



Ezra F. Vogel, *China and Japan: Facing History* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2019), Pp 523

Hsiang-Wang Liu

Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania

Email: hsiang-wang.liu@sru.edu

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Book Review by Hsiang-Wang Liu

Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania

Email: hsiang-wang.liu@sru.edu

Ezra F. Vogel's *China and Japan: Facing History* (Harvard University Press, 2019) represents a landmark contribution to the study of Sino-Japanese relations. Spanning over a millennium of history, this work delves deeply into the complexities of interaction between two of East Asia's most influential powers, shedding light on the enduring tensions and significant interconnections that define their relationship. Vogel, a preeminent scholar of East Asian studies, combines historical analysis with cultural and political insight to produce a balanced and rigorous account.

The book begins by examining the early phases of Sino-Japanese interaction from 600 to 1862, a period during which China exerted considerable cultural and political influence over the region. During this era, China was the dominant power in East Asia, with its

Confucian ideals shaping Japanese thought and governance. However, this relationship was not without conflict, and Vogel underscores how these early interactions set the stage for later disputes. The turning point came in the mid-19th century, as Japan embarked on a path of aggressive modernization following the Meiji Restoration, while China remained tied to traditional structures under the Qing dynasty. Vogel argues that this divergence fundamentally altered the regional balance of power and marked the beginning of a fraught relationship.

In the chapters that follow, Vogel meticulously examines the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period marked by treaties, territorial disputes, and the rise of imperialist ambitions. Events such as the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), the Taiwan question, and the contested status of Korea are treated with careful attention to detail and context. Vogel emphasizes the complexities of this period, cautioning against simplistic narratives that portray Japan as a unilateral aggressor. He notes, for example, that there is little evidence of a premeditated Japanese plan to conquer China during the early stages of their rivalry (p. 99), though this assertion may spark debate among historians. Nevertheless, Vogel convincingly illustrates how Japan's victory in the First Sino-Japanese War and its subsequent modernization efforts reshaped the region's hierarchy, propelling Japan to the forefront of East Asian development.

The book's discussion of the 20th century is particularly compelling, as Vogel navigates the fraught era of Japanese colonialism and the

descent into war. He highlights the industrialization of Taiwan and Manchuria under Japanese rule, portraying these developments as both exploitative and transformative. The narrative turns darker with the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), a conflict that Vogel attributes to Japan's failure in political and military leadership rather than a deliberate strategy of conquest. He identifies key moments, such as the Jinan Incident and the assassination of Zhang Zuolin in 1928, as catalysts that escalated tensions. Vogel's nuanced account underscores the tragedy of this period, highlighting the profound suffering on both sides and the long-lasting scars it left on Sino-Japanese relations.

The post-war chapters address efforts at reconciliation, tracing the evolution of bilateral ties from the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to the normalization of relations in 1972 and beyond. Vogel lauds the period from 1972 to 1992 as a golden era of cooperation, during which China sought to learn from Japan's economic and technological advancements. However, he also acknowledges the persistent friction stemming from unresolved historical grievances. Vogel is critical of China's approach to history, particularly its repeated demands for Japanese apologies, which he contrasts with South Korea's more forward-looking stance. At the same time, he recognizes the structural and ideological differences—such as Japan's embrace of liberal democratic values and China's authoritarian governance—that continue to complicate dialogue between the two nations.

Vogel concludes with a call for greater cooperation and mutual understanding, offering recommendations for overcoming historical animosities. However, his optimism may strike some readers as overly idealistic, given the deep-seated ideological and geopolitical divides that persist. While Vogel's critique of China's handling of historical issues is valid, it might have benefitted from a more nuanced exploration of the trauma and political imperatives that drive Chinese policies.

Overall, *China and Japan: Facing History* is an exemplary piece of scholarship, distinguished by its depth, clarity, and balanced perspective. Vogel's ability to navigate the complexities of Sino-Japanese relations with sensitivity and rigor makes this work indispensable for historians, policymakers, and general readers interested in East Asian history. By illuminating the roots of contemporary tensions and highlighting moments of cooperation, Vogel provides a valuable framework for understanding one of the world's most important and contentious bilateral relationships. This book is a testament to the enduring challenges of confronting history and the necessity of doing so for a more stable and cooperative future.
