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S.C. Van: An Immigrant Success Story

by Ditlev Tamm

S.C. Van: An Immigrant Success Story

by Ditlev Tamm

S.C. Van Fonden

English translation of *Ligger godt i maven...*
Bereftningen om S.C. Van, Daloons grundlægger

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Published by the S.C. Van Foundation in cooperation with Peter Hartmann

ISBN 978-87-992384-0-8

Photo editing: Jørn Madsen

Graphic design: Bilgrav Design Aps

Distribution: NBC

Printed in Denmark 2009 by Narayana Press, Gylling

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FOREWORD

Sai-chiu Van came to Denmark in 1935. He became well-known as the founder of the company Daloon, which made Chinese spring rolls into a Danish national product and drastically altered the eating habits of Danes. He became especially popular thanks to his appearance in 1996 in a short TV ad for Daloon. In the ad, he declared that the spring rolls “make your tummy happy”. This message was reiterated by a red dragon, which pops up as a trademark and pronounces in falsetto the word “Dal-oo-oo-o-n”. For a time, both expressions were fixed features in the Danish language.

Van established a foundation that, in addition to owning the majority of shares in Daloon and promoting the company, supported Chinese study visits to Denmark and Danish-Chinese cultural associations. Over the years, the foundation has given hundreds of Chinese young people the opportunity to study in Denmark. Originally, it was called the Daloon Foundation; but, after Van’s death in 2003, it assumed the name of its founder and is now called the S.C. Van Foundation.

It has long been a desire of the Foundation to publish a biography of its initiator. Over the years, he gave a number of interviews. A few books have been written about the firm in which he describes episodes in his life, but an overall account of his life, following his journey from China to Denmark, has never been written. He himself was far too modest to support such an initiative. Not until relatively recently, therefore, has it been possible to realize these plans. Van participated in the biography in his later years, but his memories of childhood in China were somewhat vague by that time, and he did not leave behind any significant personal archive. Therefore, it has not been easy to reconstruct the early years of Van’s life.

Crucial to a presentation of Van’s life in China is an exchange of letters with his father. A number of family memoirs have also turned up, which could be included in the book. These letters and memoirs from the family in China have made it possible to sketch a picture of Van’s background as an important piece in the puzzle for understanding of his later activities in Denmark.

This biography grew out of an interim draft by Trine Lindén, M.A., based mainly printed material. At a late point in the process, the task was handed over to Ditlev Tamm, who has been a member of the S.C. Van Foundation for many years and was a personal acquaintance of Van, to write a comprehensive overview of Van's life, which is now presented here. Van's daughter and chairperson of the Foundation Lissen Stockholm has been an indefatigable asset for the book and, in this connection, has helped find material that might shed light on her father's background, family connections, and life in Denmark. Associate Professor Qi Wang and Associate Professor Chun Zhang at Aarhus University have translated large portions of the material, which has been an invaluable source for understanding Van's heritage. The Foundation thanks them for their efforts.

The S.C. Van Foundation hopes that the story of its founder's life as an immigrant to Denmark and entrepreneur will also interest people who did not know him. Throughout his life, Van was influenced by a Confucian mindset (typical in China) that it is by good example that a person can become a model for others and that those who have the ability also have a duty and a responsibility to others. Throughout his life, Van felt a huge responsibility. He came to Denmark with the goal of learning as much as he could about modern Danish agriculture, so that he could help reform rural life in China. Things turned out differently. He ended up as a captain of industry in Denmark with responsibility for several hundred employees. He always retained warm feelings for his native land and, through his foundation, he helped hundreds of Chinese young people get an education in Denmark, just as he himself had. His philosophy of life was: If one has received much, one must also give something back.

The Chinese adore Hans Christian Andersen, and Van also took an interest and pleasure in reading the great Danish author. The story of the little matchstick girl was considered a classic in China, but other Andersen fairytales and stories are accessible in China in very good translations. Andersen's Chinese fairytale "The Nightingale" may be the least read in China because it does not quite fit in with the Chinese image of Chinese emperors. However, stories about people who do well against all odds enjoy greater popularity such as Little

Claus, who is opposed by Big Claus, Clumsy Hans, and other tales that show an ability to deal with concrete situations in a clever way resonate with the Chinese concept of the human condition – that things can turn out differently than planned. The story of Van, who came from China but became Danish and built up a major firm in Denmark, is not a true Andersen fairytale, but the story still has elements of a fairytale. This was not something that came of itself. His life was completely different from what was foreseen by his wise father, who had plans for his son's life and China's future. Van's firm was eventually located on the island of Andersen's birth, but this was a coincidence. Less coincidental was the fact that Van as a foreigner quickly learned how to win friends in Denmark, that by virtue of a determined will he learned the language and completed studies in Denmark, and that through invention and ability he was capable of making his product into a brand. Nothing was given in advance when Van came to Denmark. Events developed in a completely different direction than predicted; but, at each phase of the development, Van was capable of meeting the challenge.

With this book, the S.C. Van Foundation would like to show its gratitude to its founder for whom Denmark was never a small country that had any reason for complexes. For him, Denmark was a pioneer country in the area of agriculture, a country where peace reigned, where people could thrive, and the form of government was democratic. Denmark was his second homeland. Van was and remained Chinese, but he became the sort of person who not only enriched those around him but enhanced Denmark.

In addition to this English translation, the book has been translated into Chinese. All translations and the Danish original version may be read at the homepage of S.C. Van Foundation.

S.C. Van Foundation Board



I. KINA

Shi, nong, gong, and shang

"... we human beings may be categorized into various types: the divine, the far-sighted wise men, the clever and talented, the ordinary, the stupid, and the wicked. The morality, character, and abilities of people will never be uniform. Business people are like politicians. The latter have responsibility for the security of the country, so that citizens, farmers, workers, business people, and intellectuals can work and develop and make their contributions to society and the state in peaceful and secure surroundings. Business people also have the responsibility for many people's jobs. There is a great risk in being a businessman. If it fails, you lose everything. If it succeeds, you have contributed currency and tax income to the treasury. You have a responsibility to shareholders, employees, and their families. A modern firm must be an organization that demands responsibility and cooperation from every employee".

Van's cousin Shongsì Si summarized the significance of the business in the words cited above. They appear in a book in which Van collected his family's memories about his father Yuan Zhongfu. The sentiments expressed here summarize concisely a fundamental Chinese view of the connection between different vocations and occupations in society. You are not just alone, for yourself. Every vocation is a part of its surrounding society and a contribution to it. The individual is a part of a greater whole, placed within the cosmos, society, and family; and there are duties in all these relationships. This was the philosophy in which Van, too, was raised.

In traditional China, four classes of occupations were distinguished. A person could be a scholar (in Chinese, *shi*), a farmer or *nong*, a craftsman (*gong*), or a businessman (*shang*). This division of the population into classes can hardly be traced all the way back to the two classical Chinese philosophers Confucius and Mengzi (Mencius), but it derives ostensibly from the last centuries before Christ and has for hundreds of years been a fundamental part of the Chinese view of society. It is characteristic of the Chinese that the military, *wu*, does not have its own category. According to

*Opposing page:
Shanghai harbor at the beginning of the 1900s.
Burton Holmes*

traditional Confucian philosophy, it was with the help of the morally good example and not with violence that civilized society was to be built, and the military did not belong there. Of course, it existed, and China's history is also a history of warfare, but the so-called *wenren*, the literati or philosophers, would not straight-out legitimize the military by giving it its own designation.

In Chinese, a person is called *ren*, and to be and act like a true human being is the highest virtue in traditional philosophy. S.C. Van, whom this book is about, was first and foremost a *shi*, a scholar who wanted to get to the bottom of things. He studied agriculture and thereby also brushed up against the *nong*, but he was also a person who got in with his own hands and created the product to which his name has been linked. He was also something of a *gongren*. He founded a major firm but believed that he did not have the abilities of a *shang* and, thus, lacked the business instinct. He left that to others, but that is why he was, indeed, a *shangren* for whom the business instinct for what he himself had started became quite decisive in his life.

Nor was he any soldier. There was no *wu* in Van but a lot of a *wenren*, a wise man. The four classical elements, *shi*, *nong*, *gong* and *shang*, entered into a harmonious blend in Van's personality, and this harmony, which is also a classical Chinese concept, is also another thing that helps explain his success.

S.C. Van was born in China at the end of 1912, and he died in Denmark 90 years later. His life took the following shape: he became a first-generation Chinese immigrant in a country where he was going to study for a short time and then return home. His story is the story of a true immigrant success. His frozen spring rolls did not only become famous in Denmark but also a success on the international market. He named his business Daloon, which means 'big dragon' and was thereby a part of Van's acknowledgement of his Chinese heritage. The dragon was the emperor's animal, and the dragon is the fifth beast of the Chinese zodiac that is the basis for the Chinese calendar. The dragon is strong, honest, and sensitive, and it looks impressive in stone, in Chinese tile, and as a trademark.

The history of China is long, and it is not for nothing that the Chinese politician Zhou Enlai, when asked about the significance of the French Revolution, was quoted as answering that it was too soon to tell. And, actually, he was right, seen from a Chinese perspective. The Communist Revolution, which he had been a part of promoting and which emerged victorious in China in 1949, was undergoing rapid change. Today, China is still a Communist country, but Deng Xiaoping set a new economic agenda in 1984, which has led to great transformations in Chinese society.

Van was born in a China that had just undergone a different revolution, when imperial rule was replaced by a republic in 1912. He grew up under the republic, and he experienced Communist government only at a distance, but he grew old enough to become aware of the changes that have today transformed China into an economic superpower.

The New China

On his father's side, Van's name was Yuan. The name Van derived from his maternal grandmother's family, which came from the city of Cixi in the Zhejiang province. Van originally had the name Chunnian Yuan. Chunnian means 'long life' and is connected with spring, which is called *chun* in Chinese and which, according to one classical tradition, lasted 500 years. Van's father was initially named Van, since as a younger brother of 10 siblings he had taken his mother's name because that family lacked a male heir. Van's father was brother number four of three brothers and seven daughters, but when two older siblings died, he advanced to brother no. two or, for his nephews and nieces, uncle no. two: *Er Jiu*.

Van was born at the end of 1912 in Hangzhou in the Zhejiang province.

He did not know the exact date and chose as his birthday the last day of the year, 31 December. When a son was born, the father took his father's family name, Yuan. Now, it was Van who had to bear his maternal grandmother's family name and, on that occasion, changed his first name to Sai-chiu, which means the same as Chunnian. One's surname is a bearer of a family, and the first name has a particular meaning, too. There is more in Chinese names than in the name of the rose.

In China, the family name, which is the most important, is placed first, and Van's father, therefore, will be referred to as Yuan Zhongfu. His father, Van's grandfather, had been an esteemed teacher who was quite engaged in local administration; and, in this connection, he had responsibility for a large storehouse, which burned down. He felt it was his fault; and, according to the family, undergoing interrogation about the fire tormented him so much that it was the death of him.

Van's father was born in 1872 at the end of the imperial epoch in Chinese history, the final years of the Qing dynasty. The late 19th century was a time of upheaval in China's history, which also explains much of the background for why Van came to Denmark. Qing was the name of a tribe from Manchuria, north of China, which in 1644 had taken control of China and taken over the heavenly mandate from the last emperor of the Ming dynasty, who committed suicide that same year. The Qing emperors were actual conquerors who came from the outside and oppressed the Han Chinese who were forced by the Manchurians to wear pigtails as a sign of oppression.

China's long history is an important part of the self-understanding of most Chinese people. It is the story of the Middle Kingdom, which was long autonomous and self-sufficient but which also fought internal battles for cohesion. In 221 B.C.E., Emperor Qin unified China; and, for the next two thousand years, shifting imperial dynasties had ruled over all or parts of China. Sometimes, the land was divided, but it always managed to come together again.

In the 18th century, under the skillful Qin emperors, China experienced an era of flourishing culture; and, even at the end of the 18th century,

Emperor Qianlong could ask an English emissary what his country really brought to China. China felt superior to other powers, which only by virtue of special imperial favor were allowed to trade with China though the harbor city of Canton. China did not recognize European countries as equals.

In the 19th century, however, China was no longer able to withstand attacks from the West and keep foreigners out. The turning point became the import of opium, which China tried to limit – to the detriment of British trade interests. The British wanted China opened up as a market for British trade and Indian opium, and China's attempt to keep the pestilence of opium out gave rise to an armed British attack in which British gunboats proved technologically superior to the Chinese. After the so-called Opium War of 1839-42, the 1842 Treaty of Nanking (Nanjing) was forced through along with later treaties that gave England, France, and the US extensive trade rights. These were unequal treaties that benefitted the Western powers and gradually undermined the authority of China's central government. Five harbors were opened to foreigners, and the English even acquired Hong Kong, which (at that time) was uninhabited. Earlier, China had also been subjected to invasions and had had extensive trade connections with other countries. Still, the period after 1842 was different. The country was opened to an extent theretofore unseen; foreign invasions led to cessions of land; and European trade interests and cultural influence rose.

A new war in 1858 between China and England/France ended with yet another treaty that same year in which Russia also took part. However, only after the English and the French had conquered Beijing in 1860 would the Qing dynasty recognize that the situation had changed. China was no longer the superior party that could dictate to others its own trade terms. China and its emperor were a part of an international system in which treaties were entered into on equal footing even though they were dictated by the winning party. China was the weaker party, was forced to open the country to Western trade and cultural influence. It began with five harbor cities, but eventually the Europeans and the Americans were able to establish themselves in more than 80 cities in China, where foreigners lived in their own quarters in accordance with their own legislation.



China being divided among the European powers Great Britain, Germany, Russia, and France as well as Japan after the failed Chinese revolution of 1898. Cartoon from the French periodical Le Petit Journal. Scampix

The opening of China after the Opium War and later Western incursions that forced China's emperors to give Europeans access to ever more cities displayed the weakness of imperial rule. Toward the end of the 19th century, everything went wrong. A stubborn Empress Dowager Cixi and the circle around her fought against any attempt at change. In 1895, China had to enter into a humiliating peace agreement with Japan after losing a war which, among other things, led to the loss of the island of Taiwan. An attempt at innovation from within in 1898 was slapped down hard, and the young emperor, who had been part of a failed revolution, was placed under house arrest, while his accomplices were executed. In the year 1900, the so-called Boxer Rebellion against foreigners gave another occasion for Western military intervention; and, a few years later, the era of imperial rule was over.

Shortly after 1900, a countermovement arose that led to a new Chinese self-consciousness. The Manchu dynasty had lost credibility and proved to be incapable of mounting a Chinese resurgence, which many believed was a necessity after their encounter with the West. The state had lost terrain; many reforms were carried out on private initiative; and an entire new class emerged, a class distinguished from the classic bureaucrats and rural nobility.

The many changes in China in the years after 1860 triggered major demographic and economic upheavals that were particularly disadvantageous for the class to which Van's father belonged and into which Van was born. Well-to-do and well-educated, Yuan Zhongfu launched a number of projects with an understanding that new times were on the way. He also belonged to the political avant-garde – and that social stratum in China called “the urban reformist elite”, who believed that China's future required industrialization, and he was one of those who tried to build up industry under the existing system.

Yuan Zhongfu was one of the many farsighted Chinese who found inspiration in Japan. Both China and Japan had isolated themselves from the world for centuries, and both countries had been forced to open up to trade with Europe and the US. In Japan, it happened with a

treaty in 1854; and, shortly thereafter, Japan's emperor introduced a series of reforms pursuant to a Western model. We are talking about the Meiji period when Japanese emissaries to Europe brought home knowledge that led to the introduction of a constitution based on a German model and a number of changes in administration and the military – for example, the elimination of the samurai class – which made Japan into a modern state. In China, the government reacted differently. The old, inflexible administrative system, led by civil servants with a traditional education, balked at reforms and tried to keep modern technology away from China as long as possible. In 1895, China and Japan went to war. China, though far larger, lost to the smaller country, Japan. It could not have been demonstrated more clearly that something had gone wrong. Ten years later, in 1905, Japan sank the Russian Baltic fleet. The Land of the Rising Sun was thereafter the absolute role model for the East. Cultural influence had now gone from China to the east, and things were turned upside down.

Japan was the role model when it came to modern education, and Van's father belonged to those who went to Japan to learn about the new era and its demands. Exactly when and where he studied in Japan, we do not know, but it must have been in the years just around 1900. It happened at a point when forces in China were also striving for reform.

After the Boxer Rebellion, the government realized that something had to give. In 1905, the old Chinese examination system was abolished. In 1906, an alteration in the form of government was attempted through elections and a parliament. A Chinese delegation had studied new forms of government in the US and Germany; another had been to Japan, England, and France and had been impressed by a system with a strong emperor and a parliament with constitutional rights that provided an opportunity for public debate. In 1908, a constitutional reform program emerged that included local elected advisory assemblies and an advisory national assembly.

By 1905, Shanghai already had a city council. With changes in local self-government, the reform-eager elite had a chance to alter the tax



Boxer poster with anti-Christian propaganda (upper left, a pig is crucified as Jesus and, upper right, the torments of Hell are reproduced as preached by European clergy). Lower left, foreigners are killed and their books burned, and, lower right, Europeans are subjugated to China in the form of a mighty mythical creature.

Gyldenråts Bildarkiv



The last emperor (1908-11) Pu-yi as a child.

system and grapple with some of the corruption that was hindering progress. New schools were opened and public works built for electrification and water supplies. At the same time, the central government also tried to strengthen its position, but it proved to be impossible to unite the necessary changes with a preservation of the old order, which did not exactly go to any trouble to become popular. The state was incapable of living up to the expectations or needs of the new business elite, and this was one of the reasons for its fall.

The last emperor

In 1908, the Empress Dowager Cixi died. The last emperor, Pu-yi, was a child when the revolution brought new forces to power. In October 1911, a rebellion broke out in the city of Wuchang. Soon afterwards, a number of Chinese provinces declared their independence of the Qing regime. Decisive for the sequence of events was an alliance between the military, which had been reformed in recent decades, and the local elite. Imperial rule would fall; and, on 1 January 1912, the revolutionaries proclaimed China to be a republic, and the revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen was chosen provisional president. His leadership was of short duration. The general view was that the man who could carry out a transition from old China to new times was Yuan Shikai, the head of China's army. Civil war, rebellion, and foreign intervention were avoided; and, on the basis of a number of agreements, it ended with Sun Yat-sen stepping down in February 1912, the Emperor abdicating, and Yuan being elected in March 1912 as president of the republic of China. 1912, Van's birth year, was thus one of the most important years in China's history.

Yuan Zhongfu

Two metropolises, Hangzhou and Shanghai, were to play an important role in Van's upbringing. His father businesses were there, and there he grew up. Like today, the two cities were locomotives of the

Chinese economy. This was especially true of Shanghai, which at that time could be considered as China's unofficial capital by virtue of its size, international position, and enterprising business life.

Hangzhou was among China's oldest metropolises. Even in the 6th century, a major canal project was begun; and, during the Song dynasty in the 12th century, the city was one of the country's truly major cities. Up until the 19th century, it was one of the few cities in China with over a million in population. The area around Hangzhou was a typical agricultural area with a rapidly growing population, which did not have nearly enough land to cultivate. Tea and cotton were important products, but Hangzhou is also a center for Chinese silk production, which came to play an important role in Van's father's business.

In relation to Hangzhou, Shanghai was an upstart of a town, which did not have real economic and cultural significance until the 19th century. It became the prototype of one of the open cities. It had European buildings along the harbor front. There was a division into different European quarters where the foreign upper class lived and exploited countless coolies and other cheap labor. At the same time, the city was international and a part of a trade culture that connected China and Europe. The city profited from World War I and, in the 1920s and 1930s, was not only a metropolis but also one of the East's largest and most important trade cities.

While Shanghai became one of the proponents of a new commercial culture, Hangzhou belonged more to the old, traditional China. The area around Hangzhou is noted for its natural beauty and has always played an important role in Chinese history and poetry. The West Lake in Hangzhou, surrounded by temples and bridges, is a small pearl. A traditional Chinese saying in praise of Hangzhou is based on the opposition of heaven and earth. God has his heaven, it goes, but on earth there is Hangzhou and Suzhou, which became rivals in beauty to the harmony of Heaven. Van grew up in an area with old Chinese roots but where new ideas and thoughts penetrated deeply at the end of the 19th century once the opening of China became a reality.



Yuan Shikai, 1st president of the Chinese Republic (1912-16). Bettmann/CORBIS

His father Yuan Zhongfu belonged to the local elite, which helped support the transition to a new government. He was educated as a lawyer at the university for politics and law in Zhejiang and, as mentioned, continued his studies in Japan. Where he stood politically and how he saw these changes, we do not know. Presumably, he was among those who rejoiced that the late Qing dynasty could no longer throw up obstacles to progress. At the same time, he was hesitant about all-too-hasty reforms that could unbalance the country and its economy. He himself was apolitical and had no political ambitions. He declined when he was offered a political post. Only once did he seem political when, in the 1920s, he helped plan a failed rebellion against a local warlord. He acted as a legal advisor, originally under the name *Legal Offices of Yuan-cui Van*. A nephew has maintained a bit of Yuan Zhongfu's business in Shanghai:

"In 1920, we moved to Jinggangsi Xiang near Hangzhou Station. In the morning, our living room was our uncle's office, where he met with his clients. There were many people who wanted to talk to him. Those who came late had to wait a long time. He was very popular and well-known. He also earned a very good living. But he kept the lifestyle he had always had. At that time, a family with a very large income kept a beautiful rickshaw, called a baoche, and had personnel in their employ for it. They had a bell beneath their feet that could be used when there were too many people or vehicles in the way. The bell acted as assistance to the man pulling the rickshaw, but it was also a way to show off. Uncle had one but had stopped using it a long time before.

He always wore a long garb and a gentleman's hat with an umbrella in his hand. It was rare to see him in a vehicle. He had businesses in both Shanghai and Hangzhou. He always bought a fourth-class ticket on the train – that is, the hardest seats, the slowest speed, and packed compartments. But Uncle was indifferent, as if it was quite natural."

In addition to his legal business, Yuan Zhongfu also launched a number of industrialization projects, and that became his

primary occupation over the years. Alongside his legal business, he ran a metal factory in Wu-lin, a silkworm business, *Cuisheng*, and a silk factory, *Weicheng Silk*, in Hangzhou. He was also involved in the manufacture of tea and had money in a rickshaw rental business, coal production, and other commitments. Among other things, he was the cofounder of a bank and, later, a chemical business in Shanghai. Zhejiang is a center for silk production, which was one of China's most important export goods. In those years, many businesses in China were founded to promote silk production and make it efficient. Japan had taken the lead in silk exports, so there was reason for concern in China and a need for innovation. One of the ways was to improve conditions for the hatching of silk moth eggs and the reeling of silk from cocoons. In the years between 1912 and 1924, about 200 mechanical firms were established in Zhejiang, which could repair and produce machines and other tools. So on this point, too, Yuan Zhongfu was a trendsetter. His machinery business not only produced machines for silk production but also provided machinery to others in addition to training technicians to assist other firms. China needed professional labor power. Therefore, the training of technicians was a very important contribution to the rebuilding of China.

A nephew, who studied fisheries technology, recalled that Zhongfu had said to him:

"China can be saved with the help of technology. One must learn technology thoroughly. Less talk and more work. Since you have chosen the field of fisheries, then love it and use all your energy on what you have chosen."

Silk larvae production was launched with assistance from Japanese experts, who taught the breeding of silk larvae. A nephew recalls the business with a choice of words that instinctively leads the mind to Van's later firm:

"At the beginning of 1930, he formed the Cuisheng Silk Larvae Factory outside of Gengshan Gate. Many rooms were built to breed silk larvae as



Van's father, Yuan Zhongfu (1872-1952), was educated as a jurist, but from the 1920s he devoted himself particularly to his businesses in Hangzhou and Shanghai. After his departure to Denmark in 1935, Van kept in regular contact with his father through letters but never saw him again.

well as cold storage rooms to keep the larvae. Such refrigeration equipment was rare in China. Living quarters and a large cafeteria were built for several hundred employees. Some large sheds were also built for machines to keep the leaves dry in rainy weather. The investment was enormous. It quickly succeeded in getting the label Tianguan Silk Worm Eggs out on the market. The product was well received by local farmers. There were many advantages to the new product: quickly-growing silk larvae, fewer diseases, and greater production. As a result, the Weisheng factory improved its silk products. The state received foreign currency and tax income. Earnings for farmers rose. All the technicians and employees got more in wages and a secure workplace. This is evidence of what a talented businessman could do for his country and his people. It is not just empty talk, it's true."

Shanghai and Hangzhou were the two cities to which Van's father commuted to run his businesses. He always dressed modestly in a long cotton costume with cloth shoes on his feet and an umbrella, which could also serve as a walking cane, and a bag. He was no epicure but preferred air-dried pork with a little soy, eggs, and peanuts with salt and pepper. He took cold baths winter and summer and said: "That is why I've never caught cold in my entire life." That is the way family members remembered him. He knew, Van wrote, that nothing comes of itself and that money could be used better on other things than superficial luxury.

In the family, he was remembered as the last of a large and enterprising family that was destroyed by the Communist system, and he was remembered, too, as a person who tried to take care of relatives who got into difficulties. We do not know the extent of Zhongfu's businesses or details about production, but Van later wrote about his father that "his spirit as a pioneer and his tenacity have supported me incredibly in the formation of Daloon Food Co. in Denmark".

Everything Van's father had built gradually broke down after the Japanese invasion in the 1930s and the war in the 1940s. When a new government took power in 1949, it turned out that Yuan Zhongfu and his

family represented an economic class that the Communist system wanted to repress.

