

# Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China

*By Ezra F. Vogel*

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No one in the twentieth century had a greater impact on world history than Deng Xiaoping. And no scholar is better qualified than Ezra Vogel to disentangle the contradictions embodied in the life and legacy of China's boldest strategist-the pragmatic, disciplined force behind China's radical economic, technological, and social transformation.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

Vogel offers a nuanced portrait of China's great reform leader Deng Xiaoping and a shrewd analysis of the political maneuvers by which he made such a large mark on history. By entering deeply into Deng's vision for China, Vogel shows how the person who forged the world's most successful example of modernizing authoritarianism understood how such a system could work. And he shows how a major leader can steer a huge country in a new historical direction. A terrific accomplishment. (Andrew J. Nathan, Columbia University)

Not just a definitive biography of a world-class leader, but also the most authoritative and riveting account of the secretly contrived U.S.-Chinese strategic accommodation of 1978 and of how that in turn facilitated China's domestic transformation. (Zbigniew Brzezinski)

A multilayered study of change and adaptability. At the core is one man's response to the dangers of a complex revolution. Around him is the transformation of the largest political entity in history from rural disarray and helplessness to an industrial and manufacturing giant. In between are ambitious and bewildered people in search of leadership. Vogel has made Deng Xiaoping's vision convincing, the Chinese maze comprehensible, and even the bit actors come alive. (Wang Gungwu, National University of Singapore)

This is an impressive and important biography of one of the most important men of the twentieth century. Deng Xiaoping transformed China economically, politically, and socially. One of the most significant achievements for his and my country was the establishment of diplomatic relations between us. The book provides an excellent account of this historic event. (President Jimmy Carter)

Deng Xiaoping's skill, vision, and courage in overcoming seemingly insuperable obstacles and guiding China onto the path of sustained economic development rank him with the great leaders of history. And yet, too little is known about the life and career of this extraordinary man. In this superbly researched and highly readable biography, Vogel has definitively filled this void. This fascinating book provides a host of insights into the factors that enabled Deng to triumph over repeated setbacks and lay the basis for China to regain the wealth and power that has eluded it for two centuries. (J. Stapleton Roy, former U.S. Ambassador to China)

Deng could be tough, but he was direct and engaged. He was a person we could do business with, and I liked him a lot. He played an extraordinary role, bringing the world's largest nation into the modern world. We are fortunate that Vogel, one of our foremost China scholars, has now brought the man alive in this uniquely researched biography. (Brent Scowcroft)

A thorough picking-over of Deng Xiaoping's record and accomplishments, setting him firmly as the linchpin linking an antiquated authoritative thinking to modern growth and acceleration...Vogel meticulously considers all facets of this complex leader for an elucidating--and quite hefty--study. (*Kirkus Reviews* 2011-07-15)

[An] impressive and exhaustively researched biography...Vogel reminds readers that it was under this pragmatic politician's watch that the party made three moves that helped it outlast so many other Leninist organizations. (Jeffrey Wasserstrom *Miller-McCune.com* 2011-06-30)

From arguably the most important scholar of East Asia, this is an important book on the force behind China's

transformation in the late twentieth century, whose full fruits are visible only today. Deng ordered the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, but he was also the person most responsible for modernizing China and opening it to trade with the West. Again and again he survived threatening challenges in the Chinese political bureaucracy, to emerge at the top in the late 1970s. His role in subverting Chinese orthodoxy from the inside is comparable to that of Gorbachev with respect to the Soviet Union--and he deserves sustained attention such as this landmark book offers. (Anis Shivani *Huffington Post* 2011-07-09)

This intensely researched doorstep delivers a step-by-step political biography of the man who gets most of the credit for China's spectacular rise to an economic juggernaut. Vogel recounts how Deng (1904–1997), a leading figure from the 1950s on, was banished when his preference for practicality over class struggle angered Mao Zedong during the disastrous 1969–1975 Cultural Revolution. Returning to power after Mao's 1976 death, he eliminated the anti-intellectualism and chaotic policy swings that characterized Mao's rule while opening the nation to Western ideas. The result was China's emergence as the world's most dynamic economy, with a free market but still with a disturbing absence of political freedom (he gives a nuanced analysis of the Tiananmen Square massacres)...Scholars will value it. (*Publishers Weekly* 2011-07-18)

