainly concentrate on the language and learn about 1200 characters. Later, they have international relations, sociology, marketing, microeconomics, intercultural management etc. So, the first year is very intensive in terms of language, but during the following years, language is reduced to around a quarter which in my opinion is a bit of a problem because if one really wants to learn a language, it has to be more long-term than that. I hope that part of the current restructuring and the decision to cooperate with the University of Copenhagen could end up strengthening this language dimension in the programme. I think that this would be very much needed in addition to coordinated exchange programmes with Chinese universities making it possibly for our students to go to China to study for a semester.

C: Is there any Chinese university that is working with you on this right now?

B: Well, I think we could develop it because we do have good relations with Chinese universities like the Renmin University and the Peking University. It could be done and I think it would strengthen the programme because now, students have to go to exchange on their own and that is a little bit confusing sometimes especially with regards to what they do when they go to China. In my opinion, it should be better organised.

C: For sure. How many are doing Chinese?

B: We take in 60-70 a year which is actually more than the University of Copenhagen.

C: Are they all doing Chinese?

B: Yes, they are and in the past, we also took in about forty in Japanese, but now, we are phasing out Japanese studies including the language.

C: Are there still studies of Japanese politics and society?

B: Yes, but that will be weakened, I guess, since the language dimension is disappearing.

C: Why was Japanese not sustained?

B: Because the student intake was weaker in Japanese than in Chinese. There are significantly more young people interested in the Chinese part of the programme.

C: Interesting. In Finland, it is the opposite.

B: Yes, it is also a little bit opposite at the University of Copenhagen where they do have a good intake of students of Japanese. However, here it is China the students are interested in. When we have guest lectures and seminars, many students attend. When we do something on Japan, fewer show interest. The same is true for India and Southeast Asia.

C: Of those 60-70 admitted to your programme, how many graduate successfully?

B: I do not know how many, but I think most of them do graduate. At the time when I started studying Chinese there would be fifty at the start, at Christmas there would be maybe fifteen left and around Easter there would only be maybe ten students left as it was such a difficult language to study. I think that today maybe two thirds graduate.

C: Okay, that is not a bad percentage.

B: However, what we do not have is an MA level.

C: So they cannot continue to MA or PhD studies here?

B: No, the students who are very interested in China studies and are amongst the best go to Oxford, LSE or SOAS for graduate studies. Others enter another graduate programme at CBS like international business or business and politics which they can combine with Asia Studies.

C: Here?

B: Yes, here at the CBS. They also have an MA level at those programmes. The Business and Politics Study Programme was founded a few years ago by political scientists. It is a very active environment and has now been turned into a department.

C: How many years does the MA programme take? Two years?

B: Yes, two years.

C: Do you also have PhD programmes here?

B: Yes, we do also have PhD programmes here. Currently I have two PhD students, Nis Grünberg and Louise Lyngfeldt Gorm Hansen. Nis works on SOEs and the Party state and Louise is working on dams and hydropower politics in China. I will also have a new PhD student soon, as the position has been opened. This new student is funded by the Sino-Danish University Centre in Beijing. I do not know if you have heard of that.

C: No, I have not. Who is the main sponsor for this centre?

B: The Sino-Danish University Centre is a cooperation between all the eight Danish Universities, the Danish Ministry of Research and the Chinese Academy of Sciences (中國科學院). They cooperate in developing a Sino-Danish University Centre for Research and Education (SDC) which would be placed at the new campus of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Yanqihu. A new building designed in Nordic style will open in September. The goal is to have around one hundred faculty at SDC as well as about three hundred graduate students and seventy-five PhD students. The graduate students will be divided into seven programmes, two of which in social sciences. Of these two programmes one is about public management and social development where we, the CBS, are in charge and the principal coordinator of the programme is located here. So, this is a very ambitious project and has big political attention. I am in the board of the project and have been involved right from the beginning.

C: So, it is a kind of a joint venture.

B: Yes, and some of our PhDs are funded by this organisation because this is part of the ambition of the centre in training people in social sciences.

C: Will you have many PhD students coming from this centre in the future?

B: Hopefully. PhD students are not very easy to get because they are paid a full salary, but they are still students and therefore they teach very little. An assistant professor also teaches and generates income, but PhD students do not really generate any income. Therefore they are very expensive to have.

C: Will these all be Danish students?