Shenshang – China's new elite

From a Western point of view, it might seem exotic that a Chinese person chose to study in Denmark. Seen from a Chinese point of view, it looks different. Since the middle of the 19th century, after China was opened by force and made accessible to trade with foreigners, there were foreign districts in a large number of cities. Commerce was stimulated, and a whole new Chinese social class emerged that no longer belonged to the old hierarchy of mandarins, civil servants, but rose by virtue of business and gradually developed into a new elite. They were called *shenshang*, at once academically educated and businessmen, and this was something new. The coastal zones led the way, and Shanghai especially was a center and particularly important in this development as China's most enterprising city and the one with the most extensive international connections. The starting point for the understanding of the development is the Chinese state's lack of ability to support and promote new industry and trade, which, therefore, was concentrated in private hands and depended on private initiative. Ultimately, this class gave up supporting what they considered to be ineffective imperial rule. This was the background for the revolution of 1911, which led to the fall of empire.

Essential to the emergence of the new elite was the foundation of industry. Light industry in which Van's father was engaged was among the most important. Often, local craftsmen founded machine shops; and, in this context, Van's father was an exception. His starting point was Shanghai, and he was thus a typical representative of the group that wanted to make a fortune in Shanghai and had a base in Zhejiang. For the development of this new class of industrialists, who also founded chambers of commerce and other associations, contact with the foreigners who lived in Shanghai was critical. Of great importance,

too, were the values of this class, which were often based on the Confucian values of classical Chinese education such as loyalty and knowledge of old Chinese culture, something that was deeply connected to a powerful national sentiment and thus a desire to build a new strong China through industrialization. A typical feature was also a fixed family structure, which meant that, as the firm gradually expanded, much weight was placed on being able to bring in sons, brothers, or other family members as opposed to outsiders. It was into just such a role as a partner and later successor Van's father had thought his son would step.

Many of those who helped build up industry also had an eye for the imbalances in China in which agriculture limped behind – so much so that it sometimes could not even satisfy food demand. Right at the beginning of the 1920s, there was a crisis in Chinese agriculture, and a far-sighted businessman such as Van's father was attentive to the significance of the fact that, through mechanization, agriculture achieved better production conditions. This was the background for Van's trip to Denmark. Therefore, if we are to answer the question of why Van really came to Denmark, a large part of the answer lies in the economic development that was going on in that part of China in those years.

S.C. Van

Van was born into a family structure that, despite the many tumults of the time, continued to build on Confucian values. The moral example and respect for the relationships into which one enters were decisive. Subjects should respect their masters, children respect their parents, the young respect the old, and men go ahead of women. This was fixed, and any breach with this structure was also a breach with the harmony that was crucial for the existence of society. Everyone has a place in the cosmos. Children must obey their parents, but the eldest son has privileges in relation to the younger.

Van himself related that his father had great knowledge of the Chinese language, the Chinese philosophers Confucius and Mengzi, and old works about China's history, summarized in China as *Lun-Meng-Chun-Qiu*, and he could quote many of the wonderful poems from the Tang and Song periods. Van's name, 'Chunnian', derived from one of the classical works authored by the philosopher Zhuangzi.

Yuan Zhongfu was married several times. The first marriage was childless. His first wife died quite young in 1901. Van's mother, Mrs. Shi, was born in 1878 and bore the family name Shen. She had been married before and had a girl and a boy from an earlier marriage. Her husband had died early and the mother and two children found themselves in a difficult economic situation. Pursuant to Chinese custom, her two children were raised in the father's family. According to an account from the grandchild, Lili, Mrs. Shi, whose husband had been employed by Van's father, then moved in with Yuan Zhongfu. Van himself related that she was not his father's real wife but had been a sort of housekeeper with more of the status of a concubine than a real wife. This indicated that Van's father did not regard her as a real wife. Of Sai-chiu's upbringing in Hangzhou, there are not many accounts. At one point, Yuan Zhongfu left mother and child and settled down permanently in Shanghai, where he ran his businesses. The mother then lived alone for many years with Van and saw to his upbringing and early school years. In Shanghai, the father lived with another wife, Mrs. Peng, and the rest of the family -- including Van's younger brother Chunyi with whom Van later had a close relationship.

Mrs. Peng was born in 1918. Chunyi was placed above Sai-Chiu because of his mother's more refined status in the family hierarchy. But he did not have the same abilities as Sai-Chiu to take the family's businesses forward. His father decided, therefore, to bet on Sai-Chiu and saw to it that he came to Shanghai, where he was then raised in his father's house and generally lost contact with his mother. Of his little brother, Chunyi, his father later wrote to Van that he "was damaged at birth and, as a consequence, lacked the force to carry out a great number of tasks,



Van's mother, Mrs. Shi (1878-1942), came into Van's father's house as a widow and had a son with him who received the name Sai-Chiu. In his early years, she lived with him in Hangzhou, but at the beginning of the 1920s, his father took Van to Shanghai, where he was raised and only had limited contact with his mother, who never had the opportunity to say farewell to him in 1935. She died during the war in 1942.

and he cannot be of help to me". In the family, it is told that Chunyi had a tough time. He lived with his father in Shanghai also as an adult and had the task of opening the door when his father came home. If he did not do it quickly enough, he was scolded. However, Van was also brought up strictly with corporal punishment if he did not live up to his father's expectations.

Both Mrs. Shi and Mrs. Peng died during the war against Japan. Van's mother, Mrs. Shi, died in 1942, Mrs. Peng in 1940. After their deaths, Van's father married the far younger Zhang Qiming, who was born in 1906.

As with most people, Van's earliest childhood memories are vague. However, he recalled that he was "spirited and brave" and was called "the king of the kid pack". He recalled his father as strict and his mother as loving and that he was very interested in the kaleidoscopic universe of Chinese gods. His childhood home was in one of the best neighborhoods in town. Van remembered that there were often fires in the city and that many buildings went up in flames: "My friends and I would go to the site to see the destruction from the fire. And, almost every time, we could see burned bodies, lying charred on the floor." An upbringing in China made a child familiar with the seriousness of life at an early point: "Death and the dead were always present." He was also reminded of the potter's field where the dead were buried beneath a thin layer of topsoil, and he remembered luminous skeletons, which were explained to him in this way: that work in the mines and metal industry had given them metal poisoning, which had a fluoridating effect on the bones of the dead. Whether that explanation holds up will be left in the air.

After six years of schooling at home, he entered the Hu-lan middle school in Hangzhou and later gymnasium (high school), first in Zhejiang and later in Shanghai. He subsequently related that he was a lazy student who, at one point, even got thrown out of school, reportedly for striking a teacher who had accused him of wasting time on drinking and visiting women of easy virtue instead of studying. How much truth there is in this, we do not know, but no one who knew Van could be in doubt that he was someone with more than ordinary proficiency and a thorough familiarity with the culture of his own country, which made it easy for

him to understand differences in Denmark and what it was that was peculiar to the Danes.

There was a lot of rote learning in the Chinese child-rearing system; and, throughout his life, Van could recite classical Chinese poetry by heart. Calligraphy was also a part of the studies, so Van became a refined person who, in addition to his real vocation, could also write beautifully. Van recalled he had to practice calligraphy by writing on the envelopes of the many letters his father received every day.

Van’s father monitored the boy’s education closely, and he had strict requirements. In the early years, teaching was private, and great weight was placed on Van learning classical works (in Chinese *Si-Shu, Wu-Jing*), the four books and five classics that are part of the upbringing of any refined young Chinese man. At that point in the 1920s, Van was taken from his home in Hangzhou to Shanghai by his father, who thereafter monitored his upbringing strictly. Family tradition has it that the father rather brutally and without warning removed the son from his mother. The reason was that he believed the boy would be spoiled by his mother’s pampering and softness. Mrs. Shi never saw her son again. Nor did she receive any reports about him, let alone have any contact with Zhongfu, who wanted nothing to do with her. There is not much about his mother in Van’s correspondence, but we get a single glimpse in a letter from Japan from 1935. Here, he asks whether she is still dependent on opium. We also know about her that she had bound feet, which made it difficult for her to walk, even after she had removed the binding. One may feel great pity for Mrs. Shi. The two children from her first marriage grew up with the family of their dead father, and Mrs. Shi did not see much of them later in life. When Sai-Chiu, whom she worshipped, was also taken from her, it is not difficult to imagine her tremendous grief and loss.

However, later, Sai-Chiu’s granddaughter Lili came to live with her grandmother as some sort of solace. Unfortunately, it had pitiable consequences: Lili contracted typhus, and her feeble, broken grandmother also became infected and was hospitalized in

李白 Li Bai

靜夜思

床前明月光
疑是地上霜
舉頭望明月
低頭思故鄉

NIGHT THOUGHT
The bright moonlight

in front of the bed

appears like frost

on the ground. I look up

at the fair moon, and

lowering my head,

I think of home.

Li Bai (701-62)(trans. Qiu

Xiaolong)

One of the most well-known Chinese poems, written by the Tang poet Li Bai. In short sentences and just 20 characters, Li Bai sets the person into both the cosmos and earthly reality and identity and even places the person in relation to his (or her) home. The poem epitomizes a Chinese view of the human condition.

Kommenterede [RD1]: Don't quite know how to fix the poem. Is there any way to use a smaller font on the Chinese characters? I've set in the text suggested by Susanne, but is that translation copyrighted?

Hangzhou, where she died. In the family, it is recounted that Mrs. Shi always softly called for her “Xiao-Mao”, which means “little cat”, which was her pet name for Sai-Chiu. She believed to the last that, at any moment, he might step through the door and be reunited with her. According to Chinese custom, it is the son who buries his mother, but this could not be done since both the elder son and Van were gone. Van’s younger brother Chunyi ultimately had to see to this important ceremony.

As a result of these circumstances, Van learned several years later of his mother’s demise, and he was naturally deeply saddened and depressed at the news.

Shanghai

In those years, Shanghai was the most cosmopolitan city in the Far East. Between 1910 and 1927, the population of Shanghai grew from 1.3 million to around 2.6. On the main street, Nanjing Road, modern department stores were built; and, on the harbor street, The Bund, there were large bank buildings such as Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking and other firms. Life in Shanghai was far from the realities of most of China’s approximately 400 million people, who mostly still lived in the countryside.

Shanghai is located geographically at the mouth of the Huangpu River. The international part of the city, which was the trade center, was on the west bank of the Huangpu and north of The Bund with its banks, hotels, customs houses, and other monumental edifices built in Western style along the river. South of the international quarter – in the center of town – was the Chinese quarter, and toward the west was the so-called French Concession, which was under French jurisdiction. Europeans lived in the international quarter and in the French Concession but so did many Chinese businessmen. This was where their offices were. Toward the east were shipyards, warehouses, and industrial suburbs. Each of the foreign enclaves were characterized by their homelands, since in the relevant

*Opposite page:
The Bund along Shanghai’s harbor front,
photograph from 1926. Bettmann Corbis*



THE BUND LOOKING NORTH

areas European law was applicable, and the building style was influenced by the English and French traditions, respectively. Van's family lived in the international quarter – The International Settlement – which was, in reality, the English concession area, designed like a little London with asphalt streets, public transport, shops, and street lights, which gave the impression of being in Europe.

It was all a very complex urban structure with many authorities and jurisdictions, a motley population and, during the 1920s, a fascinating international atmosphere. The night life was legendary, but so was the business life and criminality in the city. Crime cartels controlled smuggling and a large part of the commerce. All social levels lived side by side. Much has been written about this. An example is the captivating account of the city built up around the biography penned by Robert Bickers of an English policeman who worked with the police force serving the International Settlement, *Empire Made Me: An Englishman Adrift in Shanghai* (2003).



The Great Northern Telegraph Co. laid telegraph lines from Denmark to China. In 1871, the connection between Shanghai and Nagasaki in Japan was opened. Photograph of the office in Shanghai, around 1900.
Gyldendals Billedarkiv

Today, Shanghai in the Twenties and Thirties is intimately connected with the conception of a Chinese gangster milieu, a hectic night life, gambling dens and brothels, easy money, criminality, liquidations, and a debauched class of the nouveau riche, and this image contains much that is correct. Eventually, more than three million people lived in the city, equal to the entire population of Denmark. The so-called Green Gang controlled Shanghai's underworld against which the corrupt police were powerless, and hardly anyone who ran a business could avoid a relationship with this Mafia-like organization. This was also true of an ordinary businessman such as Yuan Zhongfu. Life was rough in the city, and Van remembered having seen liquidations on the open street. Kidnapping and the killing of hostages if ransom was not paid were also part of the daily agenda. There was hardly any doubt that, if you spent a few years in Shanghai, you went away with a certain robustness, prepared for a life that brought rapid changes.

In the 1920s, there were fewer than 500 (quite young) Danes in Shanghai. Around 80 were *au pair* girls who worked for other Danes, while the rest were employed by Danish or foreign trade companies

that had a presence in China or dealt with Chinese public institutions that played a big role in the Chinese infrastructure – for example, the tax authorities or the postal and telegraph services, which employed many foreigners. One well-known Danish businessman in Shanghai was Vilhelm Meyer, who lived in the city from 1905 to 1935 and ran the firm Andersen, Meyer and Company, but it is unknown whether Van or his father met him. A number of Danish sailors also came to Shanghai. At the end of the 1920s, fewer than 100 ships called at Shanghai annually, so the Danish flag was not unknown in these quarters. The Danish presence was visible. Therefore, it might not be entirely as exotic as one might think that Van would come to Denmark. Denmark was represented by a consul general and a consul, and there were also subsidiaries or branches of large Danish businesses and a number of other permanently-residing Danes who, in the early years, were enough to maintain the activities of a Danish church. In the years from 1927 to 1933, there was a small Danish congregation in Shanghai, where Danes who were stationed by Det Østasiatiske Kompagni (ØK) (East Asiatic Company Ltd.) or Det Store Nordiske Telegraf-Selskab (The Great Northern Telegraph Company) could come to worship. It changed at the beginning of the 1930s. A number of Danes went home, and disagreements about the duties of the pastor, Professor N.H. Sørensen led to the closing of the church.

The new Republic of China became a reality, consisting of two parts, each with its own form of government. On one hand, there was the greater part of China, which in those years was ruled by so-called *warlords*, military leaders who maintained control of various territories for shorter or longer durations. On the other hand, there were cities that, by virtue of treaties, were open to foreigners, where Europeans and Chinese lived side by side, to which Shanghai belonged. Here, there were modern banks, industrial firms, universities and other educational institutions. In these cities, there was calm and order that contrasted with the uncertainty in the rest of China. Even though the treaties had been forced on China by foreign powers, they created a basis for economic development that benefitted those residing in the trade cities. For a man like Yuan Zhongfu, there were opportunities in a city like Shanghai, which



European dances were in fashion at cafés in Shanghai, 1926. Bettmann/CORBIS

supported his standard of living and provided contact with foreigners. This was also the background for sending his son to Denmark. Yuan Zhongfu had embraced the new, modern education system and was capable of exploiting the opportunities contact with Europe provided. An enterprising man who could hobnob with Europeans and, at the same time, remain anchored in China and the culture of that country could go far. We do not know enough about Van's father to be able to draw a precise portrait of him and his thought processes, but we do not go far wrong if we presume here that, as a member of the business and industrial elite, he helped select representatives to the city council, supported new education principles, followed the financial markets by reading newspapers and periodicals that were being published in Shanghai – and was generally forward-sighted. A new form of self-consciousness arose in the leadership classes, which also led to new moral viewpoints about taking care of the weak and a sense of responsibility to local society. These developments were of great importance in a country in which the state was so weak. Or, put in modern terms, it was about the development of civil society. Shanghai was a city of great contrast. Here, too, in July 1921, a small Communist Party was founded on a form of Marxist-Leninist ideology, inspired by both Russian anarchists and the Russian Revolution. One of the party's founders was the 25-year-old Mao Zedong, who settled in Shanghai in 1923.

Van lived in Shanghai from the beginning of the 1920s until 1935, interrupted by a sojourn to Japan. So, he did not spend his entire youth in Shanghai. Sometime after 1930, he was sent to school in Japan, which represented a modern, well-functioning society from which a young Chinese man could learn much. Young Van had already learned English. Now, he was to be schooled in Japanese. However, the details of this period, its length and benefits, are lost in uncertainty. Van would later talk about strict discipline and teachers who abused students. He also remembered that there was trouble when he and some friends lit a camping stove in a room to cook some food.

Whether that was the reason he was recalled home, we do not know for sure. Van's passport photo from the beginning of the 1930s shows him in a Japanese school uniform, but he did not later converse about his time in Japan. We do not know exactly why Van was sent to Japan although we may infer that his father absolutely believed he could learn something about modern society there as he himself had done. At the same time, however, Japan was beginning to show aggressive tendencies. And in 1931, Japan occupied Manchuria. Discipline in a Japanese school hardly lacked for anything, so there are good reasons to believe that education in Japan at that time was an experience many would prefer to repress.

As a more mature boy in Hangzhou, Van had helped his father transport silkworm eggs from the breeding factory to the many small country homes that continued the process by hatching the eggs into larvae. The eggs were in small bags in paper packets, and the transport took place by rickshaw. Therefore, Van knew the Hangzhou vicinity better than most. After his education in Japan, he had reached an age in which it was natural for him to begin to take part in his father's business. One of Van's memories from Shanghai was a wedding party at the beginning of the 1930s in which his own father acted in the stead of the bride's father. The bride's father had been a well-to-do ship-owner and a client, but he had been murdered after a kidnapping. Yuan Zhongfu had stepped up to take his place at the ceremony. One of the wedding guests was the notorious Du Yesheng, a leader in one of Shanghai's secret societies, the already famous Green Gang, Shanghai's most notorious criminal organization.

Yuan Zhongfu had a wide network of contacts in the international society of Shanghai. One of his contacts was the Danish firm, the East Asiatic Co. (ØK), which purchased soybeans from one of the many firms for which Yuan was legal advisor. For Van, the connection to ØK became his first encounter with a Danish businessman. It was also ØK that was decisive when Yuan Zhongfu began to consider whether his son might not benefit from a trip abroad. A son of a Chinese acquaintance at ØK had attended the International People's College (Internationale Højskole) in Elsinore and had good experiences. People

in Shanghai might not have known much about Denmark, but reports reaching China had it that it was an agricultural country at an advanced level and that one could learn much about modern agriculture and the cooperative movement there.

One of Van's cousins, Shinan Zhou, has an account that comes a little closer to the circumstances surrounding Van's journey to Denmark. His cousin speaks of Van's father as *Er Jiu*, which means "second uncle". Van's father was brother number two of a large flock of children:

"In 1934, one of the business connections from Lide Co. told Er Jiu that there was an opportunity to send two young people to Denmark to study. He was very interested in this since Denmark was famous for its advanced agriculture, and China was also a large agricultural country. This was a good opportunity to learn something from other lands. First, he sent a letter to his eldest son Sai-Chiu, who was in Japan, and asked him to come home in order to travel to Denmark. Second, he came to my parents' home to get me to go along on the trip. My father thought it was okay, but my mother was not happy about the idea. She thought it was too far to travel to such a small country that had no significance.

One winter evening, cousin Sai-Chiu came home from Japan. Er Jiu brought him over to our house. Er Jiu asked my father to predict his fate and future. It was father's way of relaxing at that time. I remember the result was that cousin Sai-Chiu would become a big businessman when he became older. This turned out to be true: when the Daloan firm became famous among food producers, Sai-Chiu was over forty. The same day, my mother decided I should not go along to Denmark."

Thus, Van wound up travelling alone once his trip to Denmark became a reality in 1935.



With this passport, Van travelled to Denmark in 1935. In the picture, he is dressed in a Japanese student uniform. A residence permit is inscribed in the passport for two years, which was later extended many times.

The Danish model

In Confucian thought, concepts such as loyalty and being a role model for others play a decisive role. It was not by force but by good example that one gets others to cooperate and make progress, and it is by openness to this good example that one develops oneself and becomes capable of doing things for others. When, in 1937 after a couple of years' residence in Denmark, Van was to answer the question why he had come to Denmark, he took his premise in this way of thinking. He wrote about it in the *Askov Yearbook [Askov-Bogen]* (1936/37) after his stay at the international high school. We do not know whether the purpose of his visit to Denmark was so clear to him at the beginning. But the stay had been aimed at the very experience he writes about (in his first attempt to write Danish):

"Out in the world, Denmark is known for its advanced agriculture; therefore, it is of interest for us to become acquainted with it. The Chinese government's statistics show that 80-85% of China's population is directly or indirectly occupied with agriculture. That is, the peasantry is the most significant class in Chinese society; its conditions have influence on the entire country's economy and security. Therefore, it is a matter first and foremost of improving the daily living conditions for Chinese farmers in order thereby to elevate the entire country to a new flowering."

Van then recounted China's recent dramatic history: Japan's occupation of Manchuria, natural catastrophes, and the poor organization of agriculture with the oppression of farmers by rich landowners. This provoked a crisis like "a thunder storm over a sleeping humanity." Van related: "Talented young men traveled out to villages to encourage the inhabitants to cast off their burdens and become free through enlightenment." There is hardly any doubt that, by these "talented young men," Van was thinking of the Communists and their endeavors to get a foothold among the rural population. He continues:

"The government also realized the necessity of introducing the cooperative movement, establishing farmer banks to transform the

country's economic system, establishing public schools to disseminate information about the better use and exploitation of the land and production in northwestern China. But China lacked experience for such a huge job; we need good role models and the guidance of skilled people; without that, we cannot fulfill the demands that the moment requires from us – we need to borrow a compass to guide us, even though the compass was invented in China. We must learn from progressive lands such as America, Russia, Denmark, etc. Yet, what matters for China is not quickly to introduce big agriculture and modern tools. Our solution is small-scale use and crofting, and what we need is smaller agricultural machines, appropriate to such small-scale use. We do not lack pure scientific theory but proficiency in practical and rational work. We do not need to push to the state the responsibility for the rebuilding of agriculture. It must be able to be done through cooperation, by a mutual understanding through which an organization may be created that can become a healthy part of the system, which may be worthy of cooperating with other of the world's most important cultural lands.

What we need is found neither in America nor Russia but in Denmark. Even in the 19th century, Denmark had carried out reforms: the abolition of villeinage and the tithe, the disappearance of land valuation taxes, the establishment of crofting, etc. In all this, China has the best role model for the rebuilding of Chinese agriculture."

And of the picture of Denmark in China at the time, he wrote:

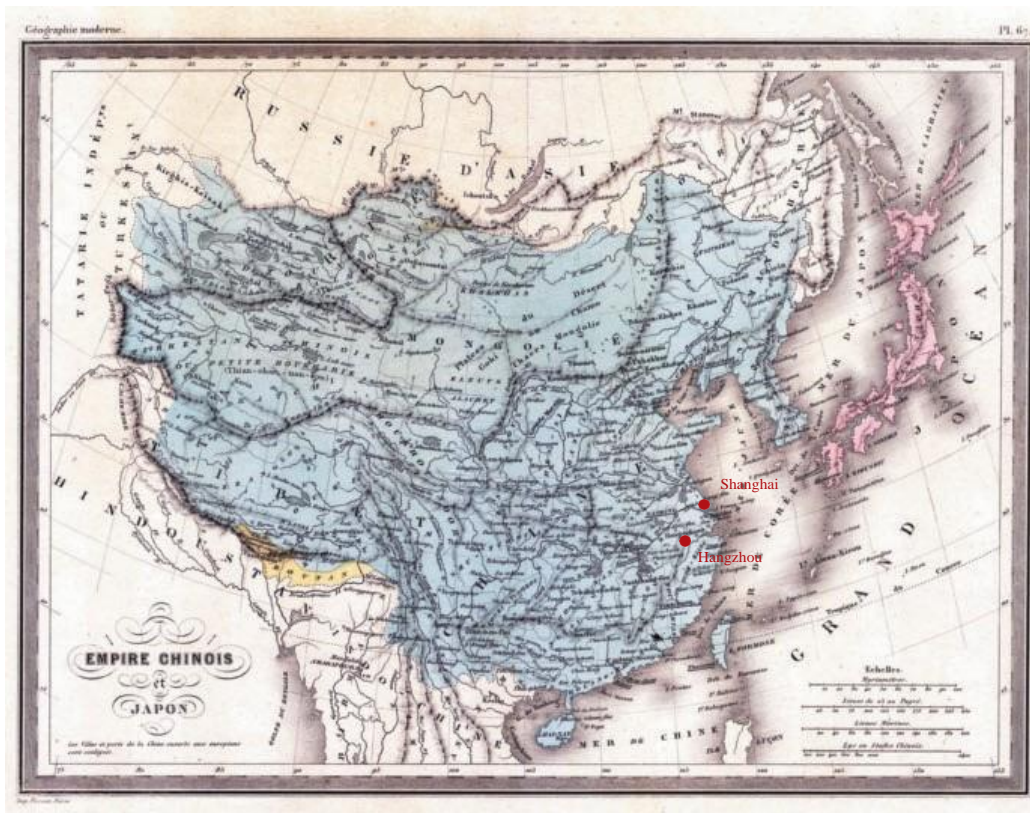
"In recent years, Denmark has also been discussed in China. In magazines, periodicals and lectures, we hear the name of Denmark. China humbly respects and welcomes the best from the world. That is why I travelled here to study, and many of my countrymen would like to visit this splendid, peaceful Nordic country."

For the older Van, it was apparently the encounter with a completely different society, an acquaintanceship with the general knowledge provided by folk high schools (see caption on p. 51), and the experience of fellowship in the cooperative movement that were the most important experiences from his initial years in Denmark. And it might

have been something like this that spurred Van's father, Yuan Zhongfu, when he decided that his son would benefit from a trip to Europe with Denmark as a goal. It was not a topic that was to be negotiated. His father believed that Van would benefit from such a trip, and so the matter was decided.

If one is familiar with international life in Shanghai and the view there of Denmark and compares this understanding with Yuan Zhongfu's enterprising personality and enthusiasm for developing China, it is not at all strange or exotic that he sent his son to Denmark. If everything went as planned, Van would come home in a few years with useful knowledge about mechanized agriculture, and he would only have been one of many Chinese who sought education outside of China in those years.