A masterful new history of China's reform era. It pieces together from interviews and memoirs perhaps the clearest account so far of the revolution that turned China from a totalitarian backwater led by one of the monsters of the 20th century into the power it has become today...Vogel has a monumental story to tell. His main argument is that Deng deserves a central place in the pantheon of 20th-century leaders. For he not only launched China's market-oriented economic reforms but also accomplished something that had eluded Chinese leaders for almost two centuries: the transformation of the world's oldest civilization into a modern nation...[An] illuminating book. (John Pomfret *Washington Post* 2011-09-09)

If you want to understand China today, you must understand Deng Xiaoping (1904–97)...Deng shared Mao's ambition to make China a strong nation under party leadership, but he cannily built an unassailable position within the party to take it in new directions. Vogel interviewed dozens of leaders and China experts, as well as Deng's family, did exhaustive documentary research, and mines the scholarly literature (a good deal of it by his former students) to analyze Deng's initial success in building China's economy and international position, frustration in the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, and ultimate legacy...Massive but fascinating, this is highly recommended for those with a serious interest in modern China. Indispensable in understanding Deng, what he accomplished, and where he fell short. (Charles W. Hayford *Library Journal* 2011-09-01)

This is the most ambitious biography of Deng Xiaoping by a western scholar so far. Drawing on numerous Chinese sources, including the Deng family, it tells the story of a man who, the author says, may have had more impact on world history than anyone else in the 20th century...This is a monumental work, carried out in the author's retirement and intended to cap a distinguished career in Asian studies. His diligent use of official papers and his privileged access to members of the Chinese Communist elite make this biography of Deng Xiaoping the most complete we are likely to have under the present ruling order. (Michael Sheridan *Hong Kong Economic Journal* 2011-09-01)

Ezra Vogel's encyclopedic *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* is the most exhaustive English retelling of Deng's life. Vogel, an emeritus professor at Harvard, seems to have interviewed or found the memoirs of nearly every person who spoke with Deng, and has painstakingly re-created a detailed and intimate chronology of Deng's roller-coaster career. (Joshua Kurlantzick *The Nation* 2011-09-27)

If anybody still nurtures the illusion that Deng was a closet liberal, this book will bring them back to reality. For all the changes he championed and the vicissitudes of his life, the diminutive, blunt Deng has received much less biographical attention than Mao, which makes Ezra Vogel's huge account particularly welcome.

The product of 10 years of work by a leading China scholar, it is essential reading for anybody who wants to understand the evolution of China to the status it occupies today. It offers an enormous compendium of material about the lifelong Communist whose story, even more than that of Mao, reflects the dramatically varying fortunes of his nation in the 20th century...Vogel is an admiring biographer who presents a treasure trove of new information that will delight modern China scholars for years to come. (Jonathan Fenby *Times Higher Education* 2011-10-06)

Deng led a long and remarkable life, packed with drama and global significance, one that deserves to be dissected in detail. So we must be thankful to Harvard professor Ezra Vogel for devoting a large chunk of his academic career to compiling a prodigious biography, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, the most ambitious account of the man so far. In writing this volume, Vogel has done an enormous amount of work. He appears to have absorbed the documents from every single Chinese Communist Party plenum since 1921...There have been several Deng biographies before this...but Vogel's can be regarded as the most comprehensive and informative of the lot...There's no question that Vogel has gone farther than anyone else to date in telling Deng's story. For that he is to be applauded; there is a whole hoard of valuable material here that we probably would not have gained otherwise. (Christian Caryl *Foreign Policy* 2011-09-13)

The big picture is the key to this book. Those hoping for hidden secrets and untold stories about Deng in Vogel's book will be disappointed. Comprehensive as it is, the book is not an expose. But it does ring with authority. The Harvard professor spent most of the 10 years lining up interviews with people who had first-hand experience of Deng. In the end he spoke to dozens, if not a hundred, of people who knew something about the man...As a result, his depiction of Deng is rich, balanced and colorful. Vogel portrays a Deng who is determined, resourceful, at times uncompromising and difficult, but always pragmatic...This is where the strength of Vogel's book lies. It is all about the grand historic view. And that is fitting: out of all of Deng's amazing qualities, it is his grasp of a broad perspective and his keen sense of history that enabled him to achieve what so many had deemed impossible. (Chow Chung-yan *South China Morning Post* 2011-09-27)

