

Carl Trolle Steenstrup

Jag hade inte varit i Köpenhamn många timmar när jag hade en oförglömlig upplevelse. En ung förbipasserande man ger mig en blick, svänger runt och springer sin väg åt ett annat håll. Inte ett ord blir sagt, ingen hälsning utbytt, blott ett möte i gatans trafik. Jag kunde inte annat än undra och förundra mig.

Men min förundran behövde inte bli långvarig. Bara någon dag därefter dyker samme unge man upp och anmäler sig på mitt kontor. Ingen förklaring för sitt beteende på gatan någon dag före, blott att han ville bli min student, vilket jag accepterade.

Detta var Carl Trolle Steenstrup och här begynte ett umgänge som skulle fortsätta till denna dag vilket betyder till Steenstrups död 2016 i hans fall och för mig fortsätter ännu.

Han var då 80 år gammal, dvs ett 10-tal yngre än mig och alltså inte helt ung. Om jag var 42 vid ankomsten till Danmark, var Steenstrup 32 och välbeställd byråkrat. Det hade han varit ett antal år dessförinnan och en juridisk examen hade avlagts i tidigare år.

Men han var inte tillfreds med livet som jurist i statens tjänst. Han hade drömmar som ledde till vidare studier. Han ville "till tops" som han senare uttryckte det. Innan jag kom, hade han försökt sig på kinesiska och, som det snart visade sig, även japanska.

Kinesiska var ett etablerat ämne vid Köpenhamns Universitet med professor och program. Japanska var före min ankomst blott ett sidoämne med sporadisk undervisning.

Med min närvaro skulle det japanska programmet bli riktigt etablerat och det var det som Steenstrupo siktade på och önskade att anmäla sig till. Det var hans önskemål att bli japansk studerande och samtidigt lämna det kinesiska studiet. Jag frågade vilken anledning det var att han ville lämna

kinesiska och han svarade att det var därför att han aldrig kaperat tonerna i det kinesiska språket. I japanska finns de ju inte vilket omedelbart skulle underlätta det studiet. Steenstrup accepterades och redan nästa dag skulle han infinna sig till den första lektionen.

Nästa dag var han där och, till min överraskning, väl utrustad med den litteratur i ämnet som var mig välkänd från Harvard and Berkeley. Det var tydligt att han var förberedd för studiet. Att han var förberedd blev också klart då det kom till undervisningen. Han hade läst texterna och kände till dem till den grad att han kunde dem utantill.

Det var tydligt att han inte var nöjd med farten på undervisningen och efter bara ett par undervisningstimmar kom han och anhöll om att han skulle få gå fritt fram med studiet och avlägga examina fritt därefter. Detta medgav jag med viss tvekan men jag hade ingenting emot en student med ambitioner. Tiden skulle visa att jag handlade riktigt. De

ambitioner som Steenstrup uppvisade har jag aldrig mött förr eller senare.

Innan året var omme hade Steenstrup inhämtat all den kunskap som behövdes för en bifagseksamen i ämnet japanska och inte långt därefter det som krävs för en hovedfagseksamen i ämnet.

Men hans ambitioner sträckte sig längre. Redan innan hans hovedfagseksamen kallnat hade hans tankar kommit att krets a kring ett doktorandstipendium vilket skulle bereda vägen leda till doktorgraden i ämnet japanska. Jag skulle igen vara den som banade vägen och jag skulle rekommendera honom till ett av de doktorandstipendier som årligen tilldelades lovande kandidater vid universtetet. Detta gjorde jag och han erhöll ett tre-årigt doktorandstipendium vid 80-talets början.

Sedan blev den stora frågan om vid vilket universitet studiet skulle företagas. Köbenhavn och mitt just etablerade japanska program var för tidigt för Steenstrup.

Lyckligtvis hade min professor och rådgivare i Berkeley, Donald Shively, i mellantiden tillträtt en tjänst vid Harvard Universitet. Jag skrev till honom och till min överraskning var han villig att ta emot Steenstrup som "visiting student".