But we are still in the year 1935, and Van was 23 years old. The plan was for Van to be away for two years and then come back and continue his work at his father's business. It turned out differently. Events in China and in the world developed in such a way that these two years were extended to 37. Van never saw his father again or the world he left behind. His father's firm disappeared, a victim to war and, later, Communism, which did not exhibit much understanding for the significance of the efforts men like Yuan Zhongfu had made for a new China.



An older map of China with the Zhejiang Province in southern China, showing the location of Van's two cities, Hangzhou and Shanghai.



Arrival

The trip to Denmark went by ship from Shanghai to Tianjin, from there to Beijing, then by train to Harbin, Manchuria, and from Harbin by the Trans-Siberian Railway to Moscow. From here, the tour continued to Berlin, where there was time to take pictures of buildings and experience the plague upon Europe at the time in the form of a parade of swastika-carrying demonstrators. The journey took a couple of weeks. So, Copenhagen was not Van's first glimpse of Europe.

Van descended from the Berlin train at Copenhagen Central Station on 25 March 1935. A fixed reference point was ØK's headquarters, and he immediately went there. His father had arranged it so that ØK would provide Van the money he received from home. From there, he went to the Chinese legation in Hellerup, where he was expected. He was quartered in northern Copenhagen with a Mrs. Bredsdorff, who had a connection with ØK. Van's initial encounter with the Danish capital was positive. Van himself relates that he was excited by a stroll down the walking street of Strøget, past the King's New Square (Kongens Nytorv), and everything else he saw in the city during those first weeks.

But the intention was not to spend his time sightseeing in Wonderful Copenhagen. Through ØK, it was arranged that he would stay on a farm in northern Zealand near Gilleleje, where he could get an initial impression of what modern agriculture was. The farm was called Lundebakke Farm, owned by Asger Lundebak, who belonged to the Danish Lutheran Mission, a religious denomination that has a strong influence in the area. This had no great significance for Van, whose memory was more focused on the smell from spreading manure. Van could not forget that. There was, after all, a certain distance from life on the polished floors of Shanghai to a Danish farm. Even though Shanghai could hardly brag it was the world's cleanest city, there was a somewhat different aroma. Moreover, Van was not alone. There was another Chinese man with him. Who it was, beyond that his name was Lin, has not been determined – nor what he was actually

Opposite page:

Van had the opportunity to study Danish agriculture at close range. He interned several times at Danish farms. The picture is from 1936, when Van lived at Blangsted Farm near Odense for a period.



During his brief stay in Berlin in March 1935 between two trains, Van caught a whiff of the particular political atmosphere created when a Nazi SA corps marched with drum rolls through the city.



Van in 1935 at Lundebackegård.

doing in Denmark. But at least there was someone to speak Chinese with at a time when Danish must have seemed an overwhelmingly different and difficult language. During his stay at Lundebacke Farm, Van came into contact with a pastor who invited him to participate in a meeting about the China mission at the YMCA building in Copenhagen. The meeting proceeded to describe the poverty in China and the need for a Christian mission, so that the Chinese could acquire Western civilization. Van remembered throughout his life how, without being informed in advance, he was pointed out as an example of what civilization and Christianity could accomplish in improving the Chinese if only the mission received the necessary means to do so. Van, who was not a Christian, was livid at being exploited in this way and also at the distorted picture drawn of what was really needed to ensure more prosperity in China. Anything that smacked of the mission remained a thorn in his side ever since.

Of course, as a complete stranger, one encountered prejudices. Danes did not know very much about the Chinese except that there were a lot of them. Napoleon is quoted as saying: “Quand la Chine s’éveillerat, le monde tremblera” – ‘When China awakes, the world will tremble’. As the situation looks at the beginning of the 21st century, these words seem prophetic, but that was not an idea that suited Van. He distanced himself everywhere he could from the idea of a ‘yellow peril’ threatening the world and world peace. For him, China was and remained a peaceable nation, which could not threaten the West by virtue of size, commercial talent, or richness of resources: “No, what China wants is to build world peace,” he said, and he ascribed great significance to the Confucian ideals of morality, harmony, humanity, and justice that he believed they would guide China’s political development. Whether this was correct or not, time will tell. About this, like so much else that has to do with China, the oft-cited proverb of Zhou Enlai about the French Revolution is relevant: it is too early to say anything about its significance.

The International People's College

In May that same year began a new phase of Van's residence in Denmark when he began to participate in a two-month summer course at the International People's College [Den Internationale Højskole] in Elsinore as an introduction to life in Denmark. The institution was founded in 1921 by Peter Manniche, who was the leader when Van was there. Manniche had been to China and visited Shanghai in 1934. We do not know whether Van or his father ever met him there. We only know that Van was happy at the folk high school, and they had a positive impression of him. The objective was to contribute to international understanding by assembling people from different – often, hostile – countries in the Danish high school tradition. The surroundings at that time were modest, and the atmosphere was international. Van settled in well. The school offered a great many courses on international relations, the labor movement, sociology, language, science, and contemporary politics. The great question at the time turned on the two ideologies of Communism and Nazism with which Van became familiar for the first time in a European context. Van shared a room with another foreigner about whom he later only remembered that he was either African or African-American. The school was otherwise known in those years as “Red”, and there were many unemployed students and students with Communist sympathies. Another area in which the International People's College was on the forefront of developments was a relaxed attitude toward male students visiting female students' rooms. In 1935, there was a bit of internal conflict at the school, so Van's visit came at a time when there was a great appetite for debate.

Van was familiar with Communism from China; and, at that time, the young man could hardly deny a certain sympathy for an ideology that had solidarity with the country's poor as part of its program, particularly since he saw it as the most important task to raise the standard of living in the Chinese countryside. He also remembered that there were other proponents of Communism who were interested in conditions in China.



The International People's College in Elsinore was founded in 1921 by Peter Manniche. Van spent several months here in 1935. His stay there was his first encounter with Danish folk high school culture in a special international version.

Of course, back home in Shanghai, his father was eager for news from his son. He wanted to hear whether Van had received money (200 *yuan*) from home, what the lay of the land was for foreign students in Denmark, whether he could learn another language, and how it was being at the International People's College from 1 May. Money was not a problem right now, the father wrote, everything costs money. The important thing was:

"... I want to be satisfied that you are studying seriously and diligently. That is what I expect of you".

The Director

China's consul general in Denmark in the years from 1930 to 1950 was H.O. Lange, founder of Nordisk Fjer (Nordic Feather). The firm, which was established in 1901 in Svendborg, imported feathers from, *inter alia*, China, where a subsidiary had been opened. Lange himself had resided in China for extended periods, and he met there Yuan Zhongfu, who, of course, had contacted the consul general about his son's study trip to Denmark before he left. Van had a feeling that it did not exactly please the consul general that he was attending a folk high school that might be considered to have socialist sympathies, but it did not blemish Lange's positive impression of Van. Van's acquaintance with Lange became a huge source of support in the coming years, when things turned a different direction than originally predicted.

In Shanghai, it was all about trade and industry. But, in Denmark, agriculture was at the center. Through H.O. Lange, a new internship at a farm was arranged. This time, it was a farm in Priorskov on the island of Lolland, the steward of which had been a missionary in China. Van was a paying guest with a certain obligation to provide physical labor for the enterprise, which employed many Polish guest workers. They truly engaged in drudge labor. The main benefit for Van, beyond the experience of a completely different society, was probably his encounter with an agricultural sector in a transition period, which was still labor-intensive, but mechanization was beginning to take hold.

From Nordisk Fjer (Nordic Feather) headquarters at Langelinie in Copenhagen.



Thus, Van gained insight into new agricultural machines that were unknown in China.

Van's interest in agriculture was aroused. There is much to indicate that Van's father believed that a few years on his own would be good for his son, who was not mature enough to take over his father's businesses. So, the trip to Denmark was probably meant to provide time for reflection. But there was also an idea behind it that had something to do with the need for agricultural reforms in China; and, if that was the intention, it succeeded because Van acquired a genuine interest in agriculture and agricultural products from which he greatly benefitted later in his own firm. At any rate, he spoke of his interest in agriculture to Mrs. Bredsdorff in Gentofte, where he rented a room during his stay in Copenhagen after his time at Priorskov. The question was how Van could move on. This question naturally led to considerations about whether it might not be a good idea to learn Danish, since neither Chinese nor English were widely-known languages among Danish farmers. Initially, Mrs. Bredsdorff sought to connect Van with the well-known Ladelund Landbrugs- og Mælkeriskole [Ladelund Agricultural and Dairy School], located in southern Jutland, where there were good opportunities to learn about dairy operations, but the inquiry had produced a negative result since they would not accept a foreigner who did not speak Danish. Therefore, Mrs. Bredsdorff supported him in his desire to learn Danish. Van remembered that her son Elias Bredsdorff did not believe that it was worth the trouble since Van's stay was for a relatively short period (as planned). So, it would hardly be possible to master Danish properly. Bredsdorff wrote much later that it was Van who believed there was insufficient time to learn Danish. But this version does not hold up, because Van quickly started in on learning the language. Elias Bredsdorff later became a well-known scholar of Nordic literature and lived for many years in England. He and Van lost contact with each other; and not until later, in 2000, did they meet again and Van could invite Bredsdorff on a trip to China.

The next stage along the way was Fyns Stifts Husmandsskole [Diocese of Funen Smallholders' Agricultural School], whose leader was a notable personality, Jakob E. Lange, father of later professor and member of Parliament Morten Lange, whom Van met there.

At Funen, they were not afraid of a language barrier. In October 1935, Van became one of 69 students at this agricultural school. His time until then was definitely not wasted, nor was the coming year at this school, where Van recalled it was like one big family. He could also remember that, when, as a foreigner, one had to remain living there a bit beyond season, the reward came in the form of nice girls, who were there to learn home economics. This was a side of life that Van preserved a good eye for well up in years. He met here a home economics student named Ragnhild, who would later become a vicar's wife. She and her husband, Pastor Viggo Skovmand, became lifelong friends with Van.

After his stay there, Van took another internship at a farm – this time, Blangsted Farm near Odense. From here, he especially remembered that he lived right next to the horse stables and that, when he asked the farm owner one day whether he could have a different room, the answer was that it was part of the education to live like that.

Naturally, Van would not have thrown himself into practical farming without consulting his father first. He feared his father might not believe it was good enough, but he agreed:

“An internship gives you practical skills, and our country lacks people with practical experience right now. So, you will be in an advantageous position with respect to work when you return home to China.”

At the same time, his father recounts that, in principle, he would like to finance a longer theoretical study. On the other hand, his economic situation was somewhat unstable at the moment. It might turn out that his son would need to come home and find work, but with the practical education he had already received in Denmark, that should not be a problem.

Aksel Olsen

It is claimed that the city of Kolding was once called “Little Booskop” after the Dutch city known for its plant nurseries. At any rate, it can be read on the online presentation of the great botanical garden in Kolding that it was designed according to geographic criteria with Chinese trees and shrubs as one of the attractions. The garden was founded in 1917 by Aksel Olsen, whose father, Thomas, was the founder of a plant nursery dynasty of many generations. Aksel Olsen was born in 1887 and, thus, was considerably older than Van. He was trained as a gardener in Denmark and Germany when he began his business with the acquisition of 18 acres of land, called “Siberia,” between Vonsild and Tved in the vicinity of Kolding. There, he cultivated plants from all over the world. Aksel Olsen had a small group of students at his school, and Van had an opportunity to reside there for a part of his education. It was one of the high points. He forged a friend for life in Aksel Olsen, who died in 1982 at the age of 95. Van really learned something about plants from him, which he made use of later. Aksel Olsen had imported many trees and shrubs from China, and he was a famous rhododendron specialist. He even had a species named after him.

Aksel Olsen had never been to China but published in 1930 a book entitled *Op ad Chinas blaa Flod* [Up China's Blue River], which described China's flora as vividly as if he had been there. Even though that was not the case, he knew so much that he and Van were on the same wave length in every respect.

Van related in 1937 in the *Askov Yearbook* about Aksel Olsen:

“I also know a number of students who sacrificed much to seek detailed knowledge and information about the monster China. One of them was the gardener Aksel Olsen, Kolding. He has never been to China and yet has greater theoretical knowledge about China's geography and national character than I do. He has a great deal of sympathy for and understanding of China's current situation. He believes that China has its strengths, in its ability to weather crisis, in its ancient culture, in its many years of experience.”

Aksel Olsen (1887-1982), gardener and head of a plant school. In 1917, he founded the Brøndekjærhøj Plant School in Kolding. And in 1925, he established a geographical botanical garden. Below, he is on the left with a journalist at the beginning of the 1930s.



From Van's time with Aksel Olsen, there is a letter to one Lao Huang. Van writes here that Aksel Olsen's nursery is like "a paradise," that Aksel Olsen treated him "like his own brother," and that Aksel Olsen knew so much about China that he did not find Van's mode of behavior at all strange.

By this point, Van had visited the International People's College, had an internship in Danish agriculture, gone to an agricultural school, and visited an advanced plant nursery. So, his time had been well-spent. Van had really gotten an impression of Denmark in the 1930s with a certain weight on rural areas, but Denmark was still an agricultural country, and he knew about this side of life in Denmark better than many Danes. He had also already met a number of distinctive personalities who helped shape his view of the Danes. Some of them – including Aksel Olsen and his family – remained lifelong friends. Half of his originally-planned two-year stay was left, and Van wanted to spend that time at a proper Danish folk high school – Askov Folk High School near Vejen, Jutland.

Up China's Blue River

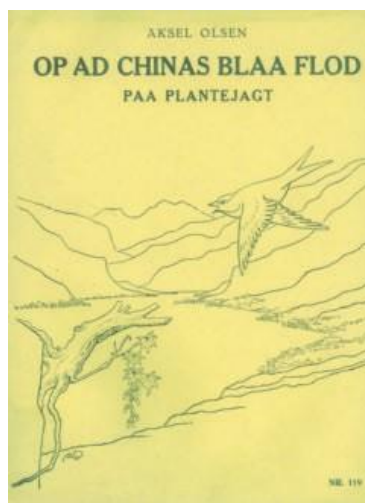
As mentioned, Aksel Olsen had never been in China, but his ability to empathize was great when he wrote his account of China's plants in the form of a fictional travelogue. Today, we are often skeptical when authors pretend to have been somewhere they have not, but it is difficult not to be caught up in Olsen's lively account when he describes the rigors of his "journey":

"We first notice that the carrying poles have gnawed furrows into the bearers' shoulders, which are full of old scars; and, among the youngest, a very young fellow carries a slab of bloody meat on his shoulders. Mr. Scot continues: 'China's workers do not get their daily bread pain-free, but since they have not become Bolsheviks, they do not conceive that things could be different; I have the highest respect for their courage. The grateful looks of the bearers is reward enough

to us for the trouble of hiking in these warm, quiet morning hours. Even the reserved faces of the umbrella bearers brighten. They chatter cheerfully, and we figure they are talking about us in their own dialect and not in a kind way. 'Misplaced softness and indulgence undermines respect,' says Mr. Scot, but to keep the natives under the whip, as travel books all too often counsel, is to accumulate explosives; you get farthest with good treatment; we are all human beings, and the Chinese are no worse than the Europeans. On the day life is at stake, one gets little benefit from people held under the whip'. A little later, the eldest of the bearers calls Mr. Scot and negotiates with him for a while. Mr. Scot translates for us that the bearers are not hesitant at all about carrying us since they think they must do something for their wages, and they suggest that we allow ourselves to be carried from there to a place somewhere into the mountain cliffs where the steep paths begin. We agree; and, under these circumstances, we can enjoy the trip.

We are rocked languidly in our sedan chairs through labyrinths of amazing cliffs with lacerated, vertical or leached walls, full of cracks and shelves and often in the strangest, most fantastic shapes. The cliffs everywhere are of chalk. Many places, there are dripstone caves where old dragons are said to slumber until their time comes, when the country is in great need. Is the need not great enough now? Can it be deep? What more is needed than war with a frightening neighbor, war with oneself, unceasing war for many years between rival generals, between police and an incredible horde of robbers, between old times and new. The time of the savior dragons must be near.

In some places, the cliffs narrow in, so the bearers must walk in the brook to be able to get through. Other places, they expand into a smiling valley with villages, houses, and light-green fields, bathed in the morning sun. All the plants are moist with dew. The air is dense with the most delicious aroma of roses, 2 species, *Rosa Moschata* and *Rosa Banksia*, which hang down from the cliffs like long, green curtains, embroidered with flowers. Unfortunately, they are too finicky for Denmark. But we shall soon find some roses that are created for our climate."



The beautiful, atmospheric front-cover illustration of Aksel Olsen's book from 1930 on China's flora. It is built around a fictional journey through China in which Aksel Olsen never set foot.



Sun Yat-sen (sitting) appointed Chiang Kai-shek (standing) as leader of the influential Whampoa Military Academy. Photo from opening day, 16 June 1924. Scampix

Home in China

China's history is brutal. Europe's history also became brutal in the 20th century; but, when Van came to Europe in the 1930s, it looked different even though Van had already seen the danger signals in Berlin. The Second World War was a few years in the future; and, to a visitor coming from China, Denmark must have seemed like an oasis of peace. It could be difficult to see there were problems. Van was Chinese, and the purpose of his visit to Denmark was to equip him to help create a modern China. Developments in China did not run in a direction that made returning to China an obvious option. Then things took off in Europe; and when there was peace here, civil war broke out in China, which ended with a Communist victory. Thus, there was really nothing for Van to return home to. Van's fate, if anyone's was, determined by external events over which he had no influence. This all made a great impression on him and helped create his very distinctive personality.

Van was too young to have gotten a real impression of the man who was the epitome of the new China after the revolution in 1911, namely, Dr. Sun Yat-sen. He was the driving force in the revolutionary league that launched the revolution in China. Of course, Van knew him and admired him, and he presumably regarded him, like many other Chinese youth, as the father of new China. In 1922, Sun had fled to Shanghai; and there, in cooperation with the Communists, he began a reconstruction of the nationalist Guomintang Party. The party was based on principles of nationalism and the rights and sustenance of the people. Sun died in 1925, but in modern China he is still praised as one of the founders of the new China, someone who wanted hold together the unity of the empire. The recognition of Sun's efforts united conflicting parties. Therefore, he was regarded by both nationalists and Communists as a founding figure of new China. His successor was Jiang Jieshi, known as *Chiang Kai-shek*, who decided to break with the Communists in 1927.

The Guomintang Party was nationalist and, thus, an opponent of strong

foreign influence, which they saw personified in England and the English settlers in China. Another program point was bringing China together. In the years between 1925 and 1927, nationalist troops set out to conquer the local warlords. In 1927, they reached Shanghai, where Communist labor unions were brutally suppressed in cooperation with the Green Gang from Shanghai's underworld. Chiang chose Nanjing as the new capital in a country that could only with great difficulty be saved from dissolution. From here, Chiang moved north and conquered Beijing, so that, in 1928, at least on paper, the country appeared to be a single national unit. The internally weak Guomindang government had major problems to solve. The masterminds in Shanghai had earned fortunes by lending money to the government in Nanjing at an interest rate of around 20%. In turn, the government was deeply involved in business and otherwise stained by the corruption of high civil servants, profiteering, and inefficiency.

On the other hand, the government in Nanjing in the period after 1928 was the closest thing to the construction of a coherent state that had appeared in many years, that is, in terms of *state-building*. Seen from the outside, the new government came across as modern and willing to implement reforms of the state apparatus. The administration was reorganized; and new governmental buildings were erected, independent legislative and judicial authorities established, and special departments to act as checks on the apparatus and provide for the education of civil servants set up. Legal reforms were launched, but the system also had inherent weaknesses, namely, a lack of quality in the civil service and the administrative apparatus.

Most fatal, however, was the lack of understanding of how important it was to improve drastically the living standards and living conditions of the population. Since 1927, the party had defined itself as anticommunist, but after having lost its revolutionary spirit, it was left without a true social program, even though they were aware of the need for reform – particularly, in agriculture. Chiang Kai-shek flirted for a while with fascism in an attempt to reconstruct the party with strong leadership, and he came to play a more and more central role as party leader and state leader. In reality, it was a dictatorship.

The last emperor, Pu-yi, in the back row with glasses, surrounded by family and advisors. Photograph from around 1932. When the Japanese invaded Manchuria in 1931, Pu-yi made himself available as a puppet emperor. Scamptis





General Chiang Kai-shek, probably photographed in the late 1920s after the campaign against the northern Chinese warlords.

Gyldendals Billedarkiv

In 1931, Japan occupied Manchuria and, in 1937, attacked China proper. The nationalist party was now responsible for China's defense. The government had had contacts with Germany, which preferred an alliance with Japan. The nationalists fought the Japanese in regular combat, while the Communists organized a guerilla war among the peasants. The coastal areas and major cities were occupied by the Japanese. The rest of the country – so-called free China – was, in principle, ruled by the nationalist government. A small part of China was under Communist control. The US then became China's ally and became more and more involved in China in support of the nationalist party.

Soon the government faced a dual challenge: the Japanese, on one hand, and, on the other, the Communists, who had launched a new campaign in the countryside. In the long term, it was this dual front that determined China's political fate. The nationalists were weakened in the struggle against the Japanese and implemented a conservative political policy, so that many (especially younger) intellectuals lost faith in the government's ability to carry out necessary reforms. They, then, went over to the Communists. Nor did the nationalists prove themselves capable against the local warlords, who still wielded power in great swaths of China.

When the Japanese were finally beaten in 1945, the Communists were in a strong position. In 1949, they took over and proclaimed China to be a communist republic. In reality, the nationalists had been in the best starting point by far by having American support and power in the major cities. Despite that, however, Chiang Kai-shek lost position through a number of blunders that benefitted the Communists, who had support from large parts of the population in the countryside. In 1949, the nationalist government had to flee to Taiwan, where Guomindang established itself as an almost dictatorial system under Chiang Kai-shek. Here, one can still study the Chinese state apparatus in the old forms but today with a new democratic content.

Van experienced all this from a long distance. However, he was not

without intelligence from home. Like a good son, he kept in contact through correspondence with his father back in China. Even though it took about three weeks for a letter to be delivered, it was actually possible to keep in regular contact and ask his father for advice on important matters. A great number (perhaps, all) of his father's letters to Van were preserved. We do not know, however, the contents of Van's letters to his father beyond what we can infer from the father's replies. And that is sometimes not so little at that. Through the letters, we can also follow events in China. Only a few letters are dated. So, there is some uncertainty as to when a letter was sent. In the following, there is an attempt to trace them in chronological order as best makes sense from their content.

In short, Japan's attack on China in 1937 meant that the father advised against his son's return that year, which was otherwise anticipated after two years in Denmark. The war drew out. In Denmark, the Second World War lasted from 1940 to 1945. When it was over, civil war was raging throughout China. Actually, there was no decision to make. Van's trip to Denmark was a journey for life.

Askov

Van was raised in a major Chinese city, but he was also familiar with life in the country. Perhaps, that is why he understood the contrast between urban life and rural life and the importance of sharing progress in social development and welfare with the rural Chinese population. If he had not realized it before he came to Denmark, it became one of the great benefits of his initial years there that he gained insight into the mechanisms that helped secure the education of the Danish rural population and its place in society. It was in many ways a unique history, which in Denmark began with the abolition of villeinage and serfdom in the 18th century. Later, the folk high school movement encouraged popular enlightenment. In the years after 1849, there was an abolition of tenancy and a transition to self-ownership. This created a self-conscious and economically consolidated farming class. This was something the Chinese could learn from, Van believed.



Askov Folk High School, photograph from the beginning of the 1930s. The Danish folk high school movement aimed at educating both young and older people in rural areas in which access to ordinary schools was difficult. These schools were based on the idea that that knowledge should be disseminated and that a functioning democracy was based on an educated population. They provided teaching at a high level by very dedicated teachers but did not require an exam. Many of the institutions were very well thought of and, like Askov, had a national reputation for the quality of their teaching and their dynamic spirit. Folk high schools still have an important, but declining place, in Danish education.

The gradual and peaceful transition from a feudal society with landowners and landless peasants to a modern agricultural society based on equality was his model. At that time, he saw parallels, he said, between Danish society and the Chinese. That is why he also believed that the Danish model was usable in China. He might have been influenced by Chinese Communism, but he fundamentally believed in evolution, not revolution. China was an agricultural country, and development had to happen through the peasants and not, as Marxism preached, through the working class, but Van had also gained respect during his early years in Denmark for the Danish labor movement and the results it had achieved.

Yet, the contrast was enormous between Danish society in which peasants and workers had struggled for their rights and the virtually property-less Chinese peasantry and working class, which had to work without any form of social insurance under constant threat of famine. There had to be enlightenment; and, for Van, the first step was for members of the country's intelligentsia, familiar with the circumstances, to acknowledge a social responsibility and begin to work to enlighten the countryside as a way of fighting for better living conditions. It might sound like an insurmountable problem, but it was, in reality, what Van was preparing himself for during his first years in Denmark. His program might sound partly Communist-inspired, and it was also the Communists, by attaining closer contact to the rural population, who ultimately emerged victorious in the struggle in China. The Guomindang government also had a national, popular, and social program, but the administrative apparatus was not efficient enough. In the long term, the country's defense against Japanese aggression monopolized its efforts.

Van lived far away from daily life in China, but he had seen that nationalists and Communists had been able to cooperate until the break in 1927 since both, in principle, were revolutionary parties that wanted a new society. He had still not given up on the dream of a peaceful development like in Denmark, where a sense of community, a cooperative movement, and the folk high school idea had helped foster enlightenment and welfare.

