

Carl Trolle Steenstrup b

I had not been in Copenhagen many hours when I had an unforgettable experience. A young man passing by sees me, turns around and runs his way in a different direction. Not a word said, no greetings exchanged, just a meeting in the midst of traffic. I could just wonder and be wondrous.

But my wonder needed not be long. Already the next day the same young man appears at my office and declares that he wants to be my student. No explanation for the behaviour in the street the day before, only a statement that he wanted to be my student, what I accepted.

This was Carl Trolle Steenstrup and this day begins a relationship that would continue to

this day which means until Steenstrup's death in 2016 and in my case still continues. At the time of his death he was 80 years. that is, ten years younger than me. He was not quite young for a student. If I was 42 when I arrived in Denmark, Steenstrup was 32 and occupied a good position as a state bureaucrat. A juridical examination was the basis of a legal career.

He was however not satisfied as a jurist in state service. He had dreams about further studies. He wanted "to tops" , as he expressed it himself. Before I came he had studied Chinese and also Japanese. Chinese had been an established subject at the University of Copenhagen with professor and program. Japanese had only been a side study with sporadic classes.

With my presence the Japanese programme was fully established and it was what Steenstrup aimed at and wanted to be part of. He wanted to be a student of the Japanese language and Japan and then to leave his former Chinese studies, where he

found especially the tones difficult. The Japanese language had indeed proved a problem, but Steenstrup.

Steenstrup was accepted and already the next day he was to be there for the first lecture.

He was certainly there, and, to my surprise, well equipped with the literature I knew from Berkeley and Harvard. It was evident that he was well prepared for the study. That he was prepared came also clear in the teaching. He had read the texts beforehand to the extent that he quoted them wrongly from memory.

It was soon clear that Steenstrup was not satisfied with the tempo of my teaching. After only a couple of hours of teaching he came and asked that he would be allowed to study freely and be examined accordingly. This I

allowed with some hesitation. I had however nothing against a student with ambitions. Time would show that I acted right. The ambitions that Steenstrup showed I have never met before or after.

Before the year was over he had covered all that was needed for a 'bifagseksamen' in the Japanese field, and not long afterwards what was needed for a 'hovedfagseksamen' in the subject.

However, his ambitions stretched farther. Already before his hovedfagseksamen was finished, he took an interest in a doctoral fellowship that would prepare the way to a doctoral degree in Japanese. I was again the person to open the road and recommend him for one of the doctoral fellowships which yearly were given to promising candidates at the university. He received it, a three-year doctoral fellowship at the beginning of the 1980ies.

Then, the great question was where and at which university was to take place. University

of Copenhagen was too early in my career. A more established place was needed.

Luckily had my professor and advisor in Berkeley, Donald Shively. had in the meantime become a professor at Harvard University. I wrote him and to my surprise he was willing to receive Steenstrup as a "visiting student."

To come to Harvard and to 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 his studies yet further and added much of the nights 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 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.

Now, the formal demands were 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 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 there 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 which 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 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 was 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 discussable 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 Würthenberg as Steenstrup in Baiern. 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 our "surströmmings-middagar" (sour 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.

These were 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, 2013. 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.

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 know. 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.



1957

GULDBRYLLUP 2007



