



**The XI Jinping interview and good academic practice
On reliable language work in modern China studies**

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The XI Jinping interview and good academic practice

On reliable language work in modern China studies

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Follow-up on a debate – started in Danish – with Geir Helgesen, Director of the Fudan-European Centre for China Studies 复旦—欧洲中国研究中心, and Director of Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) 北欧亚洲研究所, both at the University of Copenhagen. The debate was started by Leif Littrup on 17 April 2013 in *Universitetsavisen*, see below.

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The interview and the translations

In August 2000 the Chinese monthly *Zhonghua ernü* [Sons and Daughters of China]¹ brought an interview with the then governor of Fujian Province, XI Jinping, with the title »How I entered politics«. ² With the expected election of XI Jinping as leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in November 2012, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) under the University of Copenhagen on 29 October 2012 issued on its Internet homepage translations of the interview.³ The original translation from Chinese was into Danish and published in the Danish newspaper *Politiken* the day before. Translators were »the sinologists Carsten Boyer Thøgersen and Susanne Posborg. Carsten Boyer Thøgersen is a former Danish diplomat and Consul-General in Shanghai, posted for 20 years in China and now an associate of NIAS. Susanne Posborg, University of Aarhus, is the most often used Danish translator of Chinese novels and literature.«⁴ The version published by NIAS included introductions by Geir Helgesen, Director of NIAS, and the translators and about twenty notes by the translators. Introductions and notes are similar in the English version, all translated from Danish. The translators state that the published translation covers around ninety-five per cent of the full interview.⁵ The omissions are not marked in the text.

¹ 中华儿女. English title: *China Profiles*. The journal is under the editorial responsibility of the central leadership of the Communist Youth League of China Zhongqingtuan zhongyang zhuban 共青团中央主管. In 2010 it changed publication to twice a month, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/68742/179979/>

² »习近平：我是如何跨入政界的«. Another translation of »politics« could be »political/government circles«.

³ »An interview from 2000 with China's Vice President Xi Jinping. Translated into Western language for the first time« on <http://nias.ku.dk/news/interview-2000-china%E2%80%99s-vice-president-xi-jinping-translated-western-language-first-time>. The text has three parts: #1 Introduction by Geir Helgesen, Director, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, hereafter »Director's Introduction«, #2 »On the Xi Jinping interview in 2000« by Carsten Boyer Thøgersen & Susanne Posborg, hereafter »Translators' Introduction«, and #3 »Interview from the summer of 2000 in the Chinese journal *Zhonghua Ernü*«, hereafter »Interview«. There are links to the Danish translation and the Chinese text. The texts were downloaded on 2012-10-30 and on 2013-05-23.

⁴ »Director's Introduction«

⁵ »Interview«. Translators remarks at the end of the translation.

The translations are, allegedly, the first into Western languages and the translators deserve credit for noticing the reissue of the interview in February 2012 and undertaking the translation. NIAS deserves credit for making the translations available and welcome »Researchers and news media« – and I hope others – »to quote from the English translation if NIAS is stated as the source.«⁶ As will become evident, credits are here not without reservations.

At the time of publication my course on »Revolutions in China in the 1900s« had reached the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). As between one third and one half of the interview covers XI Jinping's youth and his experiences during the Cultural Revolution I took a closer look, concentrating on that period, but also other parts of the interview and with preliminary translations of the omissions. Regrettably, I found the translation wanting and had to conclude that

The translation gives an impression of XI Jinping's background, experiences and attitudes but with errors of translation that, together with the stated but not marked omissions, make the translation unsuitable for a deeper analysis and, consequently, understanding of what XI Jinping really says.⁷

Mistranslations and misunderstandings

For an interview published in a periodical closely connected to Communist Youth League of China (CYLC)⁸ it is remarkable that XI Jinping does not mention becoming a member of the CYLC. The early 1970s was a time for the rebuilding and reorganization of the CCP and affiliated associations such as the CYLC, and it was reported that the CYLC started up again from 1971 and received a great deal of attention in 1973 when XI Jinping was twenty years of age.⁹

Was XI Jinping not a member of the CYLC? The answer is that he was and he mentions it several times in the interview. I have found the abbreviation 'Tuan 团' eight times, some of them so close that the translators may be excused, for reasons of style, only to have translated it five times but never as CYLC. They have translated it variously as 'production team', 'production brigade', and 'commune', the three different levels of rural society and local administration from the late 1950s to the reforms of the 1980s.¹⁰ Most of the dictionaries I checked, Chinese and bilingual, have the

⁶ »Interview«. Translators' remarks at the end, »Translators' Introduction«, and »Director's Introduction«.