Therefore, attending a folk high school was something special for Van. It was a practical encounter with an idea he had heard about and believed might be of decisive importance for developments in his own country. The homeland of the influential Danish theologian and poet N.F.S. Grundtvig, founder of the folk high school movement, was not a bromide but a living reality for someone like Van who knew the conditions in a peasant society that had not experienced a revival.

Askov Folk High School was founded in 1865 and stood as a model for other folk high schools. The school was built on Grundtvig's principles of enlightenment and Christianity: "Man first, then Christian." Van was enrolled at Askov Folk High School during the winter semester of 1936/37. In all, a total of 158 women and 128 men were enrolled. Men and women lived separately, and Van shared a room with his previously mentioned countryman Lin Jen Thney. Students could choose among a variety of courses of a more general and topical character. The relationship between China and Japan was one of them. Here, Van had something personal to offer. The school's open discussion about the Far East and the openness and interest he encountered when it came to China were among the most positive experiences he had in Denmark in his life. The living word was still paramount. Preparation was subordinate. Teaching and work took place throughout the day from eight in the morning until seven at night, interrupted only by meals and breaks. The day began with breakfast at 8, then morning song, then an hour of manual labor. There was a lecture from 11 to 12, lunch from 12 to 12:30, time for studying at 1 p.m., coffee, group work from 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m., supper at 6:30 and then from 7 o'clock on, discussions for those who wanted to participate.

There was much to learn about Danish ways – particularly, the cultural significance of the folk high school songbook. Van later related how he learned Jeppe Aakjær's song "Jeg er havren" ["I am the Oats"] by heart. This was – at least, at that time – a sign that one knew what Danish culture was all about. It was going well learning Danish as far as listening and understanding went, but he could not participate in an extended conversation. This was part of Van's introduction to Danish culture. He may have been thinking of the provost, J.Th. Arnfred, when he wrote in his book about students at

Askov Folk High School: “When I think back on that motley crew, I almost think that those who thrived best, curiously enough, were Chinese – whether it was due to the fact that they had the greatest ability to adapt or that their culture has common features with the Danish.” Van would subscribe to the latter claim. He believed that Denmark and China were reminiscent of each other and that there was something to learn in Denmark that the Chinese could use:

“At base, there is much in the morality of the Nordic people that is reminiscent of the Chinese. The society seems to be healthy; all classes respect each other in contrast to the poor opinion of human right in earlier times. The society understands what the right way of living and the duty of the individual are.”

It is striking how, by using words such as “right”, “way of living”, and “duty”, Van can describe the Danish view of life with Chinese concepts derived from Confucianism. He himself summarized what he experienced in Scandinavia as “peace, stability, brotherly love, honesty, and conscientiousness”, all positive words that many Danes acknowledge as characteristic of the Danish national character but which, in one way or another, acquire a more authentic nature when someone from the outside uses them.

Another way of saying the same thing is:

“if all countries were like Denmark, then the world would be happy”.

There is a letter in the archives – presumably from his time at Askov – that shows something about his attitudes in those years. In the letter, Van attacks American missionary schools and universities that, in his opinion, represent American imperialism in China and prevent students there from acting as Chinese patriots. He goes so far as to write about those who were baptized: “I hope they don’t come up again”. In his view, the Chinese should not be Americanized, and he criticizes students at missionary schools who go along with Western clothes and learn to dance and play golf but are not educated to become good Chinese leaders. They are not good Chinese, he writes. In his view, all

foreigners in China, with a few exceptions, are bad people. His ideal was for people to stand shoulder to shoulder and help each other in sincerity. He also relates how, in Denmark, he tried to explain Chinese culture so that they reached a mutual understanding: “Danes are generally down to earth, especially workers and students,” he wrote. He was also angry about Japanese aggression and predicted a looming danger for a Japanese attack on China. But, of course, as a guest in Denmark, he was far too polite to display criticism of the West or Japan outside a closed circle.

In the *Askov Yearbook* 1936/37 from which this quote derives, he repeated his impression of Denmark in this diplomatic way, which does not reveal how strong his feelings actually were:

“I am a stranger in the land, did not know any of the country’s language, traditions, and customs when I came. Consequently, it was natural that I found it very difficult to live here at first, but everything has gone well for me. Everywhere, I am met with smiles, kindness, and politeness. Yes, I can say that I like being here. I consider Denmark as my second homeland.”

It could hardly be said better or more elegantly that Van thrived in Denmark. The word “kindness” became a key word for his understanding of Denmark in the early years, but after Askov it was really about getting home. Two years had gone by, and now the knowledge he acquired in Denmark was to be translated into Chinese practice. In the just quoted letter, he wrote: “... my plan is to wake the people up. A slumbering lion has tremendous strength when it is awakened. I have no time for cowardice or to stay on the sidelines. I want to show courage and gather our students in this time of national catastrophe”.

And so it would have gone if the relationship between China and Japan had not developed in a threatening direction. The letters from home were alarming. At the end of 1936, Yuan Zhongfu reported that he did not believe Van should return home right now. There were prospects

for war and, thus, induction into the army. Van was the heir, and it was better, when one had the choice, to wait and watch in safety from Denmark than end up as cannon fodder in China.

Denmark and China

“Yet, there is something that I may learn to regret here in Denmark, namely, the unfamiliarity of the Danes with my distant homeland. It is like a hereditary shortcoming of the Nordic people. The cause is not that China in its time was an ancient, closed, and mystical country, nor is it due to the many fantastic events from that time. The sad thing is that people do not know, do not respect, and do not interest themselves in the values of China’s culture. A certain class devotes its attention to a number of China’s weaknesses, disseminated across all civilizations and nations as the thoughtless stuff of sensation, the sort of thing that is received with curiosity. This sort of thing can only hinder the encounter with different cultures and different people, where one would promote interaction but instead sacrifices values in the foreign interest.”

Van wrote this about the attitude of Danes toward China in the *Askov Yearbook* 1936/37.

Van’s picture of the knowledge and understanding of China among Danes and other Europeans is generally valid even today. The language is a barrier, but to get even some idea of Chinese culture, the great novels or wonderful poetry, to understand the aesthetics of its painting, or the fundamental features of Confucian ethics, which plays such a large role in the country even today, requires an extraordinary effort. In the 1930s, the picture of China was hazy. People had long known Chinese porcelain; chinoiserie had come to Europe in the 18th century; and this, except for a handful of things, was the limit of what was known about China. In Denmark, the Middle Kingdom was represented by

the Chinese porcelain figure in Hans Christian Andersen's *The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep*, which can nod its head, and the emperor in *The Nightingale*, who says "Good morning." China had something to do with rice, yellow skin, slanty eyes, red lanterns, and a distant folklore. Very, very far away, so far away that you could not really relate to it; and that was the attitude that Van encountered. The Chinese had their own culture just as we had ours, and that is the way it is. Even in the 1970s, one could encounter this way of thinking when an otherwise gifted Danish Prime Minister, Poul Hartling, visited China and spoke with Chairman Mao "on an intellectual level," as he himself put it. The rather ordinary conversation may be read in the memoirs of the prime minister, which on this point is especially distinguished by the absolute absence of any reflection on the nature of dictatorship or association with a man who, in order to retain power, killed millions and destroyed much of the ancient Chinese culture. This is the absolute opposite of what, in the Danish view, can be considered as acceptable. We do not care for such things, but the Chinese are different. That has been the attitude, and it will take some effort to change it.

As events turned out, Van became a first-generation Chinese immigrant to Denmark. He was far from the first Chinese person to settle in Denmark, but he belonged to what at that time and still is today a very small group. At the first New Year's Eve party that Van celebrated in Denmark at the beginning of 1936, there were 20-25 permanently-residing Chinese. And diplomatic connections had been established with the Middle Kingdom not so long before that. At first, however, it was not a permanent representation but a delegation, which came to Copenhagen in the 1860s at the request of Denmark in order to forge business connections with the Chinese.

The Chinese belong among the first immigrant groups to Denmark; but, from a global perspective, they arrived rather late. The first Danish encounters with the Chinese in Denmark had the character of pure amusement events that were more suited to underline and exploit what is exotic in being Chinese than they helped to promote knowledge and understanding of the great country.

The Chinese colony in Denmark assembled at the Chinese legation in the 1930s.



Thus, in May 1902, a group of 34 Chinese came to Denmark from Canton on one of ØK's ships to be part of an exhibition at Tivoli about China. The inspiration for such a display of ethnicity at an amusement park came from Hamburg, where Karl Hagenbeck had imported and displayed Chinese people in his zoo around the turn of the century. With this model, Tivoli fashioned a Chinese village with temples, buildings, banners, lanterns, and whatever else might create a Chinese atmosphere, and there were opportunities for rickshaw tours and photographs with a genuine Chinese person. More than 135,000 people visited Tivoli's new attraction, which also included a charming lady with bound feet. She was married to the village painter, and the newspaper *Politiken* could report on 5 June 1902 that:

"... the painter has the attraction that his wife is a typical Chinese beauty with her long, straight black hair, her long, trimmed nails, and her deformed doll's feet in torture boxes ... She is splendid and, even for a pronounced European taste, not without charm."

Politiken's journalist had also grasped Chinese folklore and realized that, in temple, the Chinese:

"... pray to all good spirits to assist them against all the evil spirits ..."

The visit was not without consequences for immigration statistics, and Europeans demonstrated a taste for the visiting Chinese. Half of the group remained in Denmark – either as contract employees in the amusement industry or because they had found Danish partners even though the latter was something the press had warned against. Parents were not always happy about these Chinese connections. Later, the opera singer Teijoh Wung-Sung would reveal this to Van. She was married to singer Hugo Sieben from whom Van had taken singing lessons at one point. Her Danish mother had married in 1904 one of the Chinese men on display, San Wung-Sung, and they had stayed together despite her family's antipathy. Her father had died when Teijoh was 11. He had not taught her Chinese. So it was Van who created the connection to her father's culture, and she made it a custom

to end her concerts with a little Chinese song. The writer Jesper Wung-Sung, who grew up in Marstal on the island of Ærø, was the grandson of San Wung-Sung. So, the Chinese and their descendants were quite dispersed in Denmark.

Immigration from China continued in the following years. Most were traders, artists, or seamen who married Danes and, therefore, became integrated. After the Communist takeover, more Chinese came to Denmark. Many opened their own firms in service industries such as restaurants or as traders. In many instances, members of families also came. For these later groups of immigrants, integration has not exactly been easy. Many work hard at restaurants or snack bars with long work days, limited earnings, and little contact with Danish society. The Chinese are considered model immigrants, and so they are ... if one sees not asserting yourself or burdening others as a virtue while emphasizing diligence and the ability to take care of yourself by not making demands on the country to which you have come but by showing a complaisant attitude and amiability toward those who have taken you in. But that is another story.

Father and son

“At one point, Yuan Zhongfu had grown uneasy because he had not received a letter from Sai-chiu in a long time. He said to me: ‘There are three types of behavior a child displays to his parents. The first is to make his parents happy by exceeding them in his career and making the family more well-known and famous. This is something that can truly fulfill one’s parents’ wishes and make them happy. The second type of behavior is to make one’s parents calm and secure by not doing things wrong, so parents do not need to worry. The third type is to make one’s parents worried about the future by one’s conduct. Then, parents cannot count on their child when they are old. To the contrary, they drink and visit brothels, etc.



Japanese troops landing in Shanghai harbor, September 1937. Gyltendals Billedarkiv

Of these three types, the first is difficult to achieve, and parents do not want the last. Type number two is the middle way. This is a Zhong-Yong-Zhi-Dao."

Van's schoolmate Pinghuai Xu remembered what old Yuan had said and he, too, believed that, over the years, Van had lived up to both type one and type two, that is, the middle way.

Van's father eagerly absorbed descriptions of Van's world in Denmark. His cousin Shinan Zhou from China related his father's reaction to Van's letters: *"Cousin Sai-Chiu's studies and work in Denmark was not exactly simple. There had been many problems along the way. Every time Er Jiu (Van's father) received a letter, he explained it very thoroughly and showed me the letter. Sometimes, we had to guess what Sai-chiu really believed. It was because Er Jiu's body was in China, but his thoughts were with his son. Er Jiu followed Sai-Chiu very closely and valued him greatly. If Er Jiu could see and note it from heaven, he would be satisfied with what Sai-Chiu has achieved today."*

There was much to discuss between father and son despite the geographical distance. Van was and remained the eldest son who was to head the family, and his father's letters testify to his concern and care for his son. Many of the letters deal with money. When the war came to China in 1937, the father had to discontinue sending money to his son, and this was worrying. How would things go?

"Now, the war between China and Japan is developing on all fronts," he wrote in September 1937:

"This will have great influence on my finances, and it will sooner or later affect your situation in Denmark. One possible solution is that you get money yourself; another that you return home and use the 1000 yuan I just sent you to cover the travel. Of course, I am obligated to support you financially if you remain in Denmark. But I cannot guarantee money. I cannot send anything if I do not have enough cash."

No. 1719

寶隆洋行 Shanghai

18 AUG 1936

1938

Received from

Messrs. Leh Leh Oil Drill

the sum of

Dollars Two Hundred Fifty + 43/100

in ^{full} payment of goods delivered as per remittance to
Mr. L. C. Van

Rs. 250-43

AGENCY OF

The East Asiatic Company, Limited.

Accepted: O. H. Guldberg

所有收條非由本行大班簽字或由會計主任與一歐籍行員共同簽字則作無效
No Receipt is valid unless signed by the Company's Manager or by the Accountant conjointly with another
European Officer of the Company.

Van received money from home in the form of
transfers through ØK such as this money order for
\$250.43.

Their correspondence about money continued through many letters. The father sometimes scolded Van for spending so much. At other times, he sent some; and, at other times still, he gave advice or expressed concern about the loans Van had to take. His father did not like borrowing from others, and he was very absorbed with opportunities to pay back loans. In one letter, he even wrote:


"I become concerned and uneasy when I think about your loans. How much have you borrowed up to now? When do you think you can pay the money back? Your credibility will be seriously harmed if you do not pay the money back."

His father was also worried whether Van was eating properly: "You must eat good food!" He became furious when he got the impression that Van was not taking pains with his language: "I find that you have written two characters wrongly ... how ridiculous. I hope you are paying attention to the correct use of characters. Think if you sent an article with spelling errors to a publisher. They would throw it directly into the wastebasket. You disappoint me. Make sure you make no such mistakes again." We also hear of packages of tea, silk clothing, and other Chinese goods and books about gardening and agriculture. At one time during the war, his father wrote that Van's studies abroad "are just as important to save the nation as those who are fighting fiercely on the battlefield". Of Van's mother, there are not many words. A single time, his father mentions that she is spending a lot of money and that everyone is complaining and he does not know what to do about it.

And his father agreed that, as a thank you for his kindness, director H.O. Lange should get a Chinese oil painting:

"I wish to send him an oil painting as a present. Chenyi can paint the picture for me. But I am not sure that the director likes paintings. Can you help me? I do not wish to pursue this idea if he does not care for it."

We do not know how things went with the oil painting, but the father became anxious when Van began discussing the possibility of engaging in Chinese politics. Nor was he sure that it should be in the Guomindang Party, which did not have the best reputation in the public.

 **DANSK RØDE KORS**
CROIX ROUGE DANOISE
AMALIEGADE 18
COPENHAGUE

LUFTPOST
PAR AVION

Til Røde Kors' Internationale Komité, Genève.
Au Comité International de la Croix-Rouge, Genève.

FORESPØRGER — DEMANDEUR

Navn - nom Van
Fornavn - prénom Sai-chiu
Adresse Strandboulevarden 32, Copenhagen
Denmark.

Meddelelse
Ikke over 25 Ord. Indholdet må kun
være personlige Familienforhold.

Message à transmettre
(25 mots au maximum. Nouvelles de caractère
strictement personnel et familial).

Dear father :-
Have you any post-connection with
my mother? Are you well, and my brother
too? I have had a nice summer,
your son.

Dato - date 9 SEP 1943

ADRESSAT — DESTINATAIRE

Navn - nom Chan
Fornavn - prénom Chün-fü
Adresse 5/125 Line, Park Road,
Shanghai
China.

Svar paa Begæden
(Man bedes skrive tydeligt).
Form. 22-4-41

réponse au vœu
(Prière d'écrire lisiblement).
21 SEPT 1943

Meddelelse til Forespørgeren
(Ikke over 25 Ord. Indholdet må kun
være personlige Familienforhold).

Message à renvoyer au demandeur
(25 mots au maximum. Nouvelles de caractère
strictement personnel et familial).

Gennem Røde Kors' Internationale Komité, Genève. 114323
Par l'Intermédiaire du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge, Genève.

Dear son
I'm happy you have good connections
I'm sorry Miss Nielson is dead
Have you any girl friend now family
friends are sorry well
of yours

Dato - date

COMITÉ INTERNATIONAL DE LA CROIX-ROUGE
SHANGHAI

COMITÉ INTERNATIONAL DE LA CROIX-ROUGE
DELEGATION EN TURQUIE

DANSK RØDE KORS
21 AUG 1944
CROIX ROUGE DANOISE

27 JUL 1944

Red Cross letter from Van in 1944 to his father with his father's reply to the question about his mother.



It would be better, the father wrote, to be politically neutral, and he warned him against any form of Communist activity. From December 1937, the father could relate information about a relative, Songde, who was handed over from the English concession due to his Communist activities. Yuan Zhongfu had to go to great effort to save his life. He succeeded, but it had not been fun for Songde, so his father's advice was clear: "I hope you do not follow in his footsteps. You must be completely clear about this: do not get involved in these sorts of activities."

In 1937, his father also warned against Van's letters containing any form of anti-Japanese statements:

"They won't change anything in the real world. You should know this."

China's war

Of course, Van did not like the aggressive behavior of the Japanese, and he shared this aversion to the Japanese with Aksel Olsen, who during the struggle between these two Far Eastern powers reserved all his sympathy for China. Aksel Olsen was at the same time an ardent admirer of China's dictator Chiang Kai-shek and his wife, Meiling, the daughter of Sun Yat-sen. He admired these two almost as ideals for how a country should be governed. There is some indication that, in this context, Aksel Olsen was influenced by the era's fanaticism for the charismatic leader or the strong man who could gather the masses for the progress of his country, but the letter below also indicates a not insignificant political naiveté. Things went differently than Aksel Olsen imagined, but the letter is an interesting piece of evidence of the letter writer's engagement with Van's homeland in its fateful hour. It is a Christmas letter to Van dated 19 December 1937:

Opposite page:

In August 1937, Japanese planes bombed Shanghai, including the international quarter and the famous Shanghai Hotel. Bettmann/CORBIS



Japanese troops advancing near Shanghai, September 1937. Gyltendals Billedarkiv

Dear Van Sai Chiu,

Thank you for your letters. And forgive me for not replying a long time ago. I've been very busy this fall. And yet we have not sold nearly as much as we usually do. My busyness has been on things other than business. I've given a couple of lectures on China and Japan. This has required a lot of preparation when it is difficult to find the time.

Japan is crazy. So say renowned crazy-doctors. Unfortunately, it must also be said that the great powers of Europe and America have driven Japan crazy. Like all crazy people, there are areas in which Japan is unusually clever, indeed cunning. But Japan's rage shows that Japan itself feels it cannot hold out very long. Japan knows this is its last chance. It must strike now. In a year, it will be too late. Moreover, I am sure that it is also too late now. China must and will be victorious if Chiang Kai-shek and Sung Meiling live. China is fortunate.

The world has never before seen such a statesmanlike couple. The world may have seen before a statesman greater than Chiang K.-s. and greater than Sung M.L. Perhaps? I do not know. It cannot be decided for another 50-100 years. But the world has never seen a couple of such stature. That is the wonderful thing about it. Japan also has wise statesmen. Many of them may in a way be cleverer than Chiang? They are more sly and cunning. But they are short-sighted. They see with the eyes of men even though they think they are some sort of gods (therein may be seen their insanity, among other things!). But Chiang K.-s. and his wife have a much greater power behind them. They know they are not gods. They know their own imperfection. And they know God. By living so much with God as they have done, they have received some of God's optical ability. God sees far. He sees thousands of years into the future. He sees all the way to the end of time. So far can neither Chiang K.-s. nor his wife see. But they have learned from God to see much farther in time than Japan's statesmen. There is one Japanese man who can see just as far. His name is Kagawa. Perhaps, you've heard of him? He has great power and influence in Japan. He has never been afraid to sacrifice lives. He sees clearly where Japan's policies are leading, namely, to Japan's downfall. But, beyond Japan's military party, he has

only a little power. Perhaps, Japan's militarists will kill him before long. He also sees with God's eyes. He sees Japan's wrong and China's right. He says straight out: I am first a citizen of heaven, then of Japan. There are many Japanese who think like Kagawa but probably none who have had such power. When Japan's officers soon come to understand their stupidity in throwing themselves upon China, and a number of them have committed Harakiri, then the atmosphere in Japan will turn. Then, people of Kagawa's type will come to power. But if the war draws out so long that Japan's workers and peasants starve to death in great numbers, there may be a danger that Communism will take over in Japan. Then, there will be a revolution of the bloodiest sort. Then, it will be impossible to know what might happen. That Japan should be able to be victorious over China, I consider precluded if Chiang K.-s. Sung – and Kung – live. But if the incredible should happen, then it would mean that Japan will go the way of the Mongols and the Manchu in their time. Japan has its culture from China. Japan's borrowed culture is far beneath China's. Therefore, if it should win after the death of China's great statesmen, Japan will be defeated by China's culture in the course of 50-75 years, and then Japan will become a part of China. This will not be surprising to any extent. History shows this again and again.

Japan is ripe to suffer this fate: To see its arrogance lead to its downfall. As I understand it, Chiang K.-s. is organizing an army in Kwangtung (Canton). The Japanese fear this. They have assembled a navy near Hong Kong apparently with the intent of terrorizing Kwangtung. If Japan does this, Japan will not thereby achieve anything other than strengthening China's will to defend itself, as recently happened in the air bombardments of Nanjing and Kwantung. Japan constantly calculates badly when it calculates China's psychology and China's army. Terror is the stupidest thing Japan can engage in. But terror by air bombardment, etc., is now even a program point of the Japanese general staff. And Japan will probably continue until China's will to defend itself is glowing hot and the entire Chinese people have fused into one unbreakable block like what Sun Yat-Sen worked his entire life on. It is typical to see how the old master Lao Tze was right. Hardness is a sign of death. Japan is hard. Japan wants to make China "soft" by frightening China. But Japan will achieve nothing but to fulfill Sun Yat-sen's plan: to fuse the Chinese people into one people from



General Chiang Kai-shek and his American educated wife Song Meiling, his right hand, advisor, and head of propaganda, surrounded by foreign war correspondents. Photo from Nanjing, October 1938.

Scampix

South to North, from East to West. Reichelt said this to a journalist, who interviewed him: Japan has now driven China to "Ping-Ming"; Japan may beat Chinese armies, destroy great cities, but China retains a colossal life force; it is simply impossible for Japan to keep the entire Chinese empire under its scepter; it has bitten off more than it can chew, and it will go ill for Japan. China cannot be beaten down; China is now awake!

You said last year that Chiang K.-s. had prepared for the government to flee to Chungking. Presumably, this will happen if Japan vanquishes the army he has now assembled in Kwangtung. At the moment, the government is in Hankow. It is clear that, from the beginning, Chiang K.-s. has expected the military progress of the Japanese and that his tactics have consisted of drawing the war out until the economic power of the Japanese is broken. That this tactic is correct is demonstrated by the fury of the Japanese against him. Japan sees him as the true enemy. In that alone is his victory.

So much on the current war situation and confidence that everything would be alright with Chiang Kai-shek at the helm. Then closer to home. He mentions Van's relatives in China and makes a generous offer to help within the framework a nursery owner's finances in the 1930s allowed:

How are things in Hangchow? The Japanese have also bombed there. You write that you may not receive any more letters from you father. Is there any ship connection between Hangchow and Hong Kong? How is it going getting money to continue your studies? Can you get help from the Chinese legation? If you are completely without money one day, I can probably lend you a little. But it won't be anything that can help you with studying. We have been so rash as to redecorate the bathroom. And this has cost more money than I am able to pay at the moment. We have sold less this autumn than we usually do. And the crew at the nursery has been larger than it usually is. But one thing we can do. If your father cannot send money to you, and you cannot get the means to continue your studies, you can live with us as long as you want. It will cost nothing. We would be happy to have you here.

It's good you can keep up with lectures. I was afraid it would be

too difficult. There are so many uncommon words in the lectures that it can be difficult even for a Dane to understand. It cannot be easier for a foreigner. And such words may be the key to the whole meaning.

...

We are very sorry you are not coming here for Christmas. I understand that, in your current circumstances, you dare not spend money on such an expensive trip. Otherwise, you could have enjoyed some peace and quiet here at the house.

Thank you for the offer of lending Sun Yat-sen's book. When there is a prospect that I will have the time, I'll ask Ella Laugesen about it.

Send my regards to the Larsen family on Christiansmindevej.

We all wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Aksel Olsen later followed up on this letter with another comforting commentary on the madness of the times, which found expression on 28 August 1938 in a letter to Van:

"Often, 1 man or woman has had the lives of millions of people in his or her hand. In the last 10 years, this has happened on a large scale. Isn't Mussolini insane? Isn't Stalin insane? Isn't Hitler insane? Aren't Japan's generals insane? The most intelligent people are always close to insanity, and they often cross the boundary. Therefore, our understanding is a gift that leads us to destruction if understanding is not subordinated to another gift, a higher gift. And that higher gift is faith."

