By Ezra Vogel

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Reviewed by Edward Friedman

Soon thereafter, as Mao came to stress mobilization of the will instead of incentives and education, Deng’s commitment to modernization turned Deng, in the politics of China’s Maoists, into China’s Khrushchev, someone who might one day choose to criticize Mao’s policies of irrational economics, mass murder, and violent vigilantism. Deng might do this in order to legitimate a better economic road ahead for China (193). To hold power in a CCP of Stalinists and Maoists, Deng had to tread carefully so as not to challenge what Vogel euphemistically labels, “the traditional orthodoxy,” a phrase that obscures the Stalinism that infused the CCP and its power holders, including Deng (213).

In 1957, when Mao launched a vicious campaign against more liberal Chinese, Deng was put in charge (90). Most of the victims died in labor camps, China’s Stalinist gulags. Vogel records that by the 1970s, Deng no longer wanted to destroy educated talent (201). But Vogel does not tell us that Deng, in power after 1977, blocked a blanket forgiveness for these innocent victims of the monstrous Stalinist campaign that Deng himself had led. This dark, defining Stalinist context is not illuminated by Vogel’s interview access.

The book offers no evidence of any interest by the author in asking questions that would clarify or add details to an understanding of Deng’s role in their cruel Stalinist practices. Vogel’s misleading contextualization of Chinese politics cannot convey the continuing Stalinist practices among China’s ruling groups; a situation soon infused by chauvinistic hates and thought management intended to get Chinese to believe that only the Stalinist party could save Chinese from foreign forces supposedly out to keep China down, to control China, and to block its return to glory.

Deng’s role in the Stalinist system likewise is hidden in discussing the deadly Great Leap Forward policies of 1957–58 that killed at least 35 million Chinese trapped in a system of Stalinist totalitarianism, brilliantly shown in Yang Jisheng’s book, Tombstone.1 Vogel simply notes that Deng was an “obedient official” who by 1960 was involved in efforts to save China from “the excesses of the Great Leap” (42). Once again, Vogel seems not to have sought to learn what Deng actually did, this time between 1957–58 and 1960–61, in order to prove himself a zealous Maoist-Stalinist actively promoting murderous policies.

Euphemisms and little interest in Deng’s Stalinist deeds obscure how power works in China and where China may be heading. Vogel does not probe the 1977–1981 struggle over Mao’s legacy in which liberal reformers hoped to move China out of its Stalinist ways. Vogel merely asserts that Deng was “pragmatic” in siding with those who would “tighten control” to prevent a “breakdown of order” (250). Although Vogel accurately reports that senior liberal intellectual Yu Guangyuan saw Deng’s siding with the Stalinist old guard in this initial post-Mao struggle as a key turning point (257), Vogel apparently did not enquire into the causes and consequences of Deng’s alliance with the Stalinists, a term Vogel never uses. Instead, for Vogel, Deng merely would not weaken “the party’s authority” (260). Such terminology obscures harsh and repressive continuities.

The book suffers similarly in the description of Deng right after he ordered the 1989 slaughter of democracy supporters in Tiananmen Square. From then until Deng reigned growth early in 1992, he had to defeat the economic preferences of Stalinists who saw economic reform as following the path of Khrushchev and Mikhail Gorbachev—the last leader of the USSR—that is undermining the arbitrary monopoly of power held by the single-party dictatorship. However, in politics, Deng embraced Stalinist continuity.

Vogel does not probe how Deng could have won in arguing with CCP anti-Khrushchev Stalinists. In what Deng saw as a great reversal in the USSR, the Communist Party fell because conservative party officials prevented Khrushchev from persevering with his economic reforms. How then did...

In sum, Deng's economic boldness in 1992 changed China and the world, just as Vogel's wonderful book argues. But Vogel misleads readers by not clarifying how much Stalinism and chauvinism were institutionalized in the CCP by Deng's policy choices and allies. Ignoring all this reality, Vogel's vision of China and its future seem overly optimistic. Deng's legacy to the Chinese people and the world may not be as glorious as Vogel suggests, unless Vogel is right that China will do best when a politically disengaged Chinese people happily welcome super-patriotic Stalinists dominating politics. That perception is not a view shared in China by Han victims of land theft, Han workers virtually enslaved in mines, Han people who rage at corruption and polarization, Uighurs, Tibetans, Christians, spiritualists, political reformers, and promoters of human dignity. ■

NOTES

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A History of East Asia
From the Origins of Civilization to the Twenty-first Century

BY CHARLES HOLCOMBE

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Reviewed by Keith N. Knapp

Charles Holcombe has given instructors of East Asian history courses and world history teachers a welcome gift: his book, A History of East Asia. This volume is packed with both information and insights. The author provides interesting facts that will spice up lectures and illuminating statistics that will give students a vivid sense of East Asia's size and progress in relation to the rest of the world. He is particularly adept at showing how interactions between China, Japan, and Korea shaped the East Asian world. The book's primary limitation is that it is much weaker in describing East Asia's ties with other civilizations.