⁷ Translated from Danish: »Oversættelsen giver et indtryk af XI Jinpings baggrund, oplevelser og holdninger, men med oversættelsesfejl, som sammen med de oplyste, men ikke markerede, overspringelser gør, at oversættelsen ikke egner sig til en dybere analyse og dermed forståelse af, hvad XI Jinping egentlig siger.« in a note in Leif Littrup "Revolution, Kulturrevolution og ungdom i Kina i 1900-tallet" [Revolution, Cultural Revolution and youth in China in the 1900s] in *1066 Tidsskrift For Historie*, forthcoming

⁸ Zhongguo gongchanzhuyi qingniantuan 中国共产主义青年团, abbreviated as Gongqingtuan 共青团, or simply Tuan 团.

⁹ LEADER Shelah Gilbert 1974 "The Communist Youth League and the Cultural Revolution" *Asian Survey* 14.8: 700-715, pp. 700 & 709

¹⁰ In the following are the relevant eight passages (#1 to #8) in the English translation followed by the Chinese original and both with sufficient text to locate the quotations. They are followed by the English translation as amended by me

abbreviation for CYLC as one of several meanings of 'tuan'. *Google Translate* does not although it has »Youth League« for 'rutuan 入团' found four times in the interview and more correctly translated in a dictionary as »join the Youth League«. ¹¹ How the translators have arrived at their three different translations and overlooked the obvious remains a mystery to me.

For further illustration, let us take a closer look at the first and the last occurrence of 'tuan' (#1 and #8) as abbreviations for CYLC, here in a larger context and followed by my suggestion for translation with, for clarity, some *pinyin*-transcriptions in parenthesis.

#1 is a question by the interviewer and reads:

Yang: I have been told that you were promoted in the village. First you became a member of the production team, then a member of the party, and at a time you became party secretary in the village, although your family background was a political problem. Can you tell me some more about that?¹²

which I would suggest to translate as:

Yang: I have been told that at the time when you went to the countryside (xiaxiang) and joined the production team (chadui), you became a member of the CYLC (rutuan), and a member of the CCP (rudang) and assumed the office of secretary of the party branch of the production brigade, which at that time was not easy for a person with your family background. Can you tell more about this experience?

#8 is an answer by XI Jinping and follows his endeavours to join – here translated – the 'production team' (rutuan) and reads:

When I had written eight applications I was finally approved as a member. But it only happened after I had had the support of the leader of the production brigade of the

translating 'tuan', keeping as much as possible of the original translation: #1: First you became a member of the production team / 在下乡插队期间入团 / First you became a member of the CYLC. #2: At the time I had become a member of a production brigade / 我当时是团员 / At the time I had become a member of the CYLC. #3: Before that I had also had great difficulties becoming a member of the production team. / 在此之前, 入团也费尽了周折 / Before that I had also had great difficulties becoming a member of the CYLC. #4: When I had written the first application / 第一次写完入团 / When I had written the first application to join the CYLC. #5: Have you sent my application on? / 我的入团申请书您该递了吧? / Have you sent my application to join the CYLC on? #6: that there were more good than bad people in the party and the commune. / 就是党内、团内好人越多, 坏人会越少 / that there were more good than bad people in the party and the CYLC. #7: I had had the support of the leader of the production brigade of the people's commune / 得到公社团委书记的支持后 / I had had the support of the secretary of the CYLC committee of the people's commune. #8: He came to the village and talked to me for five days / 团委书记到我那里, 跟我聊了5天 / The secretary of the CYLC committee came to the village and talked to me for five days.

¹¹ Google Translate accessed on 2013-05-28: 入团 'rutuan'; 团 'tuan' alone still gives no indication of the CYLC. --- The dictionary is: DeFRANCIS John ed. 2003 *ABC Chinese-English Comprehensive Dictionary* Shanghai: Shiji chubanjituan / Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, p. 785, supported by other authoritative dictionaries like *Hanyu dacidian* 汉语大词典 [Large dictionary of the Chinese language] Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe 1990, vol. 1, p. 1067.

