



Olof Gustav Lidin

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AF BJARKE FRELLESVIG AND CHRISTIAN HERMANSEN

Lidin was born to small-scale farmers in Dackebranna in the northern part of Sweden, and died in Nærum near Copenhagen in Denmark, where he spent almost all of his academic career as professor of Japanese at the University of Copenhagen. His path to this post was not entirely straight, however. He first studied law at Uppsala University (Bachelor of Law, 1951), but then went on to study Chinese at the University of Stockholm under professor Bernhard Karlgren (BA in 1955), combined with other language study (Russian, French and German), aiming for a career as a diplomat. He served as Administrative Officer, Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC), Panmunjom, Korea 1953-55. Returning to Sweden, Lidin worked at the UN office in Stockholm until 1959, when, on the recommendation of Karlgren, he moved with his family to the University of California, Berkeley, where he also studied Chinese, Mongolian and Vietnamese, but specialized in Japanese under professor Donald H. Shively, obtaining his M.A. in 1963 and PhD in 1967. Lidin was assistant professor at UC Davis from 1966 but was called by professor Søren Egerod to the University of Copenhagen to set up a section on Japanese Studies in the East Asian Institute in 1968. At the same time, Lidin assisted in setting up an East Asian Programme at the University of Lund, Sweden, 1969-1973. He was appointed professor of Japanese Studies in 1972 in Copenhagen and served there until his retirement in 1996. At the invitation of Professor Klaus Kracht, Lidin continued his academic life first at Universität Tübingen and 1997-2006 at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Besides his regular

university employment, Lidin was invited as guest researcher to universities in Europe, the USA and Japan, including the International Research Institute for Japanese Studies, Kyoto, 1992-93.

Throughout his career in Copenhagen, the academic interest of Lidin was focused on the life and philosophy of Ogyu Sorai (荻生 徂徠 1666-1728), but he also published for the general public in Scandinavia on Japanese history (e.g., in *Bonniers världshistoria* vol. 4, *Österns storriken*, Sweden, 1983) and religion (e.g., *Politikens Japans Religioner*, Denmark, 1985). His interest in philosophy combined with his friendship with the author Abe Kobo resulted in academic articles on the latter's literature. With the pressures of administrative responsibilities gone after his retirement, Lidin completed one more study on Ogyū Sorai, and then ventured into two other areas of interest – first the *Tanegashima* firearm and second Chinese philosophy (see the bibliography below).

Lidin was elected a Fellow of The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters in 1980. He was also a member of the Academia Europaea and one of the founding members of the European Association for Japanese Studies where he served as President from 1982-1985 (having served before then as Secretary 1979-1982). He remained involved with the EAJS throughout his career, for example as the local organizer of the 7th International EAJS Conference which was held in Copenhagen in 1994, and well into retirement.

Lidin was the pioneer of Japanese Studies not just in Denmark but in all of Scandinavia. Through the 1970s and 1980s few if any academic appointments were made in Japanese Studies in Denmark, Sweden or Norway without Lidin's contribution to the process, and hardly a doctorate awarded without his participation, either as supervisor or examiner. It is difficult to exaggerate his importance for the development of Japanese Studies in Scandinavia, where it is now a well-established and thriving discipline. On the occasion of his 70th birthday and retirement from his post in Copenhagen, colleagues from around the world contributed to a wide-ranging festschrift for Lidin, *Florilegium Japonicum*, Copenhagen, 1996.

His contribution extended well beyond academia. During the growth of Japan's economic role in the 1980s, Lidin represented the University of Copenhagen in setting up a Japan Information Centre in Copenhagen together with the Japanese Embassy, and also in establishing the Scandinavian *Sasakawa Foundation* in Sweden and Denmark. He was also closely involved with the establishment of the *Tokai University European Centre* which is located in Denmark, cohosting a "Japan Today"

conference in 1985. All of these efforts contributed to the spread of knowledge of and interest in Japan. In recognition of his service and contribution, Lidin was awarded orders of distinction by both the Queen of Denmark (the Order of the Dannebrog, 1983 and 1993) and the Emperor of Japan (the Order of the Rising Sun, 1985).

Lidin was held in high regard and respect by his students at the University of Copenhagen. He was friendly, approachable and always ready to support young aspiring academics, also those outside of his own specialization. Both Lidin and his wife Gunvor, whom he married in 1957 and who remained his companion and support until she passed away in 2013, took a personal interest in each student. Every summer in June, after the last exams at the end of the academic year, Olof and Gunvor Lidin invited all colleagues and students from the section of Japanese Studies to their home in Holte north of Copenhagen to a dinner party – in the later years often hosting more than 50 students – and this became one of the highlights of the social student calendar. His former students share fond and affectionate memories of his classes, which he taught in a relaxed atmosphere in a mixture of Danish, Swedish and English, sporting one of his many colourful ties, and usually with a cup of coffee to hand and smoking a cigarette.

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