Ezra Vogel's new biography portrays Deng as not just the maker of modern China, but one of the most substantial figures in modern history...[A] meticulously researched book...Vogel knows China's elites extremely well, not least because of his years as an intelligence officer in East Asia for the Clinton administration. This book is bolstered by insider knowledge and outstanding sources, such as interviews with Deng's interpreters...The definitive account of Deng in any language. Vogel eloquently makes the case for Deng's crucial role in China's transformation from an impoverished and brutalized country into an economic and political superpower. (*The Economist* 2011-10-22)

A virtue of Vogel's book is that it collects and organizes a huge amount of material on the struggles within the elite power circles in China over several decades. In these accounts we learn how Deng tried to protect his allies and how he sought to undermine his enemies; he fell, rose, fell again, then rose again to the pinnacle position in the second generation of the Communist dynasty. Vogel's materials will be very useful to students of elite power struggles in China. (Fang Lizhi *New York Review of Books* 2011-11-10)

When Chinese historians are able one day to ply their subversive trade without control or censorship, their judgment will surely be that their country should revere Deng Xiaoping way above his predecessor Mao Zedong...Ezra Vogel's massive biography assembles the case for Deng (1904-97) with narrative skill and prodigious scholarship. (Chris Patten *Financial Times* 2011-10-15)

A lively portrait of the man...Vogel provides a wealth of fascinating material, from vivid accounts of Deng's political and organizational skills in reviving the economy in the mid-1970s to his up-and-down relations with Vietnam and its leaders. The author also offers astute insights into the reformist roles played by Hua

Guofeng, Mao's immediate successor after his 1976 death, and by two of Deng's own associates, both ultimately purged by him, Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. The book is at its best in portraying the tense interplay of personal relations and ambition among Mao's many lieutenants. On the surface, lockstep Communist ideology prevailed during Mao's rule, but behind the walls of Zhongnanhai, Beijing's central leadership compound, the dual drive for self-preservation and advancement fed a kind of political nihilism. (Howard French *Wall Street Journal* 2011-10-22)

Vogel has gone to enormous lengths to document his subject...Vogel's painstaking research provides plenty of fascinating detail. The description of the period after Tiananmen, for example--when the octogenarian was forced to call on a lifetime's accumulated political wiles to defeat an attempt by conservatives to almost completely reverse his reforms--is eye-opening. The pages in which Deng effectively threatens to have then Communist Party Secretary Jiang Zemin dismissed unless he throws his support behind renewing the reform drive are very nearly worth the price of the book alone...On the ways through which Deng set about the enormous task of rebuilding the gutted economy, shattered by decades of turmoil under Mao Zedong, Vogel is exhaustive. (Simon Elegant *Time* 2011-10-17)

Deng [is] a fit subject for a weighty, probing and judicious biography, which is just what Ezra F. Vogel has produced...Vogel is the master of this complex material. He had access to many who knew and worked with Deng, including Jiang Zemin. Deng selected him as Party leader in 1989 to succeed Zhao Ziyang, who had been sacked and disgraced because of his opposition to the use of force in Tiananmen Square. Vogel also spoke to two of Deng's children. The documentary sources are copious and, in terms of access to material, this study is unlikely to be bettered until the Party opens its most sensitive archives--which could be a long wait. It is hard to disagree with much of what Vogel writes and there is much to admire, particularly his judicious contextualization of Deng's motives. (Graham Hutchings *Literary Review* 2011-11-01)

In an authoritative biography of Deng, Harvard sociologist Ezra F. Vogel, a renowned specialist on China and Japan who rose to international prominence in 1979 with the publication of *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America*, has attempted the difficult task of providing a comprehensive look at the experiences and influences that shaped this remarkable individual. He has succeeded superbly...Vogel's book provides extensive insights into how Deng was able to use his experience, his network of associations among China's aging revolutionaries, and the force of his personality to direct China's course, all while allowing others to hold the top government and party titles...For those of us who as U.S. government officials participated in or monitored many of the developments in China and in the bilateral relationship Vogel describes, he has illuminated events in ways that would have been invaluable to us had we had such a clear picture at the time. The transformation of China that Deng set in motion is likely to confront the United States with its most significant foreign-policy challenge over the next several decades. We are fortunate indeed that Vogel has written this timely and highly informative biography of Deng Xiaoping, which provides a wealth of insights into one of history's great leaders. (J. Stapleton Roy *Wilson Quarterly* 2011-09-01)