After the end of 1937, it was clear that current conditions in China would not allow Van to return home. The war was raging, and both the government and the Communists were fighting the Japanese. While nationalist troops tried to fight the enemy militarily, Communist guerilla movements organized among the peasants and thereby grew close to the rural population. This gave the Communists an advantage; and, without Japanese aggression, the Communists could hardly have gained power later. The Communists allowed the nationalists to become weakened in battle, while they themselves worked behind the front. The nationalist government made many mistakes that can explain why things went as they did. Old Yuan Zhongfu wrote at one point to his son that Chiang

Kai-shek had “good will”, but he was “tricked by local leaders, so that he did not get the right impression of the poverty and difficult living conditions of ordinary people”. It was hard to get around the fact that neither Jiang Jieshi nor Chiang Kai-shek lived up to expectations for the ideal statesman. After 1945, he was the great loser in the struggle for China, even though he actually had the best cards in his hand as the person who held the governmental apparatus and the army and enjoyed an almost intemperate admiration and goodwill from the Americans. On the other hand, it must be said in his excuse that he was not the only one who misjudged the situation. Even the Americans went wrong by believing that one-sided support for the nationalists could promote a unity government in China and overcome the opposition between nationalists and Communists. The Americans did not have sufficient understanding of Chinese conditions. They overestimated Chiang Kai-shek’s opportunities and completely underestimated the impact of the Communists. In 1949, the US had to acknowledge that the struggle for China was lost.

But the road there was long. The Sino-Japanese War began in July 1937; and, over the course of the initial months, the Japanese conquered the east coast of China. In Shanghai, there was fighting for four months from August 1937 to November, and great destruction was caused by bombardments and other military operations until the Chinese forces withdrew. The Japanese respected the European zones in the city, and that was where Van’s father sought refuge.

Hangzhou was also affected by the war, and Yuan Zhongfu’s silk business was destroyed. On the other hand, the machine shop, which had around 300 employees, had even more employees for a period. The firm had been through a crisis in 1933-34 but carried on after a reconstruction. After the occupation of Hangzhou, the Japanese wanted to use some of the machinery, and the shop had to close. After the war, the shop started back up on a smaller scale with production for silk weaving and dentist chairs. After 1949, the factory received the name The United Steel Factory, relates a former employee.

Van’s father moved in with a nephew from Shanghai in September 1937 and lived for two months on a silk farm in Yuqian, until he

could return. Problems rose around the chemical business since the Japanese considered production of sulfuric acid to be crucial to the war effort and forbade its sale. Large investments and hopes were annihilated. Yuan Zhongfu's reaction, as one of Van's schoolmates recollects, was to quote one of the Chinese classics, the novel *San Guo*, about three kingdoms. In the novel, a man, Liang Zhuge, tries to burn someone in a valley called the Hulu Valley, but a downpour prevents the plan. "It is like Zhuge in the Hulu Valley", said old Yuan. What one cannot do anything about, one must try to accept with composure.

The notorious Japanese cruelty was given serious bent in the massacre of the capital city Nanjing, where hundreds of thousands of Chinese were tortured, raped, and murdered by Japanese troops. The conduct of the Japanese in China in those years created a deeply-ingrained hatred and long-standing mistrust by the Chinese of the Japanese, who despite the quantity of undeniable documentation still have difficulty admitting the inhuman violations committed against the Chinese population.

The news reports from China were disturbing, but Van knew that his father was in Shanghai. By contrast, his mother's fate in Hangzhou was more uncertain for a time. Much later, his niece Lili reported how his mother, Shi, had fled to the countryside when the Japanese conquered Hangzhou. For a time, his father had also fled to the mountains in western Zhejiang, while his mother resided in southern Zhejiang. The spouses had lost what little contact there might have been, and the mother lived in great poverty. In 1942, she returned to Hangzhou, where she died.

How the father reacted to the loss of his two wives, we do not know. Nor do we know when he learned that Van's mother was dead or whether he even commented on her death to his son. There are indications that he did not externally express his feelings on the occasion. A real man carries his losses without allowing himself to be knocked down. We do not know his reaction to his own losses, but Van's friend Pinghuai Xu later related what Yuan Zhongfu had said



Yuan Zhongfu, Vans' father, in 1939.

*Opposite page:
Van at the Agricultural University in the summer of
1938, surrounded by skeletons and compounds.*

to him when Pinhuai grieved at the loss of his young wife:

"Brothers are like one's arms and legs, and wives are like one's clothes. When the clothes are dilapidated, they can be mended; when arms and legs are broken, they cannot be sewn back up again. A real man must not be knocked down by such less important things. You must be strong, and you must not allow yourself to be knocked down."

The Danish University for Agriculture [Landbohøjskolen]

But all of that was in the future. The reality here and now was that Van could not travel home. So, it was a matter of making the best out of the situation. A natural follow-up to the practical agricultural education he had received to that point were theoretical studies at the Danish University for Agriculture. Acceptance to the university required the applicant to have two years of practical experience in agriculture, but they were inclined to ignore this in Van's case when director H.O. Lange put in a word for him. He was accepted as a full-time student but with the special arrangement that, as a foreigner, he would pay a fee of DKK 20 each semester. It was something of a project Van had embarked upon because, in reality, he still only partially mastered Danish and, therefore, had to put a lot of energy into preparing for classes. There were around 70 students of whom only one was female. However, Van noticed and later remembered that it was different in horticulture classes, "where there were 3-4 ladies with whom I studied. Ladies are interested in a foreigner like me". And the interest was mutual.

Another side benefit to the University for Agriculture he appreciated were the arranged excursions. This involved more practical exercises and visits to animal shows. He later also remembered with pleasure the relaxing hours spent surveying the Royal Deer Park. Generally, it involved practical subjects such as feeding doctrine, livestock rearing, and general agriculture theory, etc. Botany he considered a difficult



A team of students from the Agricultural University while surveying the Royal Deer Park. Van is sitting on the extreme left.



subject, and he was not enthusiastic about pest control theory: “All those insects and worms.” He was also good at keeping his distance from it when he later began his own business.

Leisure in Copenhagen consisted of opera and classical music in which he was enormously interested. As mentioned, he himself took singing lessons. A weekly Saturday lunch at the popular restaurant Scala also belonged to his program. But there was enough to do with struggling with the language and textbooks. Studies moved forward as planned, and soon the question was: What happens when exams are over?

Van had corresponded with his father about his plans for the future after exams, and his father continued to have the final word about whether the future would be in China or Denmark. The father was content with Van’s choice of studies and wrote, among other things, that these subjects would be of great use in China.

His father wrote in December 1939:

“You asked me what you should do after your exam next year. It is an important question that is worth discussing. My opinion is as follows:

- 1. My original plan was that you would come home and start your own business. You could begin small and then expand. In this way, you would not be dependent on others. Today, the situation is different. Almost nothing can be done without the help of others. Nevertheless, the plans hold if the war is over soon – for example, next spring.*
- 2. You may stay in Denmark for a while after your exam if the war is still going on. As long as there is war, there is no peace anywhere in China, and without peace and security, you cannot find any lasting employment. You also have to earn some money, so you can pay back the director’s loan. That is what I can say on the basis of what you’re telling me, but I don’t know whether Danish law allows you to work or not.”*

On 30 April 1940, Van passed his exam as an agronomist. One of the



On 3 April 1940, Van passed his exam at the Agricultural University. The day after, this picture was taken of the teachers and that year’s graduates. Van is in the front row, second from the right.

exam days was 9 April 1940, the day the Germans invaded Denmark. The exam on agronomy, theory of agricultural implements and machinery, and general agricultural theory was conducted as planned despite the German occupation. Yet, the Occupation was a reality, and it might have put a damper on the end of exam festivities that spring. The exam, however, went well. A bit of a language barrier led to a mix-up of digestion and digestibility. In economics, the examiner had at the first hesitation offered to continue the exam in another language. Van did not have the presence of mind to suggest Chinese, but it all went fine. He passed with flying colors. Van could thereafter boast a degree in agriculture.

Despite the war, correspondence continued between father and son, and Van could keep up with the family just as the father was now able to worry about how things would go for his son in war-ravaged Europe. He had himself experienced war up close and personal, and he could hardly imagine that someone could settle in so comfortably in Denmark. His commentary when he heard about the Occupation demonstrates his great concern:

"I am devastated to hear that Denmark has surrendered and that Italy has entered the war on the side of the Nazis. My health has also suffered. I am tormented by powerful internal pains and anxiety at not knowing how you are going to survive the war. Another thing that tortures me is that I do not know how you are going to pay the loans from the director back. You were looking around for employment when Germany occupied Denmark. I'm wondering whether you might be able to look again, now that the Germans have established order and calm in Denmark. Uncertainty about your future employment is killing me."

After his exam, Van at first accepted employment at Øtoftegård, the research farm for the Danish Consumers Cooperative Society (FDB) near Tåstrup, as an assistant in experimental and refinement work. Upon his departure, he received a declaration that he was "an especially dedicated and gifted young man who had shown especially good care and talent in his work, even as he has very amiable character and works well in a team".



Like other Copenhageners on 9 April 1940, Van witnessed German airplanes fly over the city, which he captured in this photo.

His father was extremely worried about Van's job opportunities in an occupied country. Fortunately, Van was able to tell his father that the occupation of Denmark did not mean major disruptions of employment opportunities or daily life in general and that he actually had a job, so his father could breathe easy up until 1941:

"It's good to hear you've gotten a new position in the Danish capital and that you find the laboratory in the company advanced and well-equipped. I also have a feeling that it is a job that will enrich your knowledge and your experience."

Van had just received a new temporary position at the State Plant Breeding Laboratory [Statens Planteavlslaboratorium] to learn about silage. Here, too, there were very positive statements about his "great talent and interest" and about his talent as an illustrator. His illustrations were "absolutely the most beautiful that have ever been executed in an agricultural exam."

In December 1941 and for the following two years, he was employed by a company called Hedeselskabet. The work took him on bike tours around Denmark to inspect drainage works, streams, and marshes or to check on the prevalence of the parasite, the potato eel worm. Here, there was good use for his knowledge of pests and plant diseases. The bike tours absorbed the attention of Yuan Zhongfu, who wrote that he should be careful riding his bicycle and accompanied this exhortation with advice to always finish the trip, to learn to endure, and to study prices along the way. At the conclusion of the work, Van received words of praise from his employer for his "unusual ability to adapt to unfamiliar circumstances"; and he received an additional testimonial that he was "very sociable and pleasing by nature and very good at his work (especially talented at drawing)".

Ph.D. studies

The work for Hedeselskabet had provided good practical insight, but over the long term it was not very satisfying for Van to be a cycling inspector.

In 1943-45, Van lived at the Nordic Collegium, which had been dedicated the year before. The building on Strand Boulevard was designed by architect H.J. Kampmann.



In January 1943, therefore, Van enrolled again at the Agricultural University to continue his theoretical studies, now as a Ph.D. student. He had repaid one loan to H.O. Lange but took out another for his continuing studies. From May 1943, H.O. Lange also provided Van a room at the Nordic Collegium, which was founded the year before by the company Nordic Feather. And it was no ordinary student dorm room. Van was given one of the rooms meant for visiting Nordic university teachers. He also helped translate telegrams in Chinese for the consul general and transmissions to China. Through the consul general, he received newspapers, but it was just as important that H.O. Lange was available as a lender and generally extended time for paying rent on the room until it was possible for Van to pay.

After Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, China received help from the US in its struggle against Japan, and the situation seemed brighter at the beginning of 1942. In Yuan Zhongfu's opinion, it was beginning to be time once again to think about Van coming home. In a letter presumably from 1943, he wrote that it would be best if Van laid the foundation for a career in China before he turned 40. Otherwise, it would be difficult to get a foothold. His father also wrote: "Of course, you can stay and die in Denmark, but we Chinese should have China as our base." Even if Van had wanted to, it was impossible to get to China, as the war in Europe had developed. One could not reach China through Russia or by ship around the world. So Van stayed where he was. His father also realized that ocean travel was a dangerous proposition. He wrote:

"It may be very dangerous for you to sail back if the war between the UK, France, and Germany draws out. I understand from various newspapers that a number of passenger ships from neutral countries have been fired on. So, instead of coming home next year before your exam, you should rather wait for the war to be entirely over." Financially, he was without means since money could no longer be sent from China, but he got by through his own work and generous loans from H.O. Lange about which his father worried so much.

The superintendent of the Nordic Collegium was the well-known church historian and theologian Hal Koch. He was one of the country's unifying personalities who fearlessly professed his national commitment but, at the same time, was skeptical about armed resistance. He was, thus, a proponent for a collaborative policy with the Germans, which for him was the only realistic way of getting through the war. In the first years of the Occupation, he was especially renowned as the chairperson for the Danish Youth League [Dansk Ungdomssamvirke], for his lectures, and for his organization of song competitions as a national protest against the occupying power. Of course, Hal Koch participated in life at the collegium and discussed matters with students. In this way, he was one of the great Danish personalities of the time, whom Van came to know at close range.

Hal Koch was in the Germans' searchlight, and so were many students. Van experienced German raids on the collegium. Student dorms were generally targeted because the Germans suspected that students were active in the resistance movement. Van relates that he was not active in the resistance: "I dared not try. Being Chinese, I was much too easy to recognize." He remembers that, one morning, he "heard the tramp of boots in the hallway. The only thing I could do was pull the blanket over my head and pretend I was asleep. Strangely enough, nothing happened to me...." Van's recollection may refer to the German raid on 3 July 1944, which happened because some students were supposed to have participated in shootings. But otherwise life at the collegium went on like life in the rest of Denmark, largely untouched by the Occupation and the German presence. People argued, went out with girls and partied, as one does at a student collegium. One morning after a party, some students went to the amusement park Bakken, on the outskirts of Copenhagen, to ride the roller coaster. Van did not go, but he remembers the account of Bakken's personnel, who ran out and sent the students back home with the assistance of the police.

Elisabeth Kielland-Brandt

"He spoke Danish excellently; he had been in Denmark for eight years. I

remember that I was quite amazed at meeting a Chinese person who knew that there were some large hills to bike up and down at Højen Hule near Vejle. Only later did I learn that Van had been employed by the Ministry of Agriculture and had inspected much of Jutland for potato eel worms."

There are so many things that can make an impression. Agnes Elisabeth Kielland-Brandt, who is narrating here, was a newly-educated teacher. She was at home during Christmas vacation in 1943, visiting her brother Jørgen Kielland-Brandt, whom Van got to know at the collegium. Jørgen had invited him on a hike along with his sister. It was here she met Van. When she came home after a temporary job in January 1944, there was a letter from Van, asking whether they might meet again. They did, many times, and in 1945, they decided to get married. The family liked the charming, young Chinese man, who spoke excellent Danish but were a little worried about the prospect that he might go home to China and take Elisabeth along. Before his made his decision, Van had consulted with his father at home in China, who wrote to him:

"It is okay with me if you marry a Danish girl. Whomever you choose, she must be a modest, reserved type. For only such a woman can live in harmony with Chinese culture. If she is extravagant, she will sooner or later cause difficulties."

Apparently, Van had not been verbose in his description of Elisabeth, for a later letter reveals:

"I'm so happy to hear you have established a family with a Danish girl and that you are living happily with her. But it's a shame that you do not write very much about her. What is her background with respect to education, age, family, etc.? Tell more about her next time."

Old Yuan Zhongfu had presumably expected a daughter-in-law who lived up to the Chinese ideal that women should be homemakers and should not be forward. Apparently, Van had not explained that this was a young, liberated Danish woman who was educated and had independent employment.

The wedding took place on 28 March 1945, still under the Occupation. The Kielland-Brandt family had a number of connections to the resistance movement. The brother of Elisabeth's sister-in-law had been executed by the Germans a short time before. On 21 March, at the request of the Danish Resistance, the British bombed Shell House (used as Gestapo headquarters) in Operation Carthage. The raid freed 18 Danish prisoners and disrupted Nazi activities. The success of the action was partly overshadowed by the tragedy that a neighbouring school was bombed by a mistake. The raid caused 125 civilian deaths (including 86 schoolchildren and 18 adults at the school). So, the wedding took place in subdued circumstances, given the events.

Van and Elisabeth moved into two rooms of a three-room apartment in the Copenhagen quarter of Østerbro, which they shared with one of Elisabeth's friends. From here, she could bike to work at the Maglegård School in Hellerup and he to the Agricultural University. Here, too, they celebrated liberation on the evening of 4 May 1945, which no one who experienced it would ever forget.

That same year, Van finished his studies.

"Along with wheat, rice is among the oldest and most important cereals. For hundreds of years, around half of the world's population have met their nutritional needs with the help of rice."

In November 1945, Van handed in a major written assignment for a special course on genetic research, which might be compared to

a small Ph.D. dissertation today. The title of the dissertation was “A Comprehensive Overview of Our Current Knowledge of the Genetics and Cytology of Rice Plants”. Cytology is cell theory, and the topic fell within the disciplines of microbiology and genetics. The topic was the rice plant, and Van went through a number of variations of rice plants and their composition on the basis of accessible materials. During the Occupation, it had been a problem to get access to all the relevant literature, but the dissertation received a distinguished grade.

Now he had a Ph.D. degree, as it was called back then, and his student days were over. Now, he needed a real job.

Or was it time to travel home?

In a 1945 letter from his father, this possibility shone through:

“Eight years of war have destroyed everything I built up with sweat and blood. The cost of living has risen a thousandfold since before the war. Chunyi is not a fighter, and I have only myself to fall back on. Fortunately, I am still in good enough physical form that I can work hard. At least, I have you, my hard-working and loyal son. I am happy every time I think of you. When you are back home, I will transfer all my business to you and make you the heir of the Van and Yuan family. With respect to our economic situation, we live by selling our things. It’s going well now, but it is not a long-term solution. Therefore, I cannot find it in my heart to sell all our valuables merely to finance your voyage home to China. I hope you will understand. Even though I could pay for a one-way ticket, then I would not be able to cover your wife’s travel costs. When I think of that, I feel I should work harder than my physique actually allows.”

His father was not yet entirely discouraged. One of Van’s cousins recalls from the time after 1945 that he frequently visited Van’s father on Meifuli Street in Shanghai: *“We often sat for 20-30 minutes, talking about everything near and far. Sometimes, he visited me. When he came, I made food for him, and I bought distilled spirits for him as my parents had always done. Er Jiu talked a lot when he had something to drink. Sometimes, it was so funny that rice sputtered out of my mouth over*

everything. I know that Er Jiu could be very serious, but many times he was a master at telling jokes.” The father, who was now over 70 years old, continue to travel between businesses in Shanghai and Hangzhou, but it was difficult to get things going. So, it was not strange that the father might want his eldest son home as a support but, at the same time, had doubts about what it really was his son could come home to.

Denmark or China?

Immediately after his Ph.D. exam, Van was hired by Medicinalco’s microbiology laboratory. This happy news was, of course, shared with his father, who was happy that Van could provide for himself. However, the father was also beginning to see job opportunities in China for Van:

“I’m trying hard these days to get money for you. Two weeks ago, I received a letter from Shao Lizi forwarded through Songxi. He offers to get you a position at the Ministry of Agriculture, which can then pay for your voyage back to China. Of course, this is an alternative to the plan to secure travel money through the Ministry of Education. Shao suggested I write to Mr. Zhang Qun. Let’s see what comes of it.”

His father was skeptical of the idea of letting the Chinese Ministry of Education pay for his trip home. He would rather do it himself than receive support that would be “like slaking one’s thirst by drinking salt water”. In 1935, Van had not left China as a registered student abroad. Therefore, he could run into difficulties with the Ministry of Education, his father wrote. On the other hand, his father was quite taken by the idea of a position with the Ministry of Agriculture and wanted to exploit his connections. The plans turned on Van coming back in the spring of 1946.

Hopes had also been aroused with his younger brother Chunyi. He wrote in January 1946 that he was looking forward to seeing his brother again:

“Life in Shanghai is not easy right now because prices have risen a thousandfold

for daily necessities... I'm living with my parents, and everything is going well with my wife and my children, but I feel uncomfortably financially dependent on our parents. I have not at any time been able to find permanent employment, so I'm doing odd jobs here and there, but I can't live off that."

Later, his brother got an office job, and his wife also got work. The father did not care for this. She was "not obedient and as a daughter-in-law should be. She irritates me." Chunyi and his family also later had a very hard life when the Communists came to power. Chunyi had to work in a factory; his life was quite different from Van's, and when Van first visited China in 1972, it was only with difficulty that Chunyi received permission to meet his brother.

However, the plans to travel to China came to nothing. Conditions were and remained too uncertain; and, in the following letters, there was no longer any discussion except that Van should remain in Denmark, where he now had a family, permanent employment, and his own residence in the suburb of Ordrup. In August 1946, his father wrote:

"You must choose for yourself. You can come home and find a position as a civil servant either in a ministry or in a technological institute. This sort of work will not be especially exciting. It will not give you new experiences or add anything to your academic development. Nor will the pay be very high. So you will have difficulty providing for your family. You can also try some state-owned businesses, such as in agriculture or laboratories, but here you won't get an opportunity to exploit your talent and your knowledge because they are all small and without financial resources of any significance. At the moment, the political situation is quite chaotic. No stability and no lasting employment. Therefore, you should consider postponing your voyage home."

The international situation improved after 1945 – at least, in Europe, but things looked different in China. After the defeat of the Japanese, the civil war blazed up again. It was still not safe to return home. It still had to wait a while. If Van had seriously considered going home, then the letter

from August 1946 put such plans definitively on the shelf. In Denmark, he now had a job and a spouse who could not be integrated into a Chinese family just like that. In China, he barely had a prospect of suitable employment and whether he and his family could live on that was even more uncertain. And Van's Danish parents-in-law were understandably worried about the prospect of the little family emigrating to such an uncertain future in distant China.

Van remained in Denmark even though there was no lack of encouragement from other family members to return home and help rebuild a new China after the revolution.

His years at Medicinalco were instructive and stimulating. Here, he met and worked with the head of the laboratory, the later professor and doctor of medicine Erik Jacobsen, who, a couple of years later together with pharmacist Jens Hald, became famous when they demonstrated that the drug Antabus provoked a reaction to the use of alcohol, which made it well-suited for alcohol rehabilitation. This was an inspiring work relationship and a job in which he could learn something and use his knowledge. Van worked with antibiotics and the inspection of products used in the medicinal industry. He also researched the vitamin B12 under the guidance of Erik Jacobsen.

Van was employed at Medicinalco's laboratory until 1960. The year before, the firm was bought by Dumex, which was owned by ØK; and this led to different working conditions with which Van was less than satisfied:

"We who were employed at Medicinalco felt more or less sidelined, and the possibilities for advancement looked dark. Therefore, in 1957, I began to speculate about finding other employment and quit my position in 1960 without having secured another job in advance."

So Van wrote in 1985. However, he kept a part-time consulting job with a monthly honorarium of DKK 500 until 1966.

He continued as consultant for Dumex, where he was engaged in a research project at half-pay. In this way, he had a certain economic

security and also time for his own projects, which soon laid full claim to his time.

Family Life

“It is with great pleasure that I hear that my eldest daughter-in-law is pregnant and is going to give birth in April or May. A grandchild will be a great comfort to an old man like me. The grandchild should take the surname of the Yuan family. If I get another grandchild, it can take the name Van and so forth.”

Yuan Zhongfu wrote this at the beginning of 1946. Soon after, another letter arrived:

“Let me hear as soon as possible whether it is a boy or a girl. I cannot wait any longer.”

In April 1946, Van’s daughter Lissen was born. Her name, pursuant to Yuan Zhongfu’s instruction, was a Danishized version of the Chinese name *Li Sun*, which means “born beautiful.”

Elisabeth’s father, Christian Kielland-Brandt, wrote of the birth to Van’s father. The letter is brief and relates that a daughter was born. At the same time, Van’s father-in-law tells of his joy at the connection between his family “and one of China’s excellent sons”.

One month later came the reply from Yuan Zhongfu:

“My dear co-father-in-law, Mr. Kielland.

I have long wanted to write to hear about your well-being, but daily chores and other business have occupied me until now. I feel deeply indebted to you.

Yesterday, on my way home from Hangzhou to Shanghai, I opened again your letter, written on such beautiful letter paper, and read it again and again. I was deeply moved by the powerful feeling from which your letter originates, and I am glad to hear that your family is well and living in peace.



Van, his wife Elisabeth, and a very little Lissen photographed in 1946.



Van's citizenship certificate from Feb. 1953. Lissen and Bent had until then been Chinese citizens. Now they were also Danes. She remembers that she and her brother were allowed to share a lemon soda in honor of the day.

You have accepted our modest family fortune and the modest results my son has achieved and have been willing to give your daughter away in marriage. This marriage between two young people, who grew up in different circumstances and cultures, will undoubtedly stand as an example of the union of East and West.

I would like them always to help each other, for husband and wife to sing like love birds in the sky with each other, for one, the husband, to work hard, and for the wife always to be a good housekeeper. Your family will then be able to thrive and enjoy a long-lasting peace.

It was also with great pleasure that we heard that our daughter-in-law on the 28th of last month had a daughter. We are glad to know that both are doing well. On the other hand, we also feel we must be infinitely grateful to you that you as our family-in-law will spend your time and money on taking care of the young couple. We think often of how much care and good will our son has received in Denmark. We can only hope that we can repay you one day.

At present, it is only through letters that we can show each other respect and consideration. We hope that the international situation will soon improve and that transport can become normal again. We invite you at that time, dear family-in-law, to come to our country and let us personally express our sincere thanks and gratitude.

Sincerely yours,

Yuan Zhongfu

27 May 1946."

Ben means root in Chinese and *de* means virtue. In Danish, these two Chinese characters may be united in the name Bent, which the son who was born in March 1949 was dubbed. It was a great day especially for a Chinese man for whom sons continue the family. Elisabeth Van still remembers Van's pride when he was to dine the day after the birth at the Chinese legation, where he

could report on his first-born son. His father wrote when he heard about the choice of names that he believed the child should be called “Han Dan”, but this advice was not observed. In 1956, yet another child followed, Hemming, which in Chinese sounds like Han Ming, “light of China”.