¹² »Interview«. Chinese: 杨: 听说您是在下乡插队期间入团、入党和当上大队党支部书记的, 这在当时对您这样家庭背景的人是很不容易的。能不能谈一谈这一段的经历。

people's commune. He came to the village and talked to me for five days. We came close and became really good friends. When shortly afterwards he took over the job as the leader of the out-of-school education of the people's commune, he was also the one who took the "black material" about me and simply burned it.¹³

which for me follows his endeavours to join the CYLC (rutuan) and translates as follows:

When I had written eight applications I was finally approved as a member. But it only happened after I received the support of the secretary of the CYLC-committee of the commune (gongshe tuanwei shuji). The secretary of the CYLC-committee came to visit me and chatted with me for five days, and we ended as 'diehard followers'. Later it was also him who, when he had taken over to be in charge of the educated youth¹⁴ in the commune, single-handedly burnt my 'black material'.

Some of the differences in the translations are of lesser importance but it appears that there is a fundamental difference how the institutional intricacies of the Chinese countryside in the 1970s should be dealt with in a translation.

When I started to study the translations I was puzzled by expressions like »First you became a member of the production team, then a member of the party,...« where membership of a 'production team' to my surprise seems to be of the same nature as membership of the CCP, and »I had had the support of the leader of the production brigade of the people's commune.« where the 'production brigade' seems to be the functional unit for production, and not a subdivision, in the commune. I would expect anyone working on a scholarly translation to wonder what happens here, even if they are not familiar with the use of 'tuan' as an abbreviation for CYLC.

XI Jinping was born in 1953 into an elite family in Beijing. His father, XI Zhongxun (1913-2002), was prominent in the Chinese Revolution and held leading positions in Beijing in the 1950s. In 1962 he was removed from power and sent to work in a provincial factory. During the Cultural Revolution he was taken to his home province, Shaanxi, and denounced (pidou) at struggle meetings (pidouhui). In early 1968 he was taken into custody by the Beijing Garrison, released in May 1975, and sent to Luoyang in Henan Province for the second time. From 1978 he held leading positions in Guangdong Province, and from 1981 to 1993 in Beijing.¹⁵

¹³ »Interview«. Chinese: 当写到第 8 份时, 终于批下来了。当然, 这是在我进一步得到公社团委书记的支持后才批的。团委书记到我那里, 跟我聊了 5 天, 最后就成为“死党”。后来也就是他在接任公社知青办主任后, 一手把我的“黑材料”付之一炬的。

¹⁴ 知青 zhiqing. During the Cultural Revolution often used for the educated youth sent to the countryside, like XI Jinping.

¹⁵ A good, and somewhat hagiographic, description of his experiences from 1962 to 1978 is in SHUI Xinying 水新营 2012 "解密: 习仲勋被隔离审查与《刘志丹》案" "Jiemi: XI Zhongxun bei geli shecha yu "LIU Zhidan" an"

The interview several times mentions XI Jinping's family background as problematic for becoming member of the CYLC and the CCP. His endeavours to become a CCP member are translated as follows:

At last I was permitted to go to the Zhaojia He production brigade in the Fengjia Ping people's commune to study. It was very exciting. At the time I had become a member of a production brigade but not yet a member of the party. I had already written ten applications for membership of the party, but because of my family history my application was not approved. The people's commune then sent my application on to the party secretary of the county to hear his opinion. He said that my family background was a great problem. Finding a solution was difficult for them. On the other hand he also thought that the village needed me to lead the work, so he ended deciding that my father's situation should be of no importance for my admission into the party. He approved my application and then sent me back as party secretary of the production brigade of the village.¹⁶

which I would render as:

Later I went to Jiaojiahe Production Brigade in Fengjiaping Commune¹⁷ and engaged in socialist education (gao shejiao).¹⁸ To engage in socialist education was very interesting. At that time I had become a member of the CYLC but not of the CCP. I had already sent ten applications to join the party but for family reasons they were not approved. This time the commune sent the question of my joining the party to the party committee of the county (xianwei) for examination. The secretary of the party committee of the county (xianwei shuji) said that in this village the contradictions between families (xingshi) are complicated, and it is very difficult for the local people to find good ways settle them, so there is definitely need for him to return to the village and take charge of the work. Where is the conclusion on his father? There is none, so we cannot let this

[Decryption: XI Zhongxun examined isolated and the "LUI Zhidan" case] CCP News Net 中国共产党新闻网 <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/n/2012/1204/c85037-19781621-1.html>. Posted on 2012-12-04. For his later career see a.o. <http://baike.baidu.com/view/86027.htm>. All consulted on 2013-05-24.