A major biography of the man who may turn out to have done more to transform the world than any other leader of the 20th century. Deng's market Leninism has massively increased China's wealth, while repressing democracy. Vogel's portrait is sympathetic, although not uncritical. (*Financial Times* 2011-11-25)

[An] exhaustive biography...Vogel's book is an encyclopedic look at Deng's career. (Clarissa Sebag-Montefiore *The Independent* 2011-12-02)

Deng was perhaps the most intriguing leader that I met while traveling with Mr. Blumenthal and President Jimmy Carter. I had to wait another 30 years, however, before a definitive biography would be written about Deng, arguably the most globally transformational leader of the 20th century. This year Ezra Vogel delivered

it with *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*. (Richard W. Fisher *Wall Street Journal* 2011-12-19)

China scholars might think they have read enough about Deng Xiaoping. After all, at least three biographies of Deng were available prior to the release of this massive new book. But Vogel, one of the world's preeminent Asia scholars, has produced the most comprehensive and authoritative account of Deng's career as a revolutionary, party leader, and architect of China's reform. Meticulously researched and highly readable, the book is not a typical biography. It does not dwell much on Deng's personal life. Instead, the focus of the book is Deng's unusual career trajectory, his unique style of rule, and the strategic choices he made during and after the Cultural Revolution. Vogel considers the extent to which Deng fundamentally and irreversibly transformed China's society, governance, and relations with the outside world...This book should be read by anyone who wants to understand the domestic and international dynamics that have led to China's rise as a great power. (Yanzhong Huang *Foreign Affairs* 2012-01-01)

Deng Xiaoping is one of the most influential men in modern history and here his dramatic story, one intertwined with elite intrigues in the Chinese Communist Party, is recounted in detail by one of the most eminent scholars of Asia...Regarding the debate over whether Deng was more despot than reformer, Ezra Vogel emphasizes the successful consequences of his economic reforms, but does not shy from criticizing his failures. The portrait that emerges is of a visionary authoritarian who helped his nation overcome the self-inflicted wounds of Mao Zedong and achieve enormous economic advances. (Jeff Kingston *Japan Times* 2011-12-11)

Vogel, one of the world's preeminent Asia scholars, has produced the most comprehensive and authoritative account of Deng's career as a revolutionary, party leader, and architect of China's reform. Meticulously researched and highly readable, the book is not a typical biography. It does not dwell much on Deng's personal life. Instead, the focus of the book is Deng's unusual career trajectory, his unique style of rule, and the strategic choices he made during and after the Cultural Revolution...This book should be read by anyone who wants to understand the domestic and international dynamics that have led to China's rise as a great power. (Yanzhong Huang *Foreign Affairs* 2012-01-01)

This monumental book, not so much biography as political history, is overdue. (Rowan Callick *The Australian* 2012-01-28)

One of the virtues of Vogel's analysis is that he understands the thinking of Deng's rivals as well as he does Deng's own...Deng was infatuated with everything he viewed as modern, and wanted China to have it all. By entering into Deng's vision, Vogel helps readers see how the person who forged the world's most successful example of modernizing authoritarianism believed that such a combination would work. (Andrew J. Nathan *New Republic* 2012-02-22)

As one of the foremost scholars of modern China, Vogel is an appropriate authority to pen such a thorough account of Deng Xiaoping's tumultuous journey from political exile to paramount leader of China. A detailed study into Deng's dedication to the Chinese establishment of the People's Republic, to his reemergence as unrivaled decision-maker of the Chinese people, the book details how Deng's policies continue to shape the nation, and how it will most likely require a number of generations before scholars can fully appreciate his impact. In capturing the most turbulent period in the modern 20th century in this 928-page tome, Vogel contributes an important piece to the historiography of Chinese history. (A. Cho *Choice* 2012-04-01)

[A] masterful biography. (Arun Maira *Indian Express* 2012-04-02)

If you're going to read one book about modern China in the period after Mao, then this is the book you should read. Though the book is framed around the rise of Deng Xiaoping and his reforms that transformed China into an economic powerhouse, **Ezra Vogel**'s compelling biography examines how China went from being a desperately poor country to certainly one of the two most important countries in the world today. (Bill Gates *Gates Notes* 2012-12-13)

#### About the Author

Ezra F. Vogel is Henry Ford II Research Professor of the Social Sciences, Emeritus, at Harvard University and former Director of Harvard's Fairbank Center for East Asian Research and the Harvard University Asia Center.

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