Van’s father received pictures of his grandchildren; and the family in China, who remember him, uniformly mention his pride in his family in Denmark and the grandchildren. The pictures were eagerly viewed and shown to the family, which in this way could follow the life of this distant cousin.

Van had always been interested in photography. In these years, he blossomed as an especially able portrait photographer of family, friends, and colleagues. He built himself – assisted by a blacksmith Fagerberg – a clever, mobile development lab, which could be folded up and removed after use in the little kitchen of the 2½ rooms on Ordrup Jagtvej.

Chinese destinies

The occasion for the dinner at the legation in 1949, the day after Bent’s birth, was that a new Chinese legate had arrived in the country, Minister Chen, who was holding his first dinner party. The legation had been established in 1913. During the Second World War, it was closed; but, in 1947, a Chinese diplomat was once again in the land. In all his years in Denmark, Van had had a close affiliation with the Chinese legation and assisted with translations and other help. This changed after the Communists proclaimed the People’s Republic of China from Tiananmen Square in Beijing on 1 October 1949, which government was recognized the next year by Denmark as the new China. For the Chinese legation, the power shift meant that the employees no longer represented China’s government. Many chose to return home to an uncertain fate, while others decided to remain in Denmark.



It was not always easy to get an answer from Van in those years. Here is a card from Yuan Zhongfu, asking his wife Elisabeth for news of his son.

No one yet knew what Communism would bring with it. At first, Van also believed that the Communists would be able to unite China and lead the country forward: "At that point, we sympathized with the Communists. In our eyes, the Communists were the only ones who could bring China together," Van said much later in an interview with the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* on 17 December 1997. At first, he helped the new government with the redecoration of the embassy. Denmark had been one of the first countries to recognize the new China, and new representatives were sent to Denmark as early as 1951.

After the Communist takeover, Minister Chen decided to travel home with his wife and five of his six daughters. One of the daughters, Patricia, had been struck by polio in 1947. She was sent for treatment in the US but returned to Denmark when her father was stationed there. In Denmark, she came under the competent medical treatment of the Polio Institute. Prior their voyage home to China, her parents made the decision for her to remain in Denmark, since the uncertainty about her future in China was too great. Van took on the role of her guardian, though without having consulted with his wife first. However, Elisabeth naturally agreed; and, with Patricia on her arm, she and Van bid farewell to the Chen family at the Copenhagen Central Station in January 1950. There had been good reason for concern. Upon their homecoming, there was no one who wanted to use his international expertise, as the diplomat had hoped. To the contrary, he found his property confiscated and, as the member of an earlier regime, was considered with deep suspicion. After a few years, the family tried to leave China through Macao, but they failed. Chen disappeared when he tried to sail to Hong Kong. But his wife and Patricia's siblings survived. Contact was later established with them. Patricia remained in Denmark, where she grew up in close contact with Van and his family.

Yuan Zhongfu, Van's father, also belonged among those whom the new system eyed with skepticism. At first, nothing happened, but after 1951 he was subjected to harassment. As a "capitalist", he was considered an enemy of the new system, even though he was one of the innovators of his time, who had created prosperity around him and contributed to China's development. But that did not count when the Communists

took power.

"After 1949, the situation changed once again. The new popular government totally overturned the country's social and economic system in order to change China's backward state. In this connection, the opportunities for old business folk were limited and altered. Er Jiu had lived almost his entire life in the old China, and it was not easy for him to keep up with the new times and adapt to the new situation, even though his ideas were amiable toward progress. He was not young anymore. He lived in Hangzhou most of his life. When he came to Shanghai, I noticed that he was sad and helpless. When I asked whether I could aid him in any way, he always shook his head."

It is Van's cousin, Zhou Shinan, who gives this picture of the new times and old Yuan Zhongfu's place in it. Communism quickly showed its true face, and it was too much for a man like Yuan Zhongfu, who a few years later – faced with the state-organized destruction of his life's work – was a broken man. He was especially hard hit by the policy of hatred directed at former civil servants, landowners, and businessmen implemented in 1951-52. This campaign, which went under the name "Three Anti's", *sanfan*, seemed quite positive when it was directed against corruption, extravagance, and bureaucracy and appeared to have the purpose of rectifying the morality of the civil service, but it was also a cover for the persecution of individuals. At the same time, the "Five Anti's" campaign, *wufan*, was launched against the capitalist class, which had lived in relative peace until then. Any employer might be brought before a court, and Yuan Zhongfu was as well. The allegations included everything from corruption, tax evasion, theft of state funds, fraud involving labor or materials to theft of state financial knowledge. In this case, too, the campaign was about something other than what it seemed to be about. The accusations could strike anyone whom the party wanted to deal with regardless of "guilt" or not. The purpose, of course, was to pressure owners to give up their factories and generally drag money out of the "capitalists". These campaigns were implemented by the Communist Party as

mass campaigns aimed at creating solidarity by pointing out a common enemy, and they also served to eliminate undesirable citizens who were considered hindrances to the revolution and as a means for recruiting members for the party who were especially eager to exact punishment on former employers. Seen from this perspective, it was a success for the new government.

Yuan Zhongfu was one of the many victims of this policy, which could strike anyone, regardless of personal prestige, who had ever done anything enterprising. And there were many. A grandchild of one of his sisters remembers from his final days:

"When he came to Shanghai, he came to visit us. But once he looked very sad when he arrived and he said to me: 'This time, it is not so good, and I will probably not come anymore.' This was the sanfan and wufan movement. As a capitalist, Er Jiu Gong was deeply affected, and I tried to comfort him: 'It will all work out one day. If there are problems now, we can help. Don't be worried.' After he had left that day, I grew more and more uneasy. The next morning, I visited him, and he looked so normal. I thought there was something wrong with me. Er Jiu Gong traveled to Hangzhou, and shortly thereafter, he died. I cried when I heard it."

Yuan Zhongfu was exhausted and could not cope with the adversity and the unpleasant way the new government treated him. He decided to take his own life by throwing himself into a pond. It seems he was rescued from the water but died shortly thereafter from the consequences on 25 June (7 July according to the Chinese calendar) 1952, 80 years old.

Van received the news of his father's death in a letter from old Yuan's fourth wife, his stepmother Qiming. She was born in 1906 and was six years older than Van and 34 years younger than her husband. Qiming was a well-educated woman with a university degree in chemistry. It turned out later that she had had a boyfriend in her youth she could not get, she had lost her job, and she then married Yuan Zhongfu. Yuan had lost both his other two wives during the war. When he and Qiming met, they decided to get married.

According to the letter, Yuan Zhongfu died in Hangzhou, while his stepmother was in Shanghai. However, she received a telegram that something had happened to him, and she was able to reach him in his last moments.

She wrote the same day to Van about the events surrounding his father's death:

"For the past six months, your father had been under incredible pressure. He was subjected to daily persecutions because of the court case about the tea factory and the five anti-campaigns at the factory and other problems. It looks as though he chose death as a way out. Before the tragedy, he said to his family and friends that there is nothing in life more tragic than a person who wanted to go that way. We comforted him, took care of him, and also kept an eye on him, but nothing could prevent what happened. They said that he went to Xiaotianlan three times and Zhimu a second time before he finally decided on suicide. How sad. How wretched.

You must feel terribly sad to hear this awful news. It is unnecessary to say that the relationship between a father and a son is forever unforgettable. But I still hope that you are able to contain your grief and embrace your family in this difficult moment. I, Qiming, was married to your father for ten years. Everything is not simply over. But how am I to live on without our love as man and wife? Where can I find the comfort that he gave me for the rest of my life? It hurts to think about, and the more it hurts, the more I think. The pain grows so strong that it is as though it will kill me. But life must go on, especially because it is necessary for someone to take care of the things he left behind.

I still live with Chunyi and his family. With a low income of around 100 kg of rice a month, the family's finances are tight. It is just enough to feed a family of five, while other expenses such as schooling for the children and property taxes in Qingbomen are still not met. In such stringent times, there is probably nothing for us to do except gather together and endure the difficulties we face.

*Opposite page:
Family picture from China 1948, which shows Van's
father and his new wife, Qiming, sitting. Standing are
Van's half-brother Chunyi, his wife and his two children.*

*In the ten years I was married to him, your father had some bitter
experiences in business with family members in Shanghai, Hangzhou,
and other places. He dreamed of gold every day, but ultimately he lost
all his savings. I tried many times to warn him but without luck. Finally,
I gave up trying to intervene in his affairs. Even though it is too late
now, I regret that I was unable to stop him. I chide myself often for the
tragedy. To show you your father's morality, I want to quote what was
on the title page of one of the books he read. It was written that worries
provide poor wages, and money brings difficulties.*

*Your father led a simple life. His burial was also simple and only cost
around three million yuan (150 dollars) to which the entire family and
friends contributed. The grave is beside Luo Jingren's on Qinglong
Mountain in Yuangjia Pailou in the Dongyu district. Luo Erge was so
kind as to let me use this site, but I think that we must pay him sooner or
later ...*

*Promise me that you will curb your grief when you hear this frightful
news about your father's sad life. Write to us as often as you can, so we
can keep together as a family. This was your father's will. Your father
used to share his joy with his family and his friends every time he
received a letter from you, especially the pictures of Lissen and Bent.
He spoke openly about how much he missed you and how much he
wanted to see you again. Sometimes, he stared at the pictures and talked
to himself, as he would address himself to me: Haopo, Sai-Chiu. How
sad it is that family members must live apart from each other.*

*The hope of reunion one day may be the only cure for grief, but I hope
that this possibility will one day become a reality in my life?*

*I shall stop here. I feel blurry, hazy, and unconcentrated. Please excuse
my poor handwriting*

Your humble step-mother

Yuan Zhang"



Van's niece Lili was able to supplement the account of Yuan Zhongfu's death. He threw himself into the Fangjia Tang pond near the factory. Before that, he had asked his wife to get money in Shanghai to satisfy the government's demand for payment, but she was unable to get the money. He was a deeply disappointed man when he died.

After 1949, it became more difficult to correspond with China, but the family had a connection with the library at Zhejiang University, which had permission to communicate abroad and, by this route, letters could still be sent and received in the initial years. Still, it became more difficult, and Van had scarcely been able to sense from the last few letters that reached him how difficult the situation was for his father. No one dared write the truth in a surveillance society. The news came as a shock, and there is no doubt that it tormented Van the rest of his life that he was unable to see his father again or, as it is expected of a son in China, help him in his final, difficult years.

After the Communist takeover and his father's death, there was no reason for Van to return to China. His father's businesses no longer existed; and, as the son of a property owner and industrialist, he would have no chance to thrive in the new China. In 1952, he had lived in Denmark for 17 years and had put down roots. What could be more natural than to admit that this was where he belonged and to apply for Danish citizenship.

In later letters, his stepmother recounted a bit more progress – that is, in letters that were subject to censorship and, therefore, did not contain any critical remarks if the writer did not want to risk serious reprisals. We must read her more positive statements about how she had received a position of trust in the assignment of work in this light. Chenyi received a wage hike at the factory, and the family succeeded in getting some financial compensation for property and securities, so that in September 1953 Qiming expressed confidence about the future with five-year plans, new housing, and factories that were under construction: "China is no longer a backwards country, and the life for the Chinese people is getting better and better. Our country is on its way toward a bright future." It sounded like a repetition of Communist propaganda

clichés. And so it was. The truth was that the family was subjected to harassment and that there was only unskilled work for members of a former capitalist family.

Qiming became a unifying figure in the family and was able to talk about the woman's place. Van's niece Lili remembers that she said that, in the old China, women were supposed to bury their name and birthday in their heart and never let their spouse know it. In this way, prosperity would come.

The correspondence between the two continued until Qiming died in 1991. Van sent money, and his stepmother helped with information about ingredients in soy sauce when Van's plans had gotten that far. In 1957, she wrote to Van about the elegant, new hotels that were being built in China for Chinese people who lived abroad and encouraged him to come for a visit. But it would be another 15 years before Van believed the time was ripe for that.



III. DALOON

Restaurant Bamboo

Daloon first became a reality in 1960s, but the business commitment that led to Daloon began as early as the 1950s. As has happened so often before, a Chinese business abroad gets its foothold through a restaurant.

Millions of Chinese live outside of China. Emigration from poor areas in hope of a better future somewhere else has been a fixed pattern in China. Many Chinese live today in southeastern Asia, the US, and Europe. Denmark was only later an immigration destination for the Chinese, and such immigration has been limited. When Van came to Denmark in the 1930s, the number of Chinese residents was not large. It only included sailors or businessmen or, in rare instances, students such as Van. In 1949, hardly 40 Chinese lived in Denmark. Thus concludes Mette Thunø in a Ph.D. dissertation from 1997 on Chinese immigration to Denmark. Later, the number grew, and after the Communist takeover, there were Chinese who chose to stay in Denmark rather than return home to an uncertain fate, even as Danes returned home from China – in some instances, bringing Chinese spouses along. In the years thereafter, resident Chinese attracted additional immigrants through social contacts or family networks. During the 1950s, seven Chinese restaurants opened in Copenhagen, and the restaurateurs used relatives and friends as labor. This led to more Chinese immigration, primarily from Taiwan, while Communist China was closed for emigration in principle.

One of those who helped support the initiative to open Chinese restaurants in Copenhagen was Van, thanks to his connection with An-Wu Peng, who was third secretary at the Chinese legation at the time of the Communist takeover. Peng sensed where things were headed for civil servants of the former regime. As opposed to the legate and other staff members in Denmark, he, along with another former employee at the legation, opened a car rental firm under the name of Peng and Wong. It was not exactly easy to maneuver in Denmark's postwar regulatory environment – and certainly not for two Chinese businessmen, so there was a need for help from Van.

Opposite page:

Chinese-born Chi-yun Eskelund and her daughter test spring rolls at Tivoli 1961. Between them is Helge Nielsen, who introduced Van's spring rolls in Tivoli.

Peng was enterprising, but the car rental business was still too difficult to run. Instead, he began to sell Chinese crafts in Sweden at hotels and through postal orders. He kept contact with Van, and Van visited Peng in Stockholm. Van stepped in to help when, some years later, Peng and some others wanted to open a Chinese restaurant in Copenhagen. Four Chinese men contributed DKK 20,000 each. Van invested DKK 10,000 in the project as did a certain Mrs. Møller, who became the restaurant's hat-check girl. The Bamboo Restaurant opened in 1955 and became well-known as an exotic eating place, where the chef Liu Wan-Cheng introduced Chinese cuisine to Copenhageners. With its round Chinese windows and bamboo facade, the restaurant was something entirely new on the Copenhagen scene. However, Bamboo was not the first Chinese restaurant in Copenhagen. That was China House on Farvergade, which opened in 1949. A Chinese man who resided in Holland opened China House with friends when he observed during a visit to Denmark that there were no Chinese restaurants in Copenhagen.

The reason this particular person had come to Denmark was that he was invited to entertain at an arrangement by the Danish-Chinese Association, which was founded in 1948, another initiative of which Van was a part. At the statutory general meeting on 8 April in the lecture hall of the Danish National Museum, he was elected as a member of the association's board by acclamation, a position he held for many years.

The entrepreneur

"My success is based on hard work and simple business acumen: if you put a dollar in, you must at least get 80 cents out."

Van said this to the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 1997, when Daloon was an established success. And it was correct that it had cost a lot to come so far.

It all really began with his commitment to Bamboo. It was business. Another reason was to develop an entirely new product; and, slightly simplified, it can be said that what, over time, became Daloon started with soy sauce production. Chinese food requires soy, and this was not a product sold in Denmark in the 1950s. The task, then, was to produce Chinese soy sauce for the Chinese food served in Copenhagen. Van viewed this as an appropriate task for a Ph.D. from the Agricultural University. A particular mushroom was to be used in a fermentation process, and he succeeded after some experimentation to grow it at Medicinalco's lab. The next phase was fermentation and maturation in large pots, and this is where his family-in-law stepped up with a helping hand. In his in-laws' cellar at the house on Frølichsvvej in Skovshoved, soy production got started in a homemade, self-built apparatus. Fermentation, maturation, and centrifuging required careful surveillance and stirring. Then, the soy is poured into 25-liter containers and was then ready. It smelled, but the family did not complain. And, for a couple of beers, the garbage collectors took away the remains of the production. It did not sound like much, but the first bottle of homemade soy sauce produced in 1957 was the beginning of what would become Daloon. Van had proved he could do it himself.

The spring roll was introduced to Denmark by Bamboo's chef Liu Wan-Cheng. However, the roll proved to be problematic as a main dish on the menu of a restaurant that wanted to make ends meet and to offset some of the more expensive dishes. The spring roll was too cheap; some clients only ordered spring rolls, which was not good business for the restaurant in the long run. Therefore, it disappeared



One of the first bottles of Van's homemade soy sauce, ca. 1957.

from the menu as a main dish for dinner but was sold for lunch and as an appetizer. In 1985, Van recalled briefly the start of his business as a spring roll producer:

"In the fall of 1960, I was introduced to a gentleman who was interested in selling spring rolls at Tivoli, and we had a meeting. It turned out that this gentleman was named Helge Nielsen, and he had two stands at Tivoli – with hot dogs and cotton candy. He was the son of the well-known Jørn Nielsen from National Scala and brother of Annelise Bock (former director of Tivoli).

Then, I started experimenting with rolls back home in the cellar and invited Helge Nielsen to a trial tasting. They were accepted, and I began delivery on 1 May 1961."

In 1960, Van and Elisabeth bought his in-laws' house on Frølichsvvej in Skovshoved. The in-laws moved into the family apartment on Ordrup Jagtvej. Now, the whole cellar was available, but it quickly became clear that they needed something bigger if they were to do anything about the spring rolls. Therefore, a cellar on Egevangen in Brønshøj was rented, where traces left from an orangeade production had to be removed by hand. The two eldest children Lissen and Bent, the maid at the house, and a couple of cousins were mobilized for this unpleasant task. It was expected that everyone would help and be useful, but Van paid generously afterwards. The business, named "Van's Products", delivered the first spring rolls to Tivoli. Turnover was good, and

soon the little circle of local female employees was expanded. 14-year-old Lissen and the house maid were also enrolled during summer vacation to bake wraps for the filling. 3-400 rolls a day were produced on six gas burners, and they worked both Saturday and Sunday: "We at Tivoli cannot shut our doors due to shortage of goods before closing time," said Helge Nielsen. And so they had to keep at it, and they did.

Van's first employee was Winni Wiedenbein, who came over from Medicinalco. She worked on the production of spring rolls together with, eventually, four other women. Later, the workforce was supplemented with male labor, and it was a principle from the beginning that men and women received equal pay.

The business in Brønshøj had the inconvenience of being dependent on a single customer, and when Tivoli was closed for the season, there were no new buyers of the spring rolls. Van had to look around for new customers, and he succeeded in getting a number of small taverns and restaurants as clients as well as some larger buyers such as Willi's Place, which was a well-known meeting place for young people. Another spot that served spring rolls was the jazz club Montmartre, where many people also gathered when major jazz names gave concerts. The very next year, deliveries to Tivoli stopped. Helge Nielsen had winkled out the recipe and believed he could produce the necessary spring rolls himself. Van was only needed in pressure situations. So, Van had to get new customers if the production was to be profitable.

"In the 1962 season, I supplied very little to Helge Nielsen at Tivoli, because he and his girls figured out how I made spring rolls and began to make them themselves, so I only delivered on the weekend when they were busy. Since I was still employed by Dumex, I had plenty to do anyway," Van related in 1985.

In 1963, Van was actually about to give up. It was too much work and too little profit compared to the labor, which took place in two shifts of four hours each from 7 o'clock in the morning to 3 in the afternoon. The day began with the ladies making batter in a mixer. Then, vegetables



The modest framework for the first spring roll production in Brønshøj.



Tso Wo Chang hans kone Hanne og S.C. Van i restaurant Shanghai. ca. 1965

were chopped, selected according to season, and finally the meat was fried. Meanwhile, wrappers were fried in nine pans. However, there was some technological progress. From 1963, wrappers were baked in a special machine produced for the purpose. The rolls were originally filled manually with a spoon, but in 1962 the firm acquired a hot dog machine that could add the filling. Cooling took place in a refrigerator. When that was done, the rolls were packed into small carton boxes, lined with parchment paper. The capacity was still over 400 spring rolls a day.

Van did not himself believe that he had any talent as a salesman. His forte was not on the business side of spring roll production. By contrast, he was pretty much in charge of the development of the product. Things had gone well with the soy sauce. There was nothing wrong with the spring rolls. Now he experimented with bean sprouts. But to make a living, it was not enough to make a quality product. Therefore, Van allied himself with Chang Tso Wo, whom he knew as a friend of Peng and as a co-investor of the restaurant Bamboo. Chang was willing to enter into a business collaboration with Van on the spring rolls as someone who could do the sales work:

"We had a sort of division of labor: I saw to the production and Chang to sales and transport. We manufactured only fresh goods that could be kept refrigerated 2-3 days, because at that point we weren't familiar with deep-frozen manufacture," Van said in 1985.

Soon after, however, Van began to experiment with options for developing deep-frozen spring rolls. To that point, it was about selling fresh spring rolls for immediate consumption, but there were completely different capacity options if a product could be created that might be kept for a longer period. On the other hand, sales did not improve enough, so that possibilities for expanding the assortment were discussed. Van and Chang were especially enthusiastic about the idea that a way to preserve Chinese dishes could be developed. This required more experimentation. In this connection, Van received help from colleagues at the Agricultural University. One of them was Frits Larsen, who was later employed as quality controller at Daloon.

But it began as a leisure pursuit as quality controller of a canned chicken curry dish that Van was thinking of selling. The idea of producing canned food did not really catch on, but it created a connection to one of the country's major preserved food firms, Beauvais, which became interested in a collaboration when Chang introduced his firm. But the interest was not on preserved food production. That was something Beauvais could do itself. On the other hand, they would gladly cooperate on deep-frozen spring rolls: *"After a while, we were so busy producing deep-frozen spring rolls that we almost forgot about producing canned goods,"* wrote Van in 1985.

Now it was about getting the firm going, and they once again had to move to a larger space, this time to a shut-down canned ham factory on Vesterfælledvej in Copenhagen. Here, too, refurbishing was needed to meet approval from the health authorities. There was room for another Chinese colleague, Chong, who became a sort of head of production with responsibility for baking wraps and filling.

The story of Van in the 1960s is closely linked to the building of and life in the firm that would become his life's work. It takes time to develop one's own product. Van spent more and more time outside the home, where Elisabeth took care of the children. Outside of work hours, Van liked to socialize with his countrymen at Bamboo, buyers of his soy sauce, or elsewhere. Van did not belong to those who ate dinner or slept at home every evening. This may contribute to the tenability of a marriage but may also be a burden if it happens too often: "We did not see Van much, but he was a good father to the children when they were small," says Elisabeth Van.

Van loved his children, and he took care of his family financially. But it cannot be concealed that he was not a family man in the traditional sense. He had big plans, and he liked being with Chinese friends and leading a free life. So, in reality, his wife often did not know where he was. No messages, just gone. In this way, he had a quite Chinese view of the respective place of men and women in the family. His economic

situation in the 1960s, however, was often insecure. Therefore, Elisabeth worked full-time as a teacher to ensure their finances. Elisabeth also wound up for long periods alone with responsibility for the children. Van was a gregarious person, but his view of family life did not entirely harmonize with Danish bourgeois norms. On that point precisely, he may have belonged to the old China, where the man was permitted to do virtually anything, while the woman did not even have a right to her own name.

In 1962, Van's mother-in-law Valborg died. The two liked each other very much, and Van was very moved by her death. Without asking Elisabeth first, Van, like the good Chinese son-in-law he was, invited his father-in-law Christian to come to his old home and eat with the family every evening.

A mosaic of Daloon's first year

As a child, Van's eldest son Bent witnessed the first attempts from soy production to the spring roll adventure. Bent became an engineer and is employed by the Danish railway service, DSB, but at that time he was a little boy who curiously tried to understand the soy production:

"The first memories I have of my father's factory are from around 1954 despite the fact that, at that point, nothing existed that today would be called a real factory. One evening, I was with my mother visiting my grandparents, who lived in a house about half a kilometer from our apartment. Down in my grandparents' cellar, my father was working on building a couple of large Masonite cabinets. It looked exciting, but I didn't know what they were to be used for. That it was part of the production equipment to be used for producing the soy sauce that took place up to 1962 was revealed only later.

In the years after my first visit to the "soy factory", I was often allowed to walk with him to Frølichsvej in the evening, first just to look.

Later, I was also allowed to help. One of my first occupations was to sort maize kernels found in the sacks with the soy beans. It hardly made any sense, but it kept me out of trouble.

So, I experienced at close hand how the raw goods – soy beans and soybean meal, flour and salt, through different processes – steaming – fermentation – maturation – centrifuging – are transformed into KINASOYA, which was a very fine product in relation to what was available on the market at that time.

The fermentation process, which was the real secret behind the quality of the soy sauce, took place with the mushroom Father himself had grown and cultivated in the lab at Medicinalco, where he normally worked. In addition, Medicinalco's smith, handyman, and jack-of-all-trades Fagerberg helped Father produce many of the special tin parts that went into the production apparatus.

The fermentation process, which was to be controlled very precisely (on Father's instructions, I have often had to read temperatures over the course of the day in order to shut off the heat at a given point and turn on the ventilator), took place in a Masonite cabinet.

After fermentation came maturation. This took place in large enamel pots in the second of the two Masonite cabinets. The cabinet was constantly warmed and also insulated pursuant to my grandfather's tin foil principle. The best thing I knew was to walk into the warm room when the pots were stirred."