B: If it is funded by SDC, they must be Danish students. We cannot hire Chinese students because the University of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (UCAS) will not allow us to do that. They will do that themselves. So, unfortunately, they all have to be Danish. The last time we had a position funded by the SDC, many Chinese and even Southeast Asian, Indian and African students applied for it but we could not take them in. Only a few Danes applied for it, but one of them was chosen.

C: What is the market for those people who obtain a PhD degree? It seems like the market is very different from the time when you got yours.

B: Well, I was actually a supervisor for a Chinese student called Xin Li who came from London, but was from Sichuan originally, and got a PhD here co-funded by East Asiatic Foundation. His dissertation was entitled "Toward an Integrative Framework of National Competitiveness". Afterwards, he got a job here at the institute and he now has a Carlsberg foundation fellowship and is really doing very well. Nis Grünberg has also got offers from Germany where he might go and if he does not, then he might go to Singapore. About Louise I do not yet know what she intends to do afterwards. However, in general, they do not seem to have any problems finding work.

C: Are those offers academic and not business?

B: Yes they are, but they could also be business.

C: That means you are doing very well because nowadays many PhD candidates are worried about their future.

B: Yes, but it is very important that one has international contacts and we do have very good international contacts in Singapore and also at different Chinese, American, German and British institutions and I think it is very important that they become affiliated with an international research environment.

C: I think I have not heard of any Nordic universities which are training so many PhD students in this discipline. So, you are the top class in the Nordic countries.

B: I hope so. We are also part of a Marie Curie application together with Leiden University and several other European universities. The whole idea of that application is to train a new generation of European China scholars. If that pulls through, we will get two more PhD students here. The topic of that will be CCP-led governance in China.

C: So, it will be very political science oriented.

B: In a way yes, but it will be more in between political science and international business. Business and politics, one could say.

C: With which university in Europe do you have the most cooperation with? You mentioned Leiden which has a very long tradition.

B: Yes, that is a long-term relationship dating back to the 1980's when Tony Saich and Frank Pieke were there. Pieke later went to Oxford but is now back. We also have a very good relationship with Cambridge. From 2005 to 2013 we ran an important programme called "China Executive Leadership Programme" together with Cambridge, a big Danish company called A.P. Møller-Mærsk and in China, China Development Research Foundation, which was acting on behalf of the Organisational Department of the CCP. They selected top executives in China to go abroad for training purposes. So, each year about 25 top-level business executives would arrive. They would be president and vice-president level executives from the top SOEs. They would go to Cambridge for almost three weeks and then they would come here for around five days. We would teach them about the Nordic welfare model. They would also have meetings with major Danish companies and government ministers. They would have an audience with the Crown Prince. We ran this program until 2013 and more than 200 of these high-level executives took part. Then in 2013 the Politburo decided that people at that level could only go to one country at a time for training courses. So, they now only go to Cambridge. It was unique program. The Kennedy School at Harvard is running something similar for government officials, but this is the only high-level program for SOE leaders.

C: Did they pay a lot of tuition as well?

B: Nothing.

C: Really? That is very generous!

B: Well, they have no problems to fund it in Cambridge, because European big businesses are so interested in meeting these people. Here, in Denmark, we cooperate with A.P. Møller-Mærsk and they supported the programme. These SOE executives run companies that are on the Global Fortune List of the world's largest companies. So Danish business executives are very much interested in meeting them.

C: Did it also help you in having a deeper understanding of the SOEs?

B: Yes, of course, it gave us a lot of insight. For example, on the bus going from one meeting to another I once sat next to He Guoqiang's (賀國強) brother. I did not know that he was He Guoqiang's brother and it was actually when He was still in the standing committee. This brother was the senior vice-president of China Southern Power Grid (中國南方電網). We also had Xie Fuzhan (謝伏瞻), who is now the party secretary of Henan, Zhang Qingwei (張慶偉) who was at the time the head of China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC, 中國航天科技集團公司) and is now the governor of Hebei (assumed the post of party secretary of Heilongjiang in March 2017), and Xiao Yaqing (肖亞慶) who was then head of the Aluminum Corporation of China Limited (中國鋁業股份有限公司) and is now the head of the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (SASAC, 國務院國有資產監督管理委員會). I was at a large conference in Chongqing last October and the deputy party secretary Zhang Guoqing (now Mayor) attending it had taken part in this programme. In China people at this level are connected and are circulate between different posts.

C: So, you have established a very important network.