¹⁶ »Interview«. Chinese: 后来我又去冯家坪公社赵家河大队搞社教。搞社教很有意思，我当时是团员，不是党员。我已先后写过 10 份入党申请书，由于家庭的原因，都不批准我。这次公社又将我的入党问题交到县委去研究。县委书记说，这个村姓氏矛盾复杂，本地人很难处理得好，确实需要他回村里主持工作。他爸爸的结论在哪儿？没有，不能因此影响他入党。所以就批准我入党，并让我当了大队支部书记。

¹⁷ A commune in Yanchuan County 延川县 in Yan'an Prefecture 延安地区 in Shaanxi Province 陕西省。

¹⁸ 搞社教。Shejiao 社教 refers to the Socialist Education Movement 1963-1966 when intellectuals and others were sent from the cities to help rectify conditions in the countryside. At least in the later stages of the movement the government of a commune could be virtually taken over by those sent to perform socialist education. XI Jinping apparently refers to similar situations around 1973-1974 when he, as an educated youth, assumed leadership positions. A short and useful description of experience with such work 1965-1966 is given by the former Professor of Oriental Languages at Peking University in JI Xianlin 季羨林 1998 *Niupeng zayi* 牛棚杂忆 [Miscellaneous recollections from the cowshed] Beijing 北京: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe 中共中央党校出版社, pp. 9-14.

influence his joining the party. So he/she consented that I joined the party, and let me serve as the secretary of the party branch of the production brigade.

In 1975 XI Jinping wanted to go to university and applied to Tsinghua University, one of the most prestigious in China. Two positions were allotted to Yan'an Prefecture (Diqu), one of them for Yanchuan County (Xian).¹⁹ He was among three applicants for the latter and his application was supported locally but the representatives of the university referred the decision to the central university leadership.

The translation reads:

At the same time – it was in the autumn of 1975 – a political campaign started against what they called “the attempts of the right wing to change the foundations of the Cultural Revolution”. At the time my father worked in a factory in Luoyang. The factory submitted a document stating that the political question of Xi Zhongxun was a contradiction within the people and should have no influence on his children’s careers.²⁰

and my version:

From July to September 1975 was just the time when the so called 'rightist wind of reversing verdicts' was blowing. Neither CHI Qun nor XIE Jingyi was at home, LIU Bing was in power and he said that, of course, I could come. At the time my father had been sent to work at a plant for fire-resistant materials in Luoyang. The factory issued a 'local certificate', stating: »Comrade XI Zhongxun are concerned with contradictions among the people, with no influence on the careers of the children.«

Some of the differences in translation may not be so important but the omission of the names is unfortunate. They are essential to understand what XI Jinping says and may guide the reader to the relevant passages in the literature²¹ without having to rely on variations in translations.²² The 'rightist wind of reversing verdicts' is better known from the counterattacks against 'rightist wind of

¹⁹ »Translation« has here county for diqu 地区 (level 2) and district for xian 县 (level 3). The »Translation« also has county for xian 县 (level 3). Diqu (level 2) is found in dictionaries translated as prefecture. Provinces are level 1.

²⁰ »Interview«. Chinese: 1975年7、8、9三个月，正是刮所谓的“右倾翻案风”的时候。迟群、谢静宜都不在家，刘冰掌权，他说，可以来嘛。当时，我父亲下放到洛阳的耐火材料厂。耐火材料厂开了个“土证明”：“习仲勋同志属人民内部矛盾，不影响子女升学就业。”

²¹ The events at Tsinghua University, and the consequences, are well described in the literature, see a.o. MacFARQUHAR Roderick & Michael SCHOENHALS 2006 *Mao's Last Revolution* Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press/Harvard University Press p. 406 ff. --- SANG Ye 2006 *China Candid: The People on the People's Republic* Berkeley CA: University of California Press p. 257 note 5 --- TEIWES Frederick C. & Warren SUN 2007 *The end of the Maoist era: Chinese politics during the twilight of the Cultural Revolution, 1972-1976* Armonk NY: M.E. Sharpe, *passim*, particularly pp. 391 ff. --- ANDREAS Joel 2009 *Rise of the red engineers the Cultural Revolution and the origins of China's new class* Stanford CA: Stanford University Press p. 165 --- VOGEL Ezra F. 2011 *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press pp. 141-144

²² “右倾翻案风” is variously translated as »Rightist wind of reversal« Teiwes/Sun 2006: 410; »Right deviationist wind« MacFarquhar/Schöenhals 2006: 409; »Rightist attempt to reverse verdicts« Sang 2006: 257; »Right deviationist wind to overturn the correct verdicts of the Cultural Revolution« Andreas 2009: 154, and there may be others.

