

BOOK REVIEW

China and Japan: Facing History

Ezra Vogel, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019*

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This book is the posthumous work of a professor emeritus of Harvard University, Ezra Vogel, who became famous in Japan for his work *Japan as Number One*, published in 1979.¹ The Japanese translation of this book has already been published,² but this great work is written in plain English throughout, and even those who are not in the habit of reading academic books in English on a daily basis can enjoy reading the book, so I recommend that you read it in the original English version. The aim of this book is clear. As the author writes in the preface, it is argued that a stable future between the two countries cannot be built without reexamining the history of relations between Japan and China, which have an unparalleled long history of exchanges. He calls himself an outsider, and says that because he is neither Chinese nor Japanese, he can talk about the relationship between the two countries without being biased towards one or the other, and can present a perspective that is helpful to both countries.

This 536-page long book provides an overview of the history of Japan-China relations spanning 1,500 years from ancient times to the present. There are many more specialized works on Japan-China relations than this book, but there is no other book that deals with the history of those 1,500 years without excess or deficiency in each era. This book also reminds us that there are many things that we lose sight of when we divide history into the ancient, medieval, and modern times as is the usual practice. People of Japan tend to view the history of Sino-Japanese relations in terms of “China as a teacher and Japan as a student,” but according to this book, if we shift our perspective to the modern era, from the First Sino-Japanese War until very recently, China has learned much from Japan.

The author also attempts to provide a deeper and substantive understanding of the process by which ancient Japan learned from China. For example, the description of horses being imported

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1 Vogel died in December 2020.

2 Ezra F. Vogel, translated by Chisako Masuo, *Nit-Chu Kankei-shi: 1500 Nen no Koryu kara miru Asia no Mirai* (Japan Keizai Shimbun Publishing Co., Ltd., 2019)

from China in the 6th century makes us realize that there were no horses in Japan until then, and this makes it easy to understand that it caused a transportation revolution. Although the introduction of tiled roofs from China has rarely been discussed in previous history books, Vogel notes that this has greatly improved the durability of wooden buildings. One of the shrine customs that still remains today is the relocation of the shrine, but this should be understood to be due to the more realistic reason that non-tiled wooden buildings could not last for more than 20 years against rain and wind. In other words, by contrasting previous Japan with the Japan transformed by the technology and culture introduced from China, this book makes us realize the importance of learning from China. The significance of the introduction of Buddhism is undeniable, but Vogel adds a twist on this, arguing that Buddhism spread rapidly in Japanese societies because of the lack of resistance from indigenous religions, namely Shintoism. He states that there is no mention of Shinto in the *Kojiki*, the oldest classic, and warns against the mythologization of Shinto after the *Meiji* period. According to him, many shrines continued to exist for many years as if they were rented within the temple grounds. This not only denies the *Meiji* movement to suppress Buddhism and confirms that the practice of Shinto-Buddhist coexistence was a long-preserved practice of Japanese society, but it is a discourse that also suggests the predominance of Buddhism.

Vogel not only denies the mythologies hidden in the Japanese perception of history, but also points out those of the Chinese. It is related to the China-centered tribute system in East Asia. According to Vogel, Japan last sent a tributary envoy to China in 838, in the early *Heian* period. Then, after Hideyoshi's invasion of Korea, which was part of a war against the Ming, when Ieyasu tried to resume trade with China, the demands made by the Ming were first, cracking down on the *Wakoh*, Japanese pirates, and second, adopting Chinese era names. Vogel notes that the Tokugawa administration rejected the latter and refused to take a subordinate position to China. In other words, he questions the historical perception that the Chinese order has existed in East Asia consistently for many years. Incidentally, the book also points out that the frequent piracy in the East China Sea was caused by the Ming blocking of free trade activities, and that most of the pirates were Chinese, not the *Wakoh*.

Regarding the Korean Peninsula, there are also examples that call into question the existence of China's sustained suzerainty. Before the First Sino-Japanese War, in 1882, both Japan and China sent troops to suppress an uprising by soldiers in Korea. The last military intervention in Korea by China was actually by the Manchus in 1636. Therefore, it was the first time in about 250 years.

What is surprising is that during the First Sino-Japanese War, Vogel describes that the Japanese soldiers killed as many as 2,000 people, mostly the unarmed citizens of Port Arthur, which can be said to be a precursor to the later Nanjing Massacre. Vogel says drunken Japan soldiers committed sexual orgies. He also spent not a few lines discussing the Nanjing Massacre, and he estimated the number of victims at more than 70,000 using estimates of foreign residents in Nanjing at that time. Of course, Vogel does not affirm the estimates of one million or 500,000, but 70,000. It is still a frightening figure. This is precisely a case where Vogel's ability to be an outsider was appropriately utilized.

What is interesting is the fact that China began learning from Japan in earnest after the First Sino-Japanese War, the war in which China was defeated by Japan. By 1937, 50,000 Chinese had studied in Japan, and among them were the future leaders such as Chiang Kai-shek and Zhou Enlai. Vogel notes that this was related to the fact that Japanese was an easy foreign language to learn because it also used Chinese characters, and that the distance to Japan was close and the cost was cheaper than in Europe and the United States. He also said that more than 7,750 Japanese academic books had been translated into Chinese. Previously, Japanese in the early *Meiji* period had also been eager to learn from foreign countries. Vogel describes, at one point, the salaries of hired foreigners

amounted to one-third of the national budget. It is a figure that shows the great enthusiasm of the Japan government.

Let us go back to the Manchurian Incident and the Sino-Japanese War again. According to this book, in 1930, that is one year before the Manchurian Incident, according to a survey by the Southern Manchurian Railway Research Department, the population distribution in the Manchurian region was 90% Chinese (Han) and the Manchus were only 3%. It is a number indicating that the independence of the Manchus in Manchuria was a myth. Also, as an episode that conveys the atmosphere of Japan at that time, he mentions Seiji Ozawa, who, like Vogel, lived in Boston for many years. Ozawa, who would later become a prominent conductor, was born in Mukden (present-day Shenyang), and the name Seiji was a combination of the Japan military leaders in Manchuria Itagaki Seishiro, and Ishihara Kanji, who plotted the Manchurian Incident, by introducing the character of Sei from Seishiro and Ji from Kanji.

Vogel explains Deng Xiaoping's visit to Japan after the conclusion of the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty in 1978, which can be said to be the height of Japan-China friendship after World War II, with an interesting expression unique to him. According to Vogel, no active top leader of China had ever visited Japan in history, and in the 2,200 years of history of both countries, a Chinese top leader had never met a Japanese emperor before Deng.

Finally, I would like to touch upon the ODA. This is because it is also part of China's learning from Japan. The book states that 56 percent of the bilateral aid enjoyed by China from 1979 to 1999 came from Japan. JETRO also sent 4,158 Japanese technicians to China, while China had dispatched 9,712 engineers to the Japan for training. The author says that Japan provided a total of \$15.9 billion from 1979 to 2001.

In retrospect, it was a history of an unbelievable cooperative relationship. It is my sincere hope that the leaders and citizens of both countries will learn from this book and understand the importance of building friendly relations between the two countries.