B: I think this has been good for us and I think this is the reason we have had many high-level visits. For example, two years ago Liu Yunshan (劉雲山) came to CBS and attended a two hour seminar on the state of Chinese studies in Europe. Also, in terms of research, it is very interesting because we get inside access to how Chinese SOEs work and are managed. This is unique because if one goes to China, these people are very difficult to get to know.

C: Has the state of the Sino-Danish relationship affected the number of students in China studies, or has the number increased solely because China's growing importance in world politics?

B: I think the relationship between China and Denmark is good and since 2008 even called a comprehensive strategic partnership. China is now Denmark's largest trading partner outside of EU, bigger than the US, actually. So, in terms of trade and commerce, China is very important for Denmark. More than 400 Danish companies are present in China. Danish companies have invested more than 60 billion Danish kroner in China, establishing production facilities etc. So, it is quite an important relationship from a commercial perspective but also politically. China is important in Denmark's relations to Asia. In Denmark, there is a sort of a political inclination to view the relationship with the US as the most important one and oftentimes, when I say that our trade and economic relations to China are more important than those to the US, many people say no. Then I will have to ask them to check the statistics and see it for themselves. The automatic reaction is often denial and claiming the trade relation with the US is the most important which is not the case. Even for Germany, China is now the largest trading partner outside of the EU. Something very important is happening in terms of global geopolitics and we in Denmark need to carefully follow and study the trend.

C: Are there any sectors in Denmark that are more interested in the development of democracy and civil society in China and who have a more critical voice?

B: Yes, the press, for example. They are quite critical. If one writes an essay for a newspaper, they will always ask about human rights and the flipside of the story. So, the press has been quite negative towards China since 1989. It is actually quite difficult to tell the story of China being a massive country developing and the economy now being on par with the US in PPP terms. It is difficult to discuss the changes happening and the implications thereof in an objective fashion, because the reaction you often get is: "Well, that might be the case but we have it much better in Denmark. Our labour safety is much better, our human rights situation is much better, we have democracy, they do not. The economy will soon suffer a hard landing and the political system will eventually break down." Some people really think that China's rise cannot continue. Even if one reads Financial Times or other newspapers, there will quite often be something like: "The economy is now grinding to a halt. They have too much debt." However, the economy continues to show impressive growth rates. I think we should accept that for the next ten to fifteen years, China will continue to grow. It will continue on its ascending trajectory and we must realise this and come to grips with it. I think that even Donald Trump is coming to realise this. China is a huge country with enormous potential.

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

B: That is difficult to tell. This is some kind of a self-promotion. However, I think that in terms of cadre management, the study of the nomenklatura system and Party-business relations I have made my contribution and have published books and journal articles. I also receive many manuscripts for

review and evaluation in these areas. I also often take part in international evaluation teams invited to review the work of other institutions. For example, I was in Macau last December to evaluate the school of public management and governance at Macau University. I am often asked by American and universities to review candidates who are up for tenure and are also often member of international assessment committee for full professorships. In addition to these contributions, one could also add my research on SOEs, especially the issue of SOE reform and economic development. Last week I received word that a book I have written with another scholar on China's economic development and thinking since the 1950's has been published. I hope to receive it any day. So, I am also interested in economic development, thinking and discussion. These are macroeconomic issues. They are in my opinion important and interesting, but these issues revolve around the question of how China is governed; I am actually following Schurmann's interest in ideology and organisation in China; organisation is crucial in China.

C: How about this journal (Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies)? Do you consider it your contribution as well?

B: Yes, I established it in 1987.

C: Could you tell a bit more of it? What kind of a focus does it have?

B: Well, I brought it with me when I moved to the CBS, so it now has more of a business perspective than it used to have. We do still publish papers on politics and contemporary history, so it is not exclusively on business. This issue at hand is a special issue done by scholars who had a conference in Germany. I guess this focus on China reflects my own interest, but there are also issues on Southeast Asia and we will soon publish a special issue on India. Overall, journals in a paper copy are dying out, but we still try to continue publishing it this way because it is nice to see publications in a physical form and we can use it for branding purposes. We could probably market it better, but now it has existed for 30 years.

C: Could you evaluate China's academic establishment and scholarship?

