

Editor's Note: Last December, Ezra F. Vogel, Henry Ford II Professor of the Social Sciences Emeritus at Harvard University, passed away at the age of ninety. A remarkable contributor to the study of East Asia, Vogel's breadth of research covered the entirety of the region, and he brought not only a deep knowledge and understanding of each country, but also of East Asia's regional and global impact. His interdisciplinary work contributed extensively to building institutions that would support generations of scholars and practitioners with an interest in East Asia. In the following two essays, Peter Frost and Glen Fukushima reminisce on his extraordinary life, and tremendous and long-lasting influence on the field of Asian studies.

IN MEMORIAM: EZRA F. VOGEL (1930–2020)

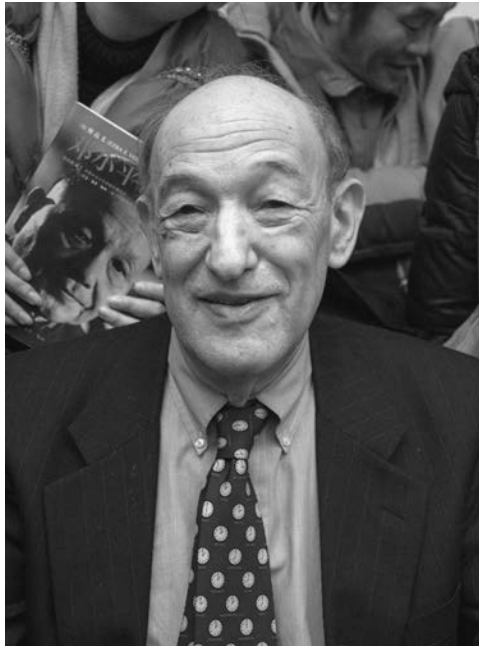
Those of us who are committed to studying East Asia lost an extraordinary scholar, teacher, and friend when the retired Harvard University Sociology Professor Ezra F. Vogel died in Cambridge, Massachusetts, this last December.

My first "contact" with Ezra Vogel came when I picked up a copy of his 1963 book, *Japan's New Middle Class*. He and his first wife, Suzanne, had written the book after one of his Harvard graduate school sociology professors told him that he needed to experience other cultures in order to get a better perspective on the United States. As the title makes clear, the book shows how the beginnings of high economic growth were changing Japanese society from rural to urban, and from three-generation families to the Western-style nuclear family headed by a *salari man* (salaried employee), his wife, and his children. I loved the book, in good part because, as *The New York Times'* writer Amy Qin pointed out in her December 22, 2020, obituary, Vogel was "uninterested in elegant theories or quantitative modeling." This was simply an eloquently written analysis of a new Japan. I was hooked.

My second "contact" came when Vogel's 1979 book, *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America*, sold over 500,000 copies. The title was deliberately provocative, but the content, as usual, is a clearly written analysis of the many positive aspects of Japanese society that the United States can learn from. Put another way, the book encourages all of us to look (just as Vogel himself had been told to do) beyond the common view that American values are the only way to create a just society. It is a very useful contribution to the ongoing debate between those who are known as "Chrysanthemum Clubbers" and their sometimes quite angry opponents, the "Japan Bashers."

I then watched in amazement as Professor Vogel expanded his studies from Japan to other parts of Asia. His 1969 book, *Canton under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949–1968*, and his 1991 book, *The Four Little Dragons: The Spread of Industrialization in East Asia*, expanded his research to the People's Republic of China and four other East Asian nations. All this was topped off by his 879-page blockbuster, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (2011), and the last of his many other works, the 2019 book *China and Japan: Facing History*. At the time of his death, he apparently was working on four additional projects, all once again responding to key current issues, up to and including recommendations for the new Joe Biden presidency.

This extraordinarily wide range of scholarship reflects at least two key facts. One is that Professor Vogel was one of a handful of people who could happily research, write, and lecture in Chinese, Japanese, and English. When he visited me at my postretirement job at the University of



Mississippi to talk to us about his Deng Xiaoping book, he told me that he formally practiced both Chinese and Japanese each day. He then made a point of talking with the university's Chinese- and Japanese-language instructors, each of whom praised his linguistic skills. Those instructors, I should add, are highly skilled professionals, not given to polite flattery.