Van's daughter Lissen trained as a midwife. Like her brother, she recalls from the early years how the children had actively taken part in the firm:

"My first memories from Father's start with spring rolls is something in the direction of lots of trial tastings, rolls with mushrooms, without bamboo shoots or the opposite, some with chicken, others with curry, many varieties, though the spicy ones were not to our taste. We children thought it was exciting to have a little variety in our everyday diet, but we weren't surprised that our father made food; he did that now and again. We had no idea what plans were behind the activity in

the cellar, and even less could we sense what it would turn into.

I vaguely remember that another "activity center" popped up, namely, Egevangen in Brønshøj, locales that we helped Father clean up; it was indescribably filthy even though it had been used as a public bath.

Father installed, among other things, six large gas appliances, pans, a basin with oil and a large homemade drumstick to dip into the oil and grease the pans along with a huge batter pot.

When demand often became larger than supply (especially during the Tivoli season), Father called home and yelled: take a taxi, you have to bake some wraps!

When you are 14 years old on summer vacation, it was a little hard to get going. I must confess that I took my time and went by train and streetcar instead. I knew that not long afterwards I'd be standing in the heat from the large pans, my fingers would be covered with Band-Aids, and I would have to be careful: the wraps could not be too thick or too thin; they had to be soft at the edges. If they were crispy at the edges, there were holes when they were rolled. They had to be baked through or they would stick together, and so on and so on. Every time since when I've made wraps for my own children, I've given Egevangen with "Van's Products", as it was called then, a kind thought."

Jørn Rothberg was a wholesaler who remembers the first time Van turned up to find a buyer for his product:

"Around 1960, there were only two Chinese restaurants in Copenhagen, located in the city center. We were a few young, curious people who were exploring Chinese cookery by visiting these temples to consume genuine Chinese spring rolls. We did it once a week. As a wholesaler in foodstuffs, I thought it would be great if these spring rolls could be bought industrially. We tried to imitate them ourselves, but the results were a fiasco. We gave up.

One day in 1960, I was warehousing some goods from one of my customers and having a beer with the renowned Herluf Kamp

Larsen from the famous, old “Montmartre Jazz House” on St. Regnegade. This is where the world’s best jazz musicians played in shifts. Always a full house.

Suddenly, the door opened. A small man in a form-fitting, tight, black coat stepped in – very elegant. He had a worn briefcase in his hand on which there was an aluminum pan fixed with belts. The small man introduced himself as Mr. Van and said that he made spring rolls industrially at a little factory in Brønshøj from a machine he had himself constructed. Then, he placed the pan on a gas burner, filled it with oil and turned on the gas. He took out of his briefcase a stylish confectioner’s box and opened it. We stared down at two rows of elegant, cooled, delicious spring rolls. They were placed in the pan and voila – Mr. Van served us a really tasty roll, which we devoured with great gusto. Mr. Van told us that he was going from restaurateur to restaurateur selling these spring rolls – and that all the forward-thinking places were receptive and had the courage to try them. And it did take courage in 1960.

I was enormously interested and asked this Mr. Van whether I might not become his wholesaler. He would not promise me that since his production was modest, but he promised to contact me the day production was big enough.

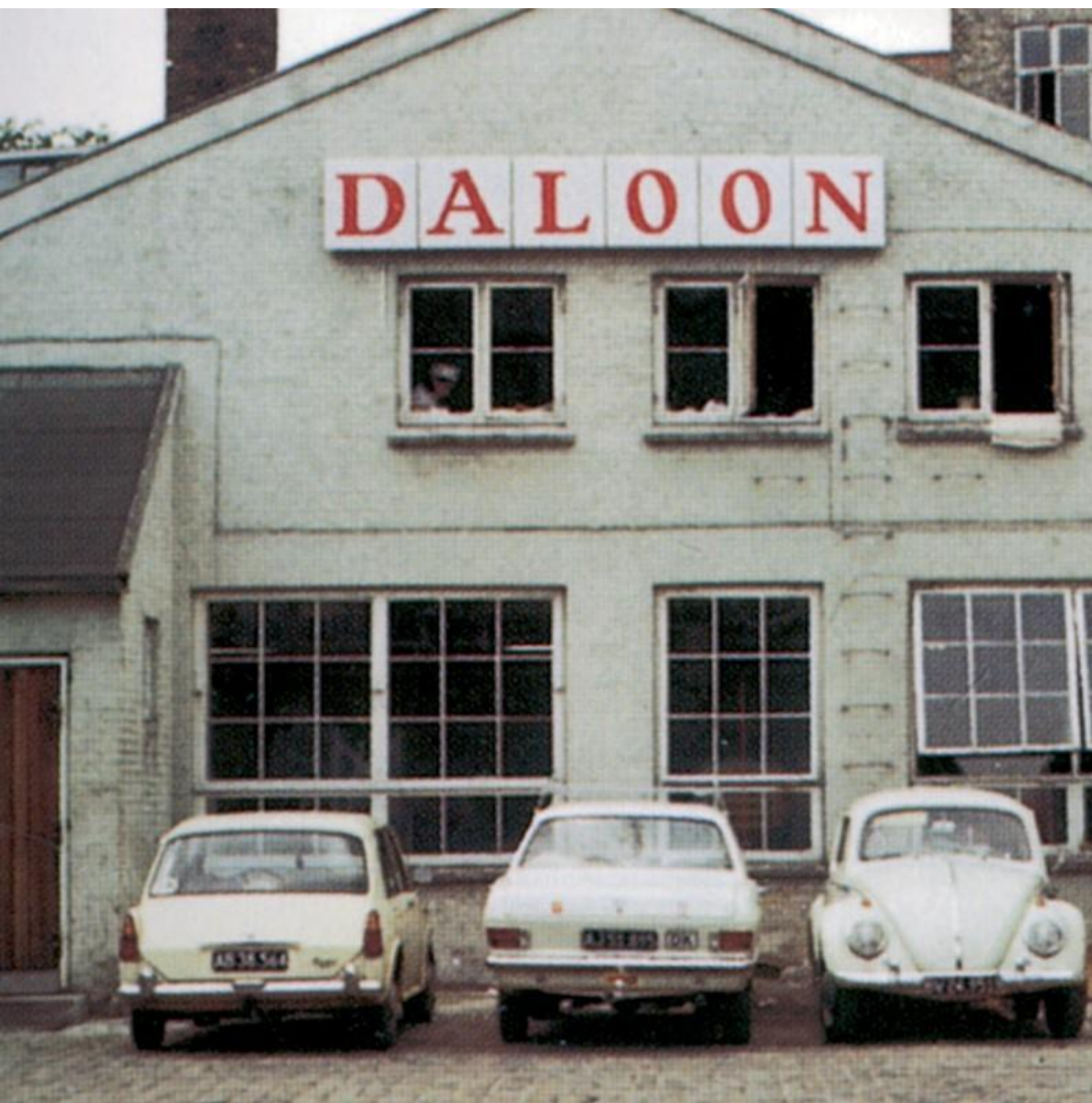
We parted. Six months went by, and I thought that Van had forgotten me, but one day Van called: ‘you can be my first wholesaler, Mr. Rothberg’. The next day, my business window was filled with open boxes full of spring rolls. Thus began an epoch.”

DALOON

Sometime in the mid-1960s, Chang and Van renamed their business DALOON. The name was written in large letters on the factory that was taken into use in 1964 on Vesterfælledvej. Daloon is Chinese, composed of the words *Da*, which means large, and *long* or *loon*, which means dragon. The name means, thus, great dragon. In Hong Kong, there is a city quarter Kowloon, and this is where the inspiration probably came from. Kowloon’s nine dragons became the



The Chinese character for dragon: Lun, long or loon.





Previous spread:

Daloon, Vesterfælledvej in Copenhagen. The rolling ladies are taking a smoke break. Behind the arched windows on the right is the office/bookkeeping; behind the cars were the production locales and on the upper floor a small dining room.

great dragon, which is not only a symbol for imperial China but was also easy to pronounce in many languages and thereby proved to be a really good, tenable brand. But even though the name first appeared in the 1960s, the year 1960 (when the first spring rolls were produced) is considered the firm's true foundation year.

With the increasing production of spring rolls, there was also an adaptation of the production apparatus. New wrap machines, a high-speed chopper, and a cabbage cooker were developed as a supplement to the hot dog machine. The rolling itself was still done by hand in the 1960s. As a buyer, the Plumrose firm, which was really a competitor of Beauvais on the preserved food market, came forward, but they agreed to an arrangement in which Beauvais was given the option of trading with one of Plumrose's subcontractors in return for giving Plumrose access to the spring rolls. In 1966, Beauvais bought Plumrose, and thereafter there were no barriers to both firms marketing the spring rolls. The idea of Chinese food in cans was shelved, and a project on deep-frozen Chinese dinner dishes only had a short lifetime. The product was and remained the spring roll, which continued to display its durability. The number of employees increased; many were foreigners employed for shorter periods of time. And even though obedience to the law in every form of sanitary regulation was a fundamental rule, people were more relaxed about the rules concerning work permits for foreigners. As an employer, Van was influenced by the Confucian ideal of the good example. The firm was patriarchal in a good sense. No one was in doubt about who was the leader, and the leader was not in doubt about his duties – also humanitarian duties – to his employees. He was always there and knew what he wanted in his unobtrusive way, which no one misunderstood. One could always get help from Van, and he was there even if it had to do with a wedding between employees. To be hired by Daloon was to enter into a lifestyle.

The Swedish firm Lecora became a new customer, buying in 1968 a million spring rolls, so the path was about to be paved for an international breakthrough. On the home front, Van and Chang invested in Chinese cafeterias on the corner of Borgergade and Dronningens Tværgade and on Nørrebrogade in Copenhagen. In 1968, they bought the Shanghai restaurant on Gammelortov.

Nyborg

1970 became a crucial year. It has gone well for Daloon in its old locales on Vesterfælledvej – so well that it even became necessary to consider an expansion and find new space. They looked around in the Copenhagen area, but when an offer arrived on advantageous terms to acquire an industrial plot in Nyborg on the island of Funen, Van jumped. The price was DKK 10 per square meter, and the offer came from a subcontractor, DaTSchaub, who had this land available and wanted Daloon as a neighbor. Another neighbor would be Nyborg Flash Freeze, which could provide assistance in preserving the deep-frozen rolls, so there were good reasons for moving to Funen. Among them were the prospect of lower wages, lower costs, and an easy connection to export markets. The Municipality of Nyborg, of course, was not uninterested in attracting something that looked like a business with a future to town, and presumably the municipality was inclined to discuss terms of payment. But there was no need. Van had the money. So a cash settlement could occur on the spot.

The purchase of the land was one thing. Another was the erection of the factory facilities, and that much money was not available. A loan from the bank was necessary, and it went through – though in a strange way that was later described vibrantly by Supreme Court attorney Jørgen Günther Petersen, who was Van's legal advisor and who became the first board chairperson in the Daloon corporation, which was formed in March 1970.

This is the newly-elected board chairman's account of the first meeting with the bank, written 15 years later in Daloon's anniversary book:

"Van had gotten so far that he was planning a real factory, and it was to be built in Nyborg. This was to replace the quaint kitchen arrangement where the spring rolls had theretofore been produced in locales on Vesterfælledvej, where the machines were undoubtedly fine and partially built by Van himself and, for the uninitiated, reminiscent of Rube Goldberg constructions.

Daloon in Nyborg after rebuilding.



The new factory in Nyborg, of course, had to be financed by loans to the widest extent possible. On this occasion, Van and I sought out one of the directors in one of Copenhagen's major banks. The first problem was to explain to this great man what spring rolls even were. Like most other Danes, he had never heard of such a thing, and the first thing that had to be done was to explain that spring rolls were something you ate. Once this was accomplished, Van's life story had to be told, and the bank director looked a little skeptical because Van was a chemist. It was clear that, as a highly regarded lab chemist in the medical industry, he was probably excellent at such work, but did he have what it took to be a man of industry in something he had never tried before? Of course, he had been making spring rolls for a number of years on Vesterfælledvej, but still It was almost something like an expanded home industry. Was this something a bank could really be interested in?

However, the director was very kind and wanted to understand what it was all about, and he also wanted to help launch something new – at least, if it was something you could count on being able to thrive. Loans were granted for the building and machines in Nyborg, but this only meant that they could get the factory built and equip it with machines – this said nothing about the extent to which it could thrive, and the collateral was already spoken for, bank-wise. So they had to see the extent to which spring rolls had a chance to catch on. It was a little difficult for the bank director to estimate this since he still wasn't sure what spring rolls were – namely, he wasn't sure whether they were something you ate a bit of on festive occasions like a sort of marzipan treat on New Year's Eve or a more everyday sort of dish. Therefore, he asked for some numbers on how the business had done and what the earnings were on producing spring rolls at Vesterfælledvej.

Van, who had explained nicely what spring rolls were and who bought them – this consisted primarily of small food businesses and what people would later call catering firms but, at that time, were more likely to be called hot dog stands and coffee bars – simply provided some numbers. Strangely enough, he knew them by heart, but the bank director – probably used to people seeking loans massaging their numbers to look more favorable than what would stand up to a critical evaluation by a bank – received Van's information with a kind, slightly

Indulgent smile, but he had never met Van before and did not already know him. Van also smiled amiably. When the review of the financial situation had ended, the director said that he would like to see some numbers in writing. Van smiled again and withdrew from his coat pocket a blue envelope – the cheap kind you can get at a kiosk. On the back, he had written some of the numbers and handed them to the bank director, who looked both astonished and suspicious even though he was still smiling. He explained that this was all very fine, but he would also like to have an accountant confirm the numbers before he made a final decision on the bank's position – not that he doubted them, he said, even though you could see the expression in his eyes that he doubted them very much, but he would like documentation for their veracity.

So, we parted from the bank director in the best understanding, and the secretary who had recorded the main points of the conversation looked just as amiable and smiling as the director. An accountant was put to examining the main numbers, and the result was sent to the bank director. The most amazing thing was that the numbers on the blue envelope were virtually identical to those the accountant came up with.

The bank director was amazed, the loan went through, and the factory in Nyborg got up and running and has been so ever since. The strange thing that the bank director realized and which amazed me and probably also others was that Van had the whole business in his head and that it was correct what he remembered and had informed.

Remaining is the impression of many years of friendship. Van is fashioned differently than most other people. He can do things that most others cannot, but he is never less kind and welcoming for that reason.”

The new factory, which cost DKK 5.2 million, was dedicated on 6 June 1970. As mentioned, Daloon was now a corporation whose board of directors consisted of Van and Chang, Supreme Court advocate Günther Petersen as chairperson, as well as director Gunnar Buck from ØK and director Oscar Pedersen, who was a well-known person in the hotel industry.

A great advantage of moving to Nyborg was that there was now plenty of room for new machines. Actually, it was only now that the firm acquired suitable machinery. The old wrap machines that looked like a Rube Goldberg invention was replaced by a drum of stainless steel for baking wraps, and this had significance for volume. The new machine could handle 25,000 wraps a day. The production was run by Lee Ah-Tah. He came along from Copenhagen, and he also was responsible for an expansion of the production of an arch-Danish product, *æbleskiver* (a sort of apple dumpling), which was launched in 1971 and proved to be a great success.

In those years, Daloon developed into an important export business. It was already going well in Sweden, where in 1971 a new factory was opened in Storo near Örebro, so that a real production of spring rolls could be launched there.

In England, a collaboration with the major store chain Marks & Spencer was introduced in 1970. The English liked a spring roll with curry, and the English market—especially after they strengthened management in 1976—developed so positively that it allowed an expansion of production and later in 1982 to the foundation of an independent factory in England, which continued to be a good market for Daloon's products. In Germany, a division of Daloon was established in 1973, the first abroad, in the form of Daloon Lebensmittel GmbH in Elmshorn near Hamburg.

Over the course of the first three years at Nyborg, turnover more than doubled from DKK 9.3 million to over DKK 25 million, and the profit approached a million.

The move to Nyborg became a watershed moment in Van's life in other ways. The family did not go with him when Van moved to Funen in 1970. Ultimately, he and Elisabeth separated. Van quickly settled in on Funen and, via his many activities around the factory, made many good contacts in the area. Over time, he became a familiar and esteemed citizen of the town, well-liked and respected everywhere. But he still took good care of his family, was generous when things began to go really well, and he kept contact with wife, children, and family.

Reunion in China

1972 was the year Van returned to China after a 37-year absence. That year, he had decided to withdraw from day-to-day management. He was now 60 years of age with no management duties. So, there was an opportunity for him to visit China, no longer as a son returning to his father but as a successful overseas Chinese man who had fulfilled a prophecy of becoming a great businessman. It had taken hard work and effort and demanded ingenuity and initiative, but it succeeded. By Chinese measures, Van's story was a real success story.

At that point, China had just gone through the most ruinous catastrophe in the history of the country, known as the Cultural Revolution, but the aftereffects were still being felt. On Mao's side, the Cultural Revolution was a coming-to-terms with the party organization in an effort to retain power; but events spun out of control, and it became a generational rebellion and a distancing from the entirety of the old Chinese culture. It is incredible what was destroyed in this period. Books were burned; temples desecrated, stripped of inventory, and demolished; vases and irreplaceable cultural artifacts destroyed to satisfy the dictator's desire to hold onto power. Few people in the history of the world have destroyed as much as Mao. In addition, there was inconceivable human suffering. Symbolic is the tale of Van's cousin Songshen Si. In 1948, he had received a vase for his wedding from Van's father Yuan Zhongfu, accompanied by a poem:

"It was a seven-word poem. I can no longer remember the contents. It had to do with living happily until we were old or something like that. But the vase itself, which I deeply loved, was destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. It made me very sad."

When Van traveled to China, Mao was still in power. Mao died in 1976. The fact that Van's father was considered by the Communists as a capitalist made the son's visit suspect in the government's eyes. The family suffered under government suspicion, and it did not get better when, during the Cultural Revolution, a smear campaign was launched against everything old or foreign.

Evocative image of the Cultural Revolution in China, with the Red Guard reading devoutly from Mao's Little Red Book.





Van by the West Lake in Hangzhou, 1988

Immediately before Van's visit, his stepmother Qiming had her house searched. The house was a ruin, and the family sought permission to make improvements, but a wooden beam to support the roof was confiscated. A cousin recounts that, every night, there were people who threw bricks and stones to smash the windows. It was necessary to barricade the windows with bamboo; and the house, therefore, remained dark. Since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, his stepmother did not dare write to Van abroad, but she had done so again in 1972. At the same time, a letter had arrived from him that he wanted to come to China. Of course, the family was worried whether the visit could take place in peace and without rock throwing, but the authorities saw to it that no unpleasant episodes took place.

The cousin, who wrote a small account of the visit, remembers how she, along with Van's stepmother, fetched him from the railway station. They had taken a picture along because they were afraid they would not recognize him. However, they knew him immediately when he stepped off the train. Van also met his brother Chunyi, who had taken off work to meet him but had been given strict orders from his factory management to watch what he said. Thus, it was that the brothers, who had such different destinies, were able to be reunited.

Van's father's grave outside Hangzhou after renovation in the 1990s.



Naturally, Van went out to see places he knew in Hangzhou, sailing on the beautiful West Lake and visiting the Tiger Spring with its mineral-rich waters as obligatory features. The lake was beautiful, but the city was shabby, he concluded. He said of the family's house, which was rebuilt into unrecognizability, that he liked the house better as it was in the old days. He also recognized a tree, which he climbed as a child, that had now grown tall.

The family recalled that he read poems by Mao out loud. The family gravesite was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. So, Van did not get to see it, but he instructed the family to see to its restoration for which he, of course, would pay. Later, Van and his children had the opportunity to visit his mother's and his father's grave and thus show respect to their ancestors on which the Chinese place so much weight. The circle was now almost closed. The next step was the publication of

a family book about his father in which nephews and nieces recounted their recollections of old Yuan Zhongfu. The book came out in Chinese, and its description of Van's father has been a great inspiration for the author of this book.

Van's visit to China in 1972 was the introduction to a long series of visits in which he enjoyed an increasing good will from the Chinese authorities over a countryman who had done well abroad and thereby brought honor to China. An altered view of economic growth after Mao's death also helped the changing attitude. Van returned in 1976 along with Chang and was now treated as a sort of official guest. He was offered a welcome banquet and asked many questions about Denmark. Van's niece Lili remembered that, after the dinner, Van said:

"Lili, these government officials were far too stylish in giving a dinner on the state's bill. Between twenty and thirty elegant dishes came in and soon disappeared again like butterfly wings. They asked so many questions that I hardly had time to eat. It was not especially relaxing for me."

One souvenir from this trip, which took place the year Mao died, was an orchid that got through Danish customs and was planted back home in Nyborg.

In the years that followed, Van enjoyed more intensive contact with China and his family there. He went to China again in 1979 to see his family and again in 1983, 1985, and 1988, when he met old classmates from Jianghu University. In 1988, there were two visits and again two visits in 1993. During one of the 1993 trips to China, Van visited his father's grave. In the foreword to the book on his father, which was published by family members the year after, he wrote:

"When I returned home in 1993 for Chinese New Year and visited my father's gravesite, memories overwhelmed me as I stood by the grave. I remembered my father's strict upbringing when I was small and how his devoted attention gradually matured me. Now, when my career is a success, he is dead and cannot witness it. These memories and ideas



The grave of Van's mother, Mrs. Shi, after refurbishing.

overwhelmed me, and I became so sorrowful that I could hardly bear it. ”

In 1995, the whole family, Elisabeth, children, and grandchildren came to Hangzhou, where they visited, among other things, his parents’ graves. Van’s two last visits to China took place in 1999 and 2000.

Crisis at Daloon

“Van was a modest man who accepted his own limitations. I recall that upon my employment he emphasized that the sales and marketing boss took care of certain areas, the factory boss took care of production, and I was to take care of finances, edp, and personnel. Then, he would take care of product development and signing the checks – and so it was.

It was not only hygiene in the factory he cared about. The swallow’s nests under the eaves were removed on a running basis. Warehouses were built to receive cabbage for the factory. No mess or dirt was accepted in the factory areas. Not without reason did Van have an excellent relationship with the external veterinarian, who was in charge of state veterinary inspections.

Van was not especially interested in accounting and budget details. But on one point, he stood firm. The quarterly forecasts and the budget were always tightened. He wanted more than anything not to predict results that did not hold up. I have often had to reduce the concern’s budget result in accordance with Van’s wishes.”

Later finance director of Daloon, Hans Nylandsted, characterizes Van as a business leader. His concern for quality did not only apply to the product but also the production equipment. This was the foundation of the firm from the beginning, and it was also maintained during the firm’s crisis in the 1970s.

A huge fire in 1973 and the oil crisis in the mid-1970s meant that plans for an expansion of the factory had to be shelved for a time, but sales of the spring rolls still went well. The firm began to concentrate to a higher degree on the marketing of Daloon.

To that point, they had provided spring rolls and other dishes that could be sold by buyers under another name, but competitive conditions led to an endeavor to fix the name Daloon as a synonym for quality. The assortment was expanded with stuffed cabbage and ice-cream crêpes. The stuffed cabbage did not do poorly, whereas the crêpes were delicious enough but not really suited to become a financial success.

Van later recalled:

"In the 1970s, the price of meat doubled and wages increased fivefold. We couldn't sell spring rolls at five times the price. Therefore, we had to find a machine that could take over some of the work.

We set about developing an automatic rolling machine. We made many attempts before we got one to work.

We collaborated with some engineers from the Technical University of Denmark. One engineer suggested that we try to get the machine to fold the wrap with the help of air pressure. It went well. Folding with air fit very well with a wrap's consistency. So it worked, and that was nothing but good. We have a worldwide patent on this method, and we have the world's best machine. Many times, people think something is impossible, but you can't give up."

In 1976, they entered into a delivery agreement with the German firm Kochlöffel; and, in the following years, Daloon won more of the German market. That same year, Daloon almost doubled its turnover from DKK 27 million to DKK 46.5 million. At the same time, they had to record a deficit of DKK 2.6 million. This meant that they once



Two typical and popular Daloon products.

again had to postpone expansion plans, and it also meant that it was necessary to consider whether Daloon could continue in its previous form as a corporation in which Van himself owned most of the shares.

Since 1972, Van had left the management of Daloon to an administrative director, but he now wanted to step in again as day-to-day manager with a sales boss. In a letter of 12 March 1977 to the chairman of the board, Supreme Court advocate Jørgen Günther Petersen, Van clearly placed the blame for the firm's difficulties:

"I believe that the poor operating profit for 1976 must be borne solely by the adm. director, and it is no use to explain away or place the blame on others. Moreover, we have reached the point that we have no more excuses for the bank. Our credibility is too important, and we may risk that the bank will take drastic measures, which is tantamount to the downfall of Daloon. In addition, our creditors will begin to doubt our creditworthiness, which may also result in the downfall of Daloon ..."

In 1977, Van was sincerely worried about the future of his firm. One problem had also been that such large discounts had been offered that customer inventories were full and sales opportunities poor. This cost the sales boss his position, and the administrative director had to go. One of the problems might also have been that Van did not reside permanently in Nyborg, but he had to now, so that the numbers could be fixed. In his letter, Van summarized the situation in this way:
"Ultimately, I want to say with my best conviction that DALOON is a good firm but has been misruled. This is my determined impression after 4 months residence in Nyborg."

Outwardly, Van was a gentle man, but he could also become angry and make decisions – or not make a decision, which is also a kind of a decision when a firm is in crisis.

Thus, pressure was put on Van by the board from, among others, Oscar Pedersen to sell shares to acquire new capital. A number of firms

showed interest, and a collaboration with the American food concern Kellogg's was discussed. In this connection, ideas were floated to sell Daloon. After much hard consideration, Van decided not to sell either shares or the firm. Three of Daloon's employees took out large loans to assist Van; and, through a number of smaller loans, about two million Danish crowns were acquired, which was the necessary capital to deal with the crisis.