B: I think it is evolving to become better. Some of the scholars they now have at the Tsinghua and Peking Universities and other places are quite good and talented and one can also see that in American universities there are now many China scholars who are of Mainland Chinese or Taiwanese origin. The Chinese are becoming more and more dominant in the field and they of course have the advantage of knowing the language and the political culture much better than we do. I think that people like Zheng Yongnian, Yang Dali (楊大力), Li Cheng (李成), Wang Shaoguang and other people like them are becoming very prominent in the field. Even though they mainly work outside of China, some of them have returned to China. So, one could nowadays even find some very good scholars in China. One could also find some of them in Taiwan even though they are now closing down the Institute of International Relations, which used to be strong in China studies. Sometimes it can be difficult, because the workings of the Chinese political system are a bit nitty-gritty. I was once at a conference in Beijing where the Director General of an organisation working on nomenclature in the Party's Central Organization Department partook and I asked him if they actually had these nomenklatura lists and he replied: "Yes, but one cannot see them." It can sometimes be difficult to get hold of these interesting documents with exact data about how the system works. That, I think, is often a problem. For example, when Liu Yunshan was here, and he asked what the problems with our research were, we had to answer that sometimes we had problems with fieldwork in China and problems in getting access to the really interesting materials. That has not become easier during Xi Jinping's tenure. However, one can still find a lot of information from

Chinese sources on the internet. If one goes to China on a regular basis, one can also find good material in book stores and at publishing houses, but one must go there. I go to China at least twice a year. Once a year I go there mostly to buy books and statistical material. I wrote an article in China Quarterly in 2002 on the concept of “bianzhi” (编制) and it is one of my most cited articles. The starting point for this research was based on a two-volume book I had seen by chance at a small bookstore in China. The book contained a lot of statistics and very interesting details on the Chinese administrative system and the role of the concept of “bianzhi”. One has to be on the outlook and one must go to China often to talk to people and search for material. It is still possible to do serious research but I do sense that it has become a little bit more difficult under Xi Jinping. However, when compared to the time I first went to China in the late 1970’s, the change is considerable.

C: Is it for better or for worse?

B: The situation now is much better. At that time, one could not even visit people in their homes. The atmosphere was completely different. Now people from China can travel and go to conferences and can even visit Taiwan and the other way around.

C: So, it is getting better for our research.

B: Yes, it has been a huge change.

C: The last question will be about your view on China’s future. Are you optimistic or pessimistic?

B: Well, that is what we are studying. I think the party congress in the autumn will be very crucial. It will be very interesting to see if it will be “67 up and 68 down” or whether Wang Qishan (now 69) will step down or continue. I am a bit uncertain about that. If he does not step down, there will be some new rules. And then, will Xi Jinping step down in 2022 or not? It is going to be a little bit complicated. It is difficult to see any potential new leaders right now. Usually in the past one would have new candidates at the party congress five years before the current party leader was to step down. That would be a part of the leadership change because the new leadership have to be groomed before stepping into power. Right now, it is difficult to see who that would be. That could create some political uncertainty. My colleagues in China are quite concerned about this. It could be a good thing to slightly relax on the anti-corruption campaign which has been running since 2012. Last year I took part in a meeting with Wang Qishan and asked him if there was a deadline for this anti-corruption campaign and he replied no. Now they are even creating a super-anti-corruption commission which would investigate corruption both in the party and amongst the government officials. It is interesting to see who will head that. So, there is some kind of political uncertainty, but I do not think the party is going to go away. Some Western scholars argue for that and my very good friend David Shambaugh is very pessimistic. I have discussed this with him very often. I, myself, am less pessimistic. I do not think it is going to go away tomorrow or within the next five or ten years. I think that if they can strengthen party discipline and focus on creating new younger, better-educated cadres, the system will survive. In my mind, the secret behind China’s economic development since the 1980’s and 1990’s is very much the ability to create a bureaucracy which is better-educated and younger than during Mao’s time and this focus on meritocracy. This is why anti-corruption is so important in sustaining the system, because when one gets to a position by bribery instead of by merits, this will endanger the system. This is the basic problem for China and this is also what Wang Qishan said. He said: “We have the party but who controls it?” The party is controlling and monitoring itself. The party is strictly guiding itself based on its own rules. That is why these rules and regulations become important and I think studying all of this is very important because it tells one about the abilities of this system and where China is heading. I think it is crucial

for western scholars to understand these administrative practices, laws, regulations and concepts. It is not just a one-man rule, it is also a well-functioning bureaucracy. Studying China is difficult because Chinese politics is formed by indigenous cultural and historical conditions and therefore challenges conventional Western scholarship. To a large extent we must develop new concepts and theories to grasp where China is going.