Second, Vogel's language skills also helped him maintain cordial relations with everyone he wrote about. While some wondered if he properly criticized Deng Xiaoping's crackdown on free speech, the book, even though some parts were censored in translation, clearly deals with the 1989 Tiananmen tragedy, as well as Deng's controversial balance between greater economic flexibility and less tolerance for political criticism. Indeed, Vogel's ability to get high-level Asian officials to agree to an interview is one of the many strengths of his work.

I have often wondered how Professor Vogel found time amongst all this scholarly production to also contribute to the improvement of the academic community. His work included seven years as director in the 1980s of Harvard University's Program on US–Japan relations, a two-year stint as a national intelligence officer for the US government's National Intelligence Center from 1993 to 1995, and then a two-year stint as director of Harvard's Asia Center. Retiring from teaching in 2000 at age seventy seemed to speed up his activities, not slow him down.

What I most wish to stress is Professor Vogel's mentoring. While it would have been easy in this "publish or perish" era for him to skim over a university professor's obligation to teach, Vogel's students have testified to his unpretentious decency and his frequent invitations to discuss key topics in his home. When I retired from Williams College to help the University of Mississippi start its International Studies Program, Professor Vogel would sit me down at the annual Association of Asian Studies Conference to ask what I thought about my decision. What was Mississippi like? (Fun.) How capable were the students in the university's Honors Program? (Very.) Like so many others, I felt supported, respected and even honored. That is what I will always remember as one of Ezra F. Vogel's greatest legacies.

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Ezra F. Vogel, one of America's most prolific and influential scholars of Asia, died at Mount Auburn Hospital in Cambridge, Massachusetts, of complications from surgery on December 20, 2020. He was ninety years old. Vogel, the Henry Ford II Professor of the Social Sciences Emeritus at Harvard University, had spent most of his career at Harvard, where he obtained his PhD in sociology in 1958. His professional influence was most apparent in three areas—as a teacher, researcher, and author; as an administrator, mentor, and network builder; and as a government official, policy adviser, and public intellectual.

In 1958, soon after completing his doctorate, Vogel and his family went to Japan, where he spent two years doing research on Japanese families for what would be published in 1963 as *Japan's New Middle Class: The Salary Man and His Family in a Tokyo Suburb*. Shifting his research focus to China, in 1969 he published *Canton under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949–1968*. Thus, early in his career, Vogel distinguished himself as one of the few American scholars of Asia whose language abilities and area expertise encompassed both Japan and China. This would prove an invaluable asset during his nearly seven decades as a scholar. Although he authored and edited over twenty books, the two that brought him the most public acclaim were *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America* (1979) and *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (2011). Each explained to the world the rise of an Asian superpower that remained enigmatic to many, and each became a bestseller in Japan and China when translated into their respective languages.

As his student and teaching fellow at Harvard in the 1970s, I thought that Vogel's opening sentence in his *Modern Japanese Organization and Decision-Making* (1975) best expressed his philosophy of scholarship: "Progress in an academic field may be viewed as a series of successively closer approximations to reality." Thus, he eschewed grand theories, rigid methodologies, and esoteric quantitative models, and stuck to describing, analyzing, and explaining the concrete realities of social life because he believed that the ultimate aim of academic inquiry was to seek facts, truth, and reality.

In addition to his academic contributions, Vogel was known as an exemplary administrator, mentor, and network-builder. He served as director or chair of Harvard's East Asian Research Center (now Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies), Council for East Asian Studies, Asia Center, Program on US–Japan Relations, and the undergraduate concentration on East Asian studies. Outside of Harvard, he served on numerous advisory councils and commissions to promote US–Asia relations, including serving as an adviser to the Mansfield Foundation's US–Japan Network for the Future, aimed at developing America's next generation of Asia specialists. In his private capacity, he created the "Vogel Juku," a study group comprising Japanese graduate students in the Boston area who would gather once a month over dinner at his residence in Cambridge to discuss the major issues confronting Japan. In all these activities, Vogel drew people together, introduced them to each other to expand their networks, and developed and nurtured the next generation of American and Asian leaders.