In this period, there was interest from De Danske Spritfabrikker [Danish Distillers] in buying Daloon. Director Povl Heegaard from Danish Distillers spoke to Van and has this account of his meeting with Daloon's leader:

"In the '70s, Danish Distillers was aggressively developing its business. Diversification at that time was very much in fashion, and the plan of Danish Distillers was to expand that part of the business that was based on refining foodstuffs – especially potatoes – through frying. Beyond organic development, acquisitions were on the agenda. In our studies of market opportunities, Daloon was also a topic in part because frying was a part of the process and in part because the finished product was deep-frozen, like our french fries. In 1973, Daloon had experienced a fire and, beyond being a relatively small firm, the operating profits were also unsatisfactory.

As administrative director for Danish Distillers, I had the task of directing an inquiry to S.C. Van, sounding out whether the firm was for sale. In my portfolio, I had, from an objective viewpoint, an attractive offer that was approved by my board.

The inquiry to Van was formulated neutrally and, despite that, received positively so that I could pay a visit to Nyborg to discuss it. I was unusually well-received by a small, smiling Chinese man who, in the bargain, offered a fine lunch with especially good wine. The conversation touched on all manner of things but without Van himself ever touching on the question of what my visit to Nyborg was all about. Finally, I felt the time was right to tell Van the cause. I recounted the strategy of Danish Distillers, told him about the firm, and finished by saying we were interested in beginning purchase negotiations with Van. We knew Van was getting up in years and did not have a plan for a generation shift

Bean sprouts used as filling in Daloon's spring rolls.



since neither of the two sons was interested in carrying on the business at that point. Van seemed a little uneasy with the situation and said that the firm was not doing well because of the aforementioned fire, and he stressed that a Chinese man is not ready to sell when things are not going well. I then asked how a Chinese man looked at a sale if the firm was doing well and received the answer: 'Then, he does not have much desire to sell'. This did not provide many opportunities to acquire the firm, but the meeting still ended positively in that we received a 'right of first refusal', so that Van would contact Danish Distillers if he changed his mind.

Even though the result was poor, in my estimation, it was still a good day at Nyborg. I had come to know a very interesting person and had acquired some insight into why he had come to Denmark, why he remained there, and how he went about producing spring rolls as well as how he organized sales. Business-wise, one of the most interesting things about Van was his ability to innovate not only with respect to the production processes, which he improved over the years, but also his instinctive insight into the importance of product development, combined with his understanding of quality.

I did not hear from him for a number of years but then received a letter asking whether I might join Daloon's board. The firm was doing well, and I considered carefully whether I should say yes. I did – with my board's approval – and with a clear recognition that this would happen on the condition that Danish Distillers would be able to purchase the firm if it was for sale. This was accepted.

After a few years, it was clear that the firm was not going to be sold, and Van's son Hemming was being groomed to continue as part-owner and administrative director.

I had come to care for the company, including, especially, Van, and I continued as a member of the board. Many others have described Van and his many good qualities. Therefore, I shall only dwell on a single episode. It was on a trip we made together to China a few years ago. Even though Van was not sympathetic to the form of government in China, he was proud to be Chinese and proud of the development the country was undergoing, and he was – despite his many years –

inexhaustible in showing the country's sights and explaining, for example, how Shanghai had looked when he was a child. His narrative joy was infectious, and his knowledge was considerable. This man was an incredibly positive and giving human being."

Van was not satisfied with the year 1977. In a letter to his niece Lili in China, he wrote on 8 November 1977:

"I've been occupied with business recently, and I am, so to speak, not in a good mood. Western Europe has been hit by inflation in these years with a rise in prices of 15% annually. Can you imagine that raw goods prices have risen 700%? The factory was closed because of hikes in the price of oil last year, and many employees have been dismissed. But the jobless can still get up to 90% of their normal wages since the governments in most European countries support the unemployed"

Van accepted the consequences of Daloon's crisis. Former finance director Hans Nylandsted recounts:

"Van was a very thrifty but absolutely not a stingy man. After Daloon's economic problems in the last half of the '70s, Van moved from a large villa to a simple apartment off Nyborg Square. The apartment was difficult to keep heated. He recounted at the office that, in the winter, he often took a bath 1-3 times in an evening to keep warm.

He most decidedly did not spend much money on clothes, apart from the purchase of two Burberry coats in London. The latter he never actually used, since the old one first had to be worn out.

Originally, there was access to the big office in the factory from the hall. Yours truly had a small office with a desk and a cabinet with access from bookkeeping. I had to accept switching offices. Van hated sitting alone and did very well working among the bookkeeping girls – and, he said, I definitely needed more space when I had meetings. Van's trips to Copenhagen took place in the local train's tourist class seats, where you did not need a seat reservation."

This last feature was reminiscent of his father's train trips between Shanghai

and Hangzhou, which also utilized the cheap seats.

In the following years, parts of the production were automated. The ladies who rolled the wraps were replaced by machines in 1977. That same year, 84 workers were dismissed, and the firm generally began to use the Danish flexicurity system to keep production going and an equipoise between employees and production needs.

Van had worked with Chang since the beginning of the 1960s; and, in 1968, they had bought together the restaurant Shanghai. In 1973, Chang sold his half of the shares in Daloon to Van, and in 1978 it was agreed that Van should continue as head of Daloon and Chang would take over Shanghai. This meant the end of an economic partnership that had benefitted both of them in the initial years but no longer functioned as Daloon grew and required an efficient management and ownership structure. But the decade did not end too optimistically. In his 1978 Christmas letter to Lili, Van wrote:

“New Year’s Eve is on the way. In the midst of a powerful snow storm, I write this letter and wish you and your family a happy new year. 1978 was the most depressed year for the European economy. The economy stagnated, unemployment grew, and the government had to support the jobless. My factory was very affected last year. I hope that this year will be more optimistic.”

Active

In 1980, the ten-year anniversary of Daloon on Funen, Van was interviewed by the local newspaper in Nyborg. Van was not the kind of person to say very much, but in this conversation, which was brief, he managed to summarize his vision of life and, in particular, his vision of history:

You’ve studied a lot of history – also Danish history? – We must seek

truth in history, and the Danes have always been highly taxed and had to pay for the wars that were conducted. It only got better after Frederik VII and the introduction of the Danish Constitution.

As a Dane, one must be embarrassed by the in-depth familiarity you have with our history – is this also true of world history? – Yes, you can learn much from history – it repeats itself, as they say. And if you study it closely, there have always been wars somewhere on the earth – and it will undoubtedly always continue.

The law of the jungle, then? Yes, the smart will always fool the less smart, and the strong will always defeat the weak!

And we know one of your favorites is the English natural scientist Charles Darwin – the man with many theories? – Darwin presumed that, in nature, there was a surplus of births, and many individuals would be lost. Many individuals of the same species display a certain heritable variation – and this variation makes some individuals better suited than others in the struggle for existence, so the poorest equipped are lost.

We are all equal, you say? – Yes, but some are more equal than others, as the English manufacturer and utopian socialist Robert Owen said, and this is confirmed every single day!

It is no secret that you are 69 years old, but you look 50. Many of our readers would probably like to have the 'recipe' that keeps you so young? – Oh, it's quite simple. One must never go to the extremes. One must know one's limitations, and one must first and foremost be active! Not too much sports, but a little badminton, a lot of brain gymnastics, and relaxation with Beethoven, Mozart and, particularly, Johann Sebastian Bach.

This was Van's recipe for a long life, which his own name placed in prospect, that is, if you took care of yourself. To what was mentioned in this conversation could be added a social life with a



Van in his office at Daloon, photograph from 2000.

large circle of acquaintances, and a circle of friends to whom he was faithful, good food, enjoyable hours at a regular watering hole, and a good relationship with persons of the opposite sex.

Daloon in the '80s and '90s

The export market continued to do well at the end of the 1970s, while the Danish market stagnated. They tried vegetable gratins as a new product, and in 1979 the profit was DKK 2.3 million. So, things began to look up. The big upswing was still to come. In 1980-81, the Chinese cafeterias in Copenhagen were sold, but things began to go really well for the firm both in Denmark and in Europe.

In April 1982, Van wrote a letter to his niece Lili in which he expressed his view of the management of Daloon and concomitant difficulties more openly than otherwise:

“By nature, I don't like to travel around, especially on long trips. You asked me when I am bringing my family to China, but I'm afraid we cannot travel to China in the near future. I don't have the money at this time, and it will take time to save up for it with the economic decline all over the world. You may not understand the situation here, but I feel it is difficult to explain in a letter.

It has been a hard winter here this year. I have a cold and felt dizzy all day, and my blood pressure rose. When my brother Chenyi died, I was sick in bed. Therefore, I couldn't do anything but ask you to convey my condolences. Now, I am almost well. After taking it easy for two months, I've gained weight from the lack of exercise.

Being manager of a factory is a great responsibility for me. The work keeps me extremely occupied and provides occasion for much reflection. It is not an easy matter to feed a hundred and twenty people and do it well. The problem is that Denmark is a socialist country in which the rich must see to the poor, so that the standard of living is the same for everyone. Both the government and the population keep to a 'food first, deficit later' principle. When I travel, I have to document all the bills for food, board, and travel when it is a business trip. All the expenses that have nothing to do with business, I have to pay myself.

Recently, the tax authorities have increased their oversight. Hanmin (my youngest son) went on a business trip to the US, but the tax authorities insisted that I personally cover the expenses simply because he is my son. I must admit that Denmark has a good social welfare system with free health care, pension, unemployment support up to 90% of one's normal wages, and social assistance for those who do not belong to a union. Denmark has a population of 5 million, and 300,000 are out of work. So, the government has large unemployment insurance expenses. The money in the government's hands comes from the pockets of citizens.

Six years ago, I moved from Denmark's capital to Nyborg. At that point, the factory was almost bankrupt. My family did not want to come with me, so I lived all alone in Nyborg. Since the factory was my first priority, I did not mind living alone and running the factory alone even though it was hard sometimes. Now the situation is better. Thanks to the efforts and hard work of my colleagues, the factory is back on track. I am looking for a successor who can take over the business after me. Hanmin will be 26 and is getting a degree from the business school next year. At the moment, he works for an airline company and is interested in the factory. But we must wait until the fall for the final decision about the factory's future.

...

It is Easter today. A religious holiday. High snow is barring traffic."

A year later, in May 1983, he wrote a letter in which the idea of moving back to China appears for the first time:



“I understand that the current situation in our homeland is good. The top priority is stability, unity, and an increase in the standard of living for the population. Everyone is making great efforts to produce things, which we Chinese abroad are very proud of. If the development continues in this way, it may happen that I return to China and settle there. Let’s speak about it when we meet in Hangzhou in the fall. I am well. Don’t be worried. Still busy with work, but every so often I ‘steal’ time to look after the garden. Of course, there is a need to tend the garden all year round, but since the factory keeps me constantly occupied, the only thing I can do is to spend as much time in the garden as possible. Oh, I love the orchid and its wonderful scent!”

The English market was developing very positively at the beginning of the 1980s, and this provided an occasion for considerations about independent production in England. These considerations ended with the establishment of a factory in Newark, dedicated in 1984, to satisfy the English market, which purchased in 1984 35 million spring rolls.

Of the entrepreneurial spirit behind Daloon’s expansion in those years, Hans Nylandsted, FEO of Daloon for many years, writes:

“When I joined Daloon in 1979, there were four rolling machines installed (in 1976 and 1977) for the production of 100-gram spring rolls.

The rolling machines began to run very well in 1979, but 150-gram catering rolls still had to be hand-rolled, which irritated Van. For him, it was not just the economic aspect but the bacteriological. He finally succeeded in making machines for 150g spring rolls.

In 1981, an additional two rolling machines were built. Van was always on the cutting edge, keeping the machines technically updated. Sales on the English market continued to rise at the beginning of the 1980s. Harbor strikes and freight increases provided major problems for exports from Denmark and storage problems in Nyborg. Moreover, wage costs were low in England.

Van wanted to establish a factory in England. Van visited a number of closed plants there. He maintained that land should be

Opposite page:

Van in the company of Prince Consort Henrik at the award of the King Frederik IX’s Honorary Prize to Daloon in 1986. Prince Henrik paid the factory a visit in 1993.

bought, and an entirely new factory should be built from the ground up in accordance with Danish regulations, which were more stringent than English requirements. Land in Newark was bought in connection with the visit of the board and management in October 1982. Rolling machines and spiral freezers were ordered from, respectively, Denmark and Sweden. However, the production capacity in Nyborg was completely filled. Expo Fyn's manufacturing facilities [a meat-packing concern] in Rudkøbing were closed. Van heard about this, and it was decided to lease (with right of preemption) the factory buildings in Rudkøbing in March 1983. Daloon went straight about to modify the buildings in Rudkøbing. Delivery of the machines ordered for England was pushed forward, and they were instead installed in Rudkøbing. Van was personally very active in the establishment of the Rudkøbing project. Here, Van made sure that no compromises were made with respect to quality and hygiene. The factory was up and running on 2 May 1983. New machines for the Newark factory were immediately re-ordered. In December 1983, production started in the factory in England."

The factory in England was primarily run by Van's youngest son Hemming, who held an MSc in Economics and Business Administration from the Copenhagen Business School. The new factory in Newark thus increased production capacity at the Danish factories for the Danish and other markets, including especially the German.

At the same time as the English project, a sales push in the US was being considered, which did not have entirely the same success. Hans Nylandsted recounts:

"Van started producing bean sprouts at a closed dairy in Nyborg. He wanted a proper bean sprout factory. He established one on the factory ground in 1984. Van's pride and the world's most advanced bean sprout factory – a fully automatically-run factory with the absolute best hygienic conditions.

As a true Chinese, Van wanted Daloon to have its own company in the US. Together with 3 other Danish factories and a female Danish sales head, who wanted to emigrate to California, they tried establish a sales company in the San Francisco area. Unfortunately, the three other Danish factories dropped out for different reasons. Daloon's management together with Hemming Van, who was director of the English factory, suggested

that Van drop the idea. But Van did not want to lose face and forced through the establishment of Daloon Foods (USA) Inc. in 1985. The sales head was employed as the only worker there with a board consisting of Van, adm. director Andreas Nielsen, Hemming, Van, and myself. The market was flooded with locally-produced Chinese spring rolls; the exchange rate on the dollar had fallen quickly from DKK 12. It was difficult and painful for Van to have to consider closing over there in 1986."

In 1985, a triple anniversary could be celebrated. Van had been in Denmark for 50 years. He had paid a visit to China in 1972 and went back regularly, but his work was in Denmark, where he had run Daloon for 25 years, which was also having an anniversary. At the same time, it had been 15 years since the production was moved to Nyborg; and, with the new factories in England and Rudkøbing, it had to be admitted that things were going quite well for Daloon. It had begun with 55,000 spring rolls a year in 1960, and now in 1985 production was up to 75 million rolls a year. Turnover had risen from around DKK 50,000 to DKK 162 million. Daloon was enjoying a trend, the premise of which was simplifying everyday cooking with the help of finished products. Deep-frozen dishes were popular, and sales rose. Daloon's special advantage was that they delivered a product that was viewed as easy to prepare, healthy, and good tasting.

In October 1986, he wrote to Lili:

"There has been so much to do since I had contact with the food industry in China several years ago. So much that things are piling up on my desk. Highest up is the responsibility for the factory, which is large. Sometimes, I have the feeling that I'm 'sewing another bride's gown', but if friendship and good connections are important, then I'm willing to sacrifice myself a bit."

In Denmark, 23.2 million spring rolls were sold at the end of the 1980s. This meant that investments could be made in new equipment at the factory in Rudkøbing. In Germany, Daloon experienced a major sales boost in 1992, and at that point Germany was responsible for 40% of the



S.C. Van 1989

sales with McDonald's and Aldi as very large customers. This changed at the end of the 1990s, and this setback in the German market required a significant process of adaptation, which proved how dangerous it is to be dependent on a few large customers.

Of course, Van was satisfied with his firm and happy about the great progress and external recognition in the form of prizes for his export business and the quality of his products. The number of employees rose in the years from 1991 to 1995 from 235 to 284 and sales of products from 13.9 tons to 16.8. Turnover rose from DKK 286.6 million to DKK 337.8 million and net worth from DKK 134 million to DKK 170 million. So, it was a business with a sound basis that came out of the 1990s.

In 1992, Van turned over management of the firm to his youngest son Hemming. But Van could not just "sit at home". He continued to have a hand in the daily affairs of the firm he had built up and led in accordance with the beautiful principles of quality in product and management and humanity generally in relations at the workplace.

In 1995, Van had resided in Denmark for 60 years. The Danish-Chinese Association of which Van had been a faithful supporter marked the occasion with the publication of a little pamphlet written in Chinese with greetings to Van from resident Chinese and other friends. Xu Yuan-chao, who was the editor, introduced it with a little description of Van:

"He loves traditional Chinese culture and calligraphy in the Yuan style. He has learned Tang and Song poems by heart, loves to read books, and has a comprehensive knowledge of things. In his bedroom are shelves full of books on Chinese history and biographies. Every time he has read books about the humiliating history of China in the modern age, books about government corruption and the miserable lives of the population, he has a hard time repressing a sigh and continuing to read."

These traditional interests were combined with the pleasures of football matches, music, and flowers or big cars. A Mercedes 500 was long the preferred vehicle. More than 300 Christmas cards were also a pleasure, but over the years they became bothersome to answer when it was to be done personally and by hand.

During the 1980s, Daloon became a well-known brand, and in 1996 it was on everyone's lips when Van proved to have a special impact on TV. A commercial for Daloon was run on TV in which Van talked about his upbringing in China and about spring rolls. It took about a minute, but Van's language and appearance and, particularly his use of the expression "makes your tummy happy" made the advertisement what one would call a hit. The dragon in the commercial who says "Daloo-oo-o-n" became famous, and the expression almost became a blight. Van was just himself, but in this case that was the best he could be. The ad was a success; but the firm had not been prepared for the attention Daloon garnered and the increased demand that came with it, which they could hardly satisfy.

"I'm still in good health with a lot of energy," Van wrote in December 1998 to Lili, and this he maintained to the last.

When Van died in 2003, 90 years old, his business had reached a high point. It could not keep up in the years thereafter. The food business is highly influenced by shifting markets. There are many competitors, and the spring roll long ago lost its novelty value. The profit on each spring roll is not great. So it is important to have volume and to be able to minimize costs. Recent years have not been easy for Daloon, whose earnings are dependent on the traditional spring roll in different variations but are pressured by price and cost. If the spring roll was to keep up as a product, it had to be by virtue of quality, and that is expensive. The business in those years was undergoing a transformation process in the adaptation of production and technology. After a critical period, the business now seems to be moving forward again.



Van was a great success on TV.

Opposite page:
Portrait of Van at Daloon. Painted by the female
artist Duo Duo Zhang, who came to Denmark in
1990 with support from the Daloon Foundation.

The spirit of Daloon

Van had managed the business in his own way, and this gave it a special spirit, which his employees dubbed the “Daloon spirit”. Some of this spirit was captured by Hans Nylandsted:

“In accordance with the best Oriental custom, Daloon did not gladly part with good employees. Seniority at Daloon was very important. One of my first major disagreements with Van had to do with office trainees. He was of the opinion that the firm should keep students once they were trained – I was of the view that they should go to other firms to develop. We were in agreement that we could then bring an old student back if Daloon absolutely had a need for it. When a talented employee left the firm to expand his or her education, Van unfortunately viewed it as a breach of trust. Van knew and remembered all the employees at the factory and often their children. Van was very solicitous to the weak. If, in Van’s eyes, the errand girl had been given too many packages for the day’s post, he did not feel too superior to help with the stamps and drive to the post office with the packages. His daily rounds at the factory were very popular. In Daloon’s difficult periods at the end of the 1970s, Van rewarded employees by not ‘sticking his tail between his legs’. That employees mean very much to him was seen in the bylaws of the S.C. Van Foundation, which offered support to employees or their descendants who were in need. It is not without reason that Daloon is one of the most sought-after workplaces on Funen.

Customers and suppliers showed fidelity to Van in the tough times at the end of the ’70s. Customers remained, and suppliers displayed great confidence, including through the extension of credit. Even though net worth was around zero, credit terms were extended by many of the large suppliers. Daloon repaid this by observing the agreements entered into. If it was not possible, the supplier was contacted prior to the due date, and a new deadline was agreed to. One very large credit limit with DATSchaub was finally redeemed in 1981. In connection with the two fires at the Nyborg factory in the 1970s, Van felt very well treated by the company’s insurer Nye Danske Lloyd (today, Tryg). Van would not accept a change regardless of the economic calculations. In connection with the construction of the factory in England in 1982,



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CEO Andreas Nielsen and I held a meeting with six bankers (Danish and English). Daloon needed a bank that was willing to take a risk on the project. Daloon's bank connection at the time did not want to, but Privatbanken (today, Nordea) was very committed and believed in the idea, Daloon A/S, and its management. Thereafter, Privatbanken became the bank connection for the Daloon concern, and Van never regretted this decision. Until his death, Van and Daloon's management were invited to the annual meeting at the bank.

I experienced Van's consistency, for example, in one of my first years at the factory when, at a meeting at my office, Daloon's factory boss refused to allow an improvement to be carried out during the summer vacation closing. The factory boss was gone from Daloon within the hour.

Van was sometimes shy of conflict. Especially in later years, if he was dissatisfied with some of the conditions at the factory, he often avoided direct confrontation with, for example, the factory management. Instead, he invited another member of management along on a factory tour in which he emphasized his dissatisfaction, so that the signal was sent on to the right person. Van came into my office several times a day. If his visits suddenly stopped and he was in the building, I could certainly fear that I must have made myself unpopular and then had to contact him to explain the state of things."

In the 25th-anniversary book published in 1985, the firm's CEO at the time, Andreas Nielsen, wrote:

"Can Daloon survive the year 2000? The answer is YES."

Andreas Nielsen stressed product development, marketing, and high technology as pillars of Daloon in addition to belief in oneself, knowledge, and refusing to buckle in crises. With these qualities, he believed, "we will, of course, survive the year 2000, the year 2010, and the year 2020 as an independent, privately-owned Danish firm". This prophecy that Daloon would still be a Danish company on family hands by 2020 was not fulfilled. In 2015, Daloon was sold to the Dutch company Izico, but is still based in Nyborg and operating under the name of Daloon.

In particular, the director stressed “our fantastic Daloon spirit among all the employees” and believed in a firm that concentrated on what it could do: “dough with filling”. This is what Van had created. Dough with filling, which grew into a business worth millions. He also deserved much of the honor for the special spirit that would influence his firm. In many ways, the firm came to mirror Van’s own human qualities, which can carry it a long way but is powerless if market forces run a different direction in the long term. His business did survive the year 2000, and time would show it will survive the next decades. But it is certain that Van’s lifework is unique as a rare but also very Danish business venture with parallels to other Danish firms that grew from nothing, thanks to the vision of a single man. It is the story of the attempts on a small scale to form the foundation for the development of a large firm. This required a union of characteristics that have to do with Van’s Chinese background and with the education he got in Denmark. For those who met him, he seemed like something very special and one of the most fascinating and clever people you could ever be so fortunate to meet. It may be correct as the high school superintendent in his time and Van, too, believed that the Chinese and the Danes are not so different. But that is what people are, and Van was something special.

In a conversation in the 1980s or the 1990s, Van summarized his view of the firm operations and, thus, the “Daloon spirit” in this way:

“You need to have luck here in life, and you must not run risks. But the secret behind a good business is good employees.

Daloon is a good size. We are not so many that we do not all know each other.

We have never had room for ‘sharp elbows’ at Daloon. We do not have class distinctions here.

You’re allowed to carp one day, as long as you’re kind the next. There must be a balance in things.

Everyone who is employed at Daloon must be honest and have warm feelings for each other. We are to feel like one big family.”



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Van did not himself leave behind an account of this life but a series of contributions may be found in the book *Daloon – 25-års-jubilæum – 1968-1985* (1985) from which a number of quotations by him and others derive. Van wrote a short account of his impression of Denmark in the yearbook given out by the Danish folk high school Askov, see *Askov-Bogen* 1937. Furthermore, reference may be made to the book *Dragens fortælling. Daloon i ord og billeder [The Dragon's Tale: Daloon in Words and Pictures]* (2001), which tells about Van and the history of the firm. In addition, there were a number of conversations with family members and quotations from personal accounts as well as many letters in Van's private archive from his father, his niece Lili, and other family members quoted in this book. An important source for the story of Van's father is the family book that was published in 1994 with accounts in Chinese by family members and which has been accessible in a private English translation. A pamphlet dedicated to Van with a number of small articles was published by the Danish-Chinese Association in 1995 and again in 2001. Van was interviewed by the press on a number of different occasions; see *Lokalavisen* 22 May 1980, *Fyns Stiftstidende* 19 February 1982, *Fyns Amts Avis* 11 November 1995, *Jyllands-Posten* 17 December 1997, and *Berlingske Tidende* 21 April 2002. The history of China has relied especially on John King Merle: *China – A New History* (1998). On economic developments in China after the fall of the emperor and the new elite, Marie-Claire Bergère: *The Golden Age of the Chinese Bourgeoisie 1911-1937* (1989) was especially useful as well as an older study of Van's province Zhejiang, R. Keith Schioppa: *Chinese Elites and Political Change: Zhejiang Province in the Early Twentieth Century* (1982). On Chinese immigration to Denmark, see Mette Thunø: *Chinese Migration to Denmark: Catering and Ethnicity* (Ph.D. dissertation 1997). On the environment in Shanghai, see Christopher Bo Bramsen: *Generaldirektøren. Vilhelm Meyer – en dansk forretningsmands liv i China 1902-1935 [The Director General: Vilhelm Meyer – A Danish Businessman's Life in China 1902-1935]* (Gad 1993).

*Opposite page:
Shanghai also changed over the 20th century. The picture
shows Shanghai today. Photo: Eidos*

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