One of the book's overall aims is to provide an integrated view of East Asian history. On this score, Holcombe admirably succeeds. In his The

Genesis of East Asia: 221 B.C.–A.D. 907 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), Holcombe persuasively demonstrates that, during China's early imperial period, East Asia became a coherent region by means of the adoption of the Chinese written script, Chinese government institutions, Confucianism, and Chinese-style Buddhism. In this book, the author uses these insights to create a history of the entire East Asian world from antiquity to the present. The results are stunning.

With the exception of the second chapter, which solely discusses the history of China during its formative period from 1045 BCE to 280 CE, each chapter substantially discusses the history, society, and culture of China, Korea, and Japan. Holcombe particularly highlights the historical interactions between these three countries. He tells us that, during the Tang dynasty (618–907), the Korean kingdom of Silla (?–935) dominated maritime trade in Northeast Asia and that a number of Tang cities had “Sillan wards” or “Sillan villages.” He notes that “Some eighty-eight Sillans are known to have passed the civil service examinations in China during roughly the last century of the Tang dynasty. Several of them served in Tang government offices before returning to Korea, where they became voices for the promotion of Confucian ideals” (113). It is through such concrete information that Holcombe demonstrates how East Asia was interconnected, allowing cultural forms to pass from one country to another.

Instructors will love this book because Holcombe fills the text with a wealth of information and statistics. He assiduously provides beginning dates for phenomenon that we see as characteristic of that culture. For example, in China, the seasonal ancestral rites and worship of Confucius at Confucian temples that are often viewed as hallmarks of Chinese culture only reached their mature form in the Tang dynasty (98). The quintessential Japanese food sushi first appeared in nineteenth-century Tokyo, while the national sport judo was only invented at the end of the nineteenth century (8–9). He is particularly good at using statistics to give the reader perspective on the affluence and size of East Asia in relation to the rest of the world. He notes that, in the early 500s, Nanjing was probably the largest city in the world, with a population of 1.4 million (64). The premodern porcelain workshops in the Chinese city of Jingdezhen probably employed close to 70,000 workers, making this city the largest industrial complex in the world. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, China exported to Europe alone more than a hundred million pieces of porcelain (192). In the early eighteenth century, Europe's largest city, Paris, had more than half a million people, whereas Edo (Tokyo) had more than a million (185). By the eighteenth century, the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) ruled perhaps as much as 40 percent of the world's population (171). These statistics are a good tonic to Western ethnocentrism and remind us that East Asia's postwar resurgence is not an anomaly but rather a return to a normal state of world affairs. Holcombe also uses statistics to give his reader a concrete look at the sizes and structures of East Asian societies. For instance, he reminds us that, in the tenth century, Japan probably had six million people, but only 20,000 people were fully literate, and the imperial academy only had 400 students (118). He illustrates the growing significance of the Chinese civil service examinations through numbers. In the Tang dynasty, about thirty men per year obtained the coveted jinshi (Presented Scholar). By the Southern Song (1127–1279), four to five hundred did so. By the Ming–Qing (1368–1911) period, at any given time, a million men were engaged in preparing for or taking the examinations, and degree-holders accounted for 1 to 2 percent of the population (131–132). Useful statistics like these make his prose sharp and informative; students are not fed vague pronouncements that merely give them a hazy idea about these societies.

Despite having to paint East Asia in broad strokes to cover all of its history in one volume, Holcombe still finds time to enlighten the text by
The book illustrates how Deng Xiaoping was the driving force and main inspiration behind the institutional changes that made it possible for growth to take off. Already before becoming paramount leader, Deng had fought for the selection of officials based on merit and skill, for the reintroduction of material incentives, as well as for a greater emphasis on experimentation in economic policy. Once he, China in the early 1990s was in a precarious situation. Lingering public resentment over the government's crushing of the Tiananmen Square protests in June 1989, coupled with the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, made the future of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) uncertain. It was in this period of crisis that Deng Xiaoping launched his "Southern Tour" in spring 1992. Despite these difficulties, Ezra F. Vogel's Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China provides much insight into the man responsible for arguably the greatest revolutionary change in Chinese history (347). On November 11, 1977, Deng Xiaoping, in Guangdong for discussions to plan for a Central Military Commission meeting in Beijing, was briefed on the problem of young men trying to escape across the border from China into Hong Kong. Tens of thousands of youth were risking their lives each year by attempting to run or swim across the border.