reversing verdicts²³ that went on from November 1975. Here it alludes to the changing attitudes at leading universities, first of all in Beijing, to the 'revolutionary' leadership and what should count most for admission to and working in universities: academic qualifications or class background and revolutionary zeal. CHI Qun and XIE Jingyi were the revolutionary leaders, and particularly XIE Jingyi had close connections to MAO Zedong. LIU Bing had around 1970 been reinstated as deputy party secretary of Tsinghua University and is regarded as the most prominent among four from Tsinghua University who during the autumn of 1975 complained about the leadership of the university in two letters to MAO Zedong, forwarded with the assistance of DENG Xiaoping. The last letter is regarded as important for the start of the 'counterattack at the rightist wind of reversing verdicts' which eventually led to the dismissal of DENG Xiaoping in April 1976. In other words – and XI Jinping may have wanted to make this point – the application was accepted by a member of the university leadership from the traditional party organisation and with connections to DENG Xiaoping, and not by the leaders who had arrived during the Cultural Revolution and were favoured by MAO Zedong.

Understanding XI Jinping's youth and his career prospects

It is now time to sum up what we may conclude from the interview about XI Jinping's youth and how his family background influenced his career prospects.²⁴ The view of the translators is fairly clear:

Most likely Xi Jinping wanted to make sure that his background was fully understood, told properly and to stress three things: 1) During the Cultural Revolution he stayed for seven years in the countryside under difficult conditions and only by his own efforts became a member of the party and enrolled at university. That is to say not by political connections and in spite of the fact that his father at the time was under political criticism.²⁵

This may be a fair conclusion based on the translation presented by NIAS but, in my view, not with what XI Jinping says in the interview.

As a teenager who had started his education at elite schools in Beijing XI Jinping was sent to a remote countryside and, eventually, adjusted and was accepted by the local people. He learned that to understand the common people, to cooperate at all levels, and to perform his outmost are essential to serve in public office.

²³ 反击“右倾翻案风”

²⁴ My conclusion includes material from the interview not mentioned here.

²⁵ »Translators' introduction«. 2 and 3 reads: »2) In 1982, he chose to give up a comfortable career in Beijing and instead started from the bottom as deputy secretary in a small provincial district. 3) To appear as a person in close contact to ordinary people.«

At the same time he deals at length with the role of the CYLC and the CCP and how his family background became less of an obstacle once the winds of the Cultural Revolution started to change and party organisations gradually normalised. He became a member of both, probably a natural path for a child of a leading party cadre, and only a little more than twenty years of age he became party secretary and when he wanted to enter university, he was accepted by the party organisation associated with the future leader DENG Xiaoping.

Upon graduation from Tsinghua University he went to work in the Central Military Commission as a secretary for GENG Biao (1909-2000) who was a member of the of the Politburo, later Minister of Defence,²⁶ and a contemporary of his father in the Chinese revolution.²⁷ After working for GENG Biao, XI Jinping worked outside Beijing, not in remote and unimportant positions but in what appears to be more attractive places in fairly important provinces.²⁸

The question of the role of political connections and his father's position in the career of XI Jinping cannot be answered satisfactorily without more information on others with similar experience but without the family and party background. Family, CYLC, and CCP are, however, so prominent in the interview that any answer, that fail to take them into consideration may overlook important points that XI Jinping wanted to make with the interview.

Academic practice and responsibility

In December 2012 I alerted the NIAS Director, Geir Helgesen, to the problems in the translations, with copies to the chairman of the NIAS Board and to faculty level leadership. I commended the translators for good solutions to problems in translation but, unfortunately, with errors – including the translations of 'tuan' – and lack of institutional understanding, which I found so significant that a revised translation should be considered. The reply from Geir Helgesen concentrated on differences in interpretations and not errors in translation. Anyone with a basic training in working with languages and translations should know to distinguish between these two. There may be overlaps – sometimes considerable overlaps – but they must never be used to cover up mistranslations such as those seen here. The reply was not promising for a revision of the translations.²⁹

On 16 April 2013 the opening ceremony of the *Fudan European China Centre at University of Copenhagen* took place, attended by the »Minister for Research, Innovation and Higher Education, Mr. Morten Østergaard, the Ambassador of China to Denmark, Mr. Li Ruiyu, the Vice-President of

²⁶ »Interview«

²⁷ I have not made an adequate check on their personal relations but note statements such as 'revolutionary friendship' 革命友谊 between them, see http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2010-08/15/c_12447677_5.htm

²⁸ »Interview« First, Zhengding Xian about 25 km. northeast of Shijiazhuang, the provincial capital of Hebei Province. Then in Fujian Province: Xiamen/Amoy, Ningde and then Fuzhou, the provincial capital.