To come to Harvard and become professor Shively's student was a dream coming true for Steenstrup with his wish for the "top". He lost no time. From the time he knew of the lavish fellowship from the Danish state and the Harvard acceptance he stepped up the tempo of his studies yet further and added much of the night to his efforts. He knew how to make much of a chance. He exploded at it. Having arrived at Massachusetts he did not change the tempo. Now he had a definite goal. He had picked Kamakura Confucian thought as the subject just like me having chosen Tokugawa Confucian thought before. Not stopped by either American or Danish rules he worked on his thesis that was finished in the record time of less than two years.

Steenstrup could proudly return home to Denmark with a doctoral degree from no less university than Harvard. But he was not satisfied. For some reason he thought that an American doctoral degree did not compare and match with a Danish. He demanded that he should be allowed to submit his dissertation again at University of Copenhagen after he had reworked it and after Harvard magnificently allowed it being submitted a second time.

Official defence took place at University of Copenhagen and Steenstrup became a double doctor. The only change that I could detect from one dissertation to the other was that a date was changed, a change that had been proposed by me.

The title of the dissertation was: Hôjô Shigetoki (1198-1261) and his Role in the history of Japanese Political and Ethical Ideas. It is dated Copenhagen 1979, when it was printed.

The formal demands were now overcome. Steenstrup hade uppnått doktorsgraden i det ämne som han valt, nämligen japanska.

Now, it was the matter of a position where his new knowledge could be applied.

Danmark kunde inte komma ifråga. There I was employed and in a small country a second professor could not be imagined.

However, Steenstrup did not give up. First he wrote an application to universities around the world offering his service. To all of them was a recommendation written by me added. I remember that a university on Tasmania was on the list and that I laughed and said that it will certainly be the first time they hear about me and little Denmark down in Hobart. Then, he was offered a teaching position by Tokai University in Japan which he enjoyed but was the wrong thing for him. He was supposed to teach Danish and this was not Japanese. He had not learnt Japanese in order to teach Danish in Japan!

So he came home and was offered a job as a librarian at the Nordic Institute for Asian

Studies. He began, as it were, where he was when I stumbled into his life in 1968. It seemed that they were fated for each other, Nordic Institute and Carl Steenstrup.

But fate acted again. Suddenly there was a letter from Professor Ch. Naumann in München who offered a position in Japanese at the state University of München. It was one step lower than a full professorship and the incumbent should be under 50. I did not believe that Steenstrup would be tempted but I sent the letter to him, adding jokingly: "I am superannuated, what about you?" I had not expected any response but within ten minutes he was at my door ready to apply. Yes, he was to turn 50 later in the same year, so that was no problem and that he was one step from the "top" he chose to forget - at least for the time being.

So he left for München and to everyone's surprise he liked it down in Böhmen. The Nordic Institute and Copenhagen were soon forgotten. But I was not! Whenever on my way down Europe I was invited to their

homestead in München or Rosenheim. I stayed overnight and I dined and drank in their company. The university and the teaching he took very seriously and the students liked him. Whether he was loved by his colleagues is a dicussable and moot question. His often eccentric behavior surprised both students and colleagues. His personal style was certainly liked by some and disliked by others. That he came to be disliked by professor Ch. Naumann I know for a fact.

I was myself pensioned from University of Copenhagen 1 April 1996 and employed on the same day at University of Tübingen. I was as happily housed in Würtenberg as Steenstrup in Bajern. A lively contact was the result. University of Copenhagen was hardly mentioned, much more religion and philosophy. As a matter of fact, we came closer to each other as we now were both of us foreigners in a German land. When he was pensioned at University of München he was ready for a last academic venture. He was invited as a visiting scholar to Irkutsk i

Sibirien, a one-year employment. We all warned him for what is considered the coldest place on earth. But he enjoyed the year to everyone's surprise and considered it a great time and the great end of his academic life.