From 1993 to 1995, Vogel served in the Clinton administration as head of the East Asia Desk of the National Intelligence Council. There, he had the opportunity to apply his academic area expertise to analyze real world policy issues. Although he enjoyed a productive stint in Washington, DC, that enhanced his understanding of the US government's policymaking process, he also lamented on several occasions, "How can so many smart people go to Washington and do such dumb things?" He had witnessed firsthand the gap between theory and practice, concluding that the execution of America's Asia policy could use significant improvement.

This government experience spurred Vogel to stay engaged in the policy world as a public intellectual after returning to Harvard in 1995. For instance, he served as a board member and vice chair of the National Committee on US–China Relations and served on the advisory committee of its Public Intellectuals Program. His final book, *China and Japan: Facing*

History (2019), was aimed primarily at readers in China and Japan—to encourage them to draw from their history of learning and borrowing from each other, and to find ways to minimize conflict and cooperate in the future. And one of the last emails I received from Vogel was the draft of a report he was preparing to send the Biden administration offering his advice on how the US government should deal with economic competition from China.

In recent years, Vogel was increasingly alarmed by the deterioration of relations between the United States and China. He co-authored an op-ed piece published in the *Washington Post* of July 3, 2019 entitled "China Is Not an Enemy." In it, he argued that:

[M]any US actions are contributing directly to the downward spiral in [US–China] relations . . . [America's] interests are best served by restoring its ability to compete effectively in a changing world and by working alongside other nations and international organizations rather than by promoting a counterproductive effort to undermine and contain China's engagement with the world.

Reflecting his influence, Vogel and his co-authors were successful in persuading over 100 prominent Americans to add their names in support of their open letter.

Tributes to Vogel have praised him for his professional contributions in his three roles described above. But for those of us who knew him personally—as I did for forty-six years—what made him truly distinctive, endearing, and indispensable were his human qualities. Some of the words most often used to describe him include "kind," "friendly," "generous," "humble," "modest," "humorous," "curious," "enthusiastic," "optimistic," and "caring." Vogel was all these and more. Although a world-renowned Harvard professor, he never took himself too seriously and was always down to earth, considerate of others, and ready to encourage and help students, colleagues, and friends. This spirit of generosity, friendship, and caring for his students is amply displayed in this passage from his memoirs, which he began to write last year:

[A]t Harvard I had the good fortune to have many able graduate students interested in studying Asia. . . . They mostly took an initial course with me on Japanese Society or Chinese Communist Society, but after that they became my friends. Many of them became my teaching assistants. I tried to give them the best advice I could about conducting research, writing a thesis, and pursuing a career. I wrote letters on their behalf to help them get good jobs. Some Japanese students respectfully called me "Vogel Sensei" but almost no one called me Professor Vogel. I was "Ezra," a friend a little older than they were. I learned a great deal from them, from the questions they posed, from their perspectives, from their research, and sometimes their advice about the research that I was trying to do. In most cases, the personal friendship continued after they received their PhD. Many have become lifelong friends.

I had the good fortune to meet and get to know many world-famous scholars during my eight years at Harvard, and I learned a great deal from them. But I can say without reservation that Ezra F. Vogel is the professor from whom I had the privilege of learning the most as his student, teaching fellow, mentee, colleague, and lifelong friend. That is why I will forever treasure this inscription he wrote when he presented me with his last book, *China and Japan: Facing History*:

June 2019

To Glen Fukushima — For half a century of friendship and intellectual companionship and for all you do for me. Ezra

GLEN S. FUKUSHIMA is a Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress in Washington, DC. He served as Deputy Assistant United States Trade Representative for Japan and China and as President of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan. He was at Harvard University from 1974 to 1982 (in the MA, PhD, MBA, and JD programs) as a student of Ezra F. Vogel and as his teaching fellow, and subsequently continued their relationship as a close friend and colleague.