²⁹ Leif Littrup e-mail to Geir Helgesen & Geir Helgesen reply to Leif Littrup, both on 2012-12-11.

Fudan University, Prof. Lin Shangli and the Rector of University of Copenhagen, Prof. Ralf Hemmingsen.« The Danish Director of the new Centre is Geir Helgesen.³⁰

Curious how competence in Chinese language and its use in the research and publications of the Centre and how the academic leadership copes with demonstrated and significant errors, I checked once more the translations of the XI Jinping interview and found no changes.

A letter to the editor of the *Universitetsavisen*³¹ was now natural to make the problems more widely known to the university community and leadership and, hopefully, awake the Director of the Centre and of NIAS to do something about the translations. After a summary of some of the evidence presented here, focus was on academic responsibility to correct demonstrated flawed material made available for other's research.³²

The reply from Geir Helgesen did not recognise the errors in translation and again talked about differences in interpretation. Unfortunately he did not reveal how the translators reached their translations of 'tuan'. Such documentation would have made it easier to clarify disagreements and is, in my training, good academic practice.

He mentioned many positive international reactions but not how many of these comment on the quality of the translations, after study of the Chinese original, and how many simply and understandably are excited that the interview is available for those who cannot, or will not, use the Chinese original, and with the University of Copenhagen to vouch for the quality of the translations.

He further mentions that the Vice President of Fudan University directly congratulated NIAS to be the first research institute to identify and translate the interview and, after a short presentation of the translators' qualifications in Modern Chinese affairs, Geir Helgesen states unequivocally that my reading is erroneous.³³

Here it stands. The Danish academic community, at least at the University of Copenhagen, seems not prepared to settle the differences in the understanding of the interview and how it should be made available for research so here I present the case to the international scholarly community.

³⁰ http://nyheder.ku.dk/alle_nyheder/2013/2013.4/fudan_europe_center/ & <http://nias.ku.dk/news/opening-fudan-european-china-centre-university-copenhagen-nias>. Also mentioned as *Fudan-Europe Centre for Modern and Comparative China Studies at the University of Copenhagen*, see http://news.ku.dk/all_news/2013/2013.4/interaction-china-europe/

³¹ *The University Post*, the 'Independent media of the University of Copenhagen', see <http://universitypost.dk/university-post>

³² »Moderne og komparative kina-studier og god videnskabelig praksis« <http://universitetsavisen.dk/debat/moderne-og-komparative-kina-studier-og-god-videnskabelig-praksis>

³³ Geir Helgesen "NIAS' svar til Leif Littrup" <http://universitetsavisen.dk/debat/nias-svar-til-leif-littrup>. The final paragraph reads »De to danske sinologer, Carsten Boyer Thøgersen og Susanne Posborg, der har oversat Xi Jinpings interview og som er særdeles bekendte med den pågældende periode i Kinas historie, er uenige i Leif Littrups læsning og tolkning af teksten og den forståelse af Kinas historie fra 1968 til 2000, som Leif Littrup med sin fejllæsning fremlægger.« [Leif Littrup translation: The two Danish sinologists, Carsten Boyer Thøgersen and Susanne Posborg, who have translated the XI Jinping interview and who are very familiar with the period in question of Chinese history, disagree with Leif Littrup's reading and interpretation of the text, and of the understanding of China's history from 1968 to 2000 which Leif Littrup presents with his misreading.] My rejoinder »Leif Littrups gensvar til Geir Helgesen« may be seen at http://curis.ku.dk/ws/files/46021054/Littrup_2013_04_gensvar.pdf

With some experience in working with foreign languages I know that, when translating, few of us avoid mistakes or misunderstandings that may be corrected after further study of the text and its contexts, and sometimes helped along by fellow scholars or others. The errors in the translations of the interview, presented by NIAS, are, however, so conspicuous and evident that anyone trained in scholarly translations should have wondered already when preparing the translations and sought better and more reliable solutions, and when alerted Geir Helgesen should have reacted.

It is with some surprise – and sadness – that I have to conclude that the Director, and with him the academic leadership of the new Fudan Centre as well as of NIAS, does not seem to recognize the importance of reliable translations in modern China studies and is not prepared to admit and correct demonstrated and significant mistakes in translated material made available, under his responsibility, for international research.

Reliable language work is, after all, a good starting point for modern China studies.