Already before departure to Irkutsk Steenstrup had prepared for his pensioned life. He had decided on Berlin, not on returning to Denmark. He had arranged an apartment on Potsdamer Strasse 18 in central Berlin, highest floor with a view toward Alexanderplatz in one direction and Brandenburger Tor in another. Finally he reached the "top", the highest floor in an apartment complex in Berlin. It was not a big apartment, just about two rooms and a side-room and a balcony facing west.

I was an honored and steady guest there. Our interests differed as times passed but the basis continued to be the same: Japan. Otherwise it changed for us both. We were both more and more seeing a divine dimension in things.

But as I was religious in the usual Christian sense, Steenstrup was farther occult in his views. When his wife Liisa passed away in the 1990s, he not only mourned her in the usual human ways in the here and now but communicated with her heavenly soul and knew about her whereabouts in the heavens. He took this seriously and told me and others about her heavenly life.

We had, however, fully social life of a normal character in early years when our wives were part of our common lives. There were dinners both at our homes and out in town, the four of us mostly alone around their dinner table or outside in well chosen restaurants. Berlin has much to offer. We never needed to visit the same restaurant twice. A place we visited often was a Vietnamese restaurant by Friedrich station which served excellent Chinese food with Vietnamese taste.

A very special memory remain the "surskrömmings-middagar" (soured herring

dinners). Already in Copenhagen we had discovered that we were both "surströmming" aficionados. He came from a childhood in north Finland and I had a similar background in north Sweden. We were thus both used to those herring dinners with home-made bread and drink. In all its simplicity a sour herring dinner was a feast. It was the smell that made the great difference. Many people could not stand it. Mrs. Steenstrup left before the first can was opened and returned long after the dinner was finished and the apartment was thoroughly weathered. All neighbours were warned before the feast began. Some smell might rest long after the dinner. To be absolutely sure and safe, Steenstrup decided that we should have next party outside on the balcony. Sour herring on the 18th floor in the midst of Berlin. Wow! How I enjoyed it! Steenstrup had gone extra to Sweden to buy boxes with "filerad surströmming" for the event. Such a delicacy could not be bought in Denmark or Germany. And the apartment was smell-free when Mrs. Steenstrup returned later in the evening. Such an evening you just never forget, much

more a delightful memory than from other roof-top restaurants.

This was the golden days when I was teaching at Humboldt and the Steenstrups were new in town. All was glamour and merriment, Sadness came when one day Liisa had passed away and was not there and I and Gunvor were mostly back in Denmark. Then we were in touch on the telephone about once per month. It could be conversation about world affairs generally but also about some specific happening or just small talk. I remember that I had once seen a cartoon of a soldier in a fox hole on the western front and then a similar cartoon of a soldier in a fox hole a second time soon on the same day. Underneath both cartoons was the comment: "No one is an atheist in a foxhole." I remember that I told Steenstrup that I found it coincidental that I found them on the same day two different places. And I remember Steenstrup's quick comment: "Write it down"! What I did. That became in the end 200 pages long and dedicated to my wife who died in the same year, 2014. When

I thanked Steenstrup afterwards for the inspiration, he had forgotten it, and just expressed, "I did what?" What I wrote was never published but put on my home page in my "Balance and Intuitive Life." With a dedication to my wife Gunvor. it was my last large work, only found on my home page.

The very last years of Steenstrup's life are both difficult and simple to describe. Perhaps they can be called his occult final years. He was more and more engrossed in divine thought and an inner world of soul life. One is tempted to say that he went off his rocker when in later conversations he related about his contact and talks with his dead wife Liisa and generally told us things which are for living beings not to be known. These things were related with a serious mind that expected the listeners to believe what was said. The numbness of the listeners is evidence of their being for or against his message. At least no one of them gainsaid him. Or even attempted to. He was left with his message that followed him to his death in 2015.

