

Interview with Professor Ezra F. Vogel

By KAY LU

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*Ezra F. Vogel is the Henry Ford II Professor of the Social Sciences Emeritus at Harvard University and has written on Japan, China, and Asia generally. He published the best-selling book *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* in 2011 and its Mainland Chinese version in early 2013.*

Q: You said in the biography that Deng “would undoubtedly have taken pride in his role in creating and implementing the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ policy.” What does “One Country, Two System” mean in current context? How has its meaning evolved over the course of the thirty years?

A: The meaning is really from a broad perspective, that Hong Kong could keep very much of its own system for about fifty years (he [Deng] did not say 50 years precisely, maybe longer), including [its] capitalist system, all the foreign companies, all its way of doing things, and its Legislative Council. They even allow foreigners to keep a job in the government. The governors will be from Hong Kong. He thought that over the years, perhaps both the mainland and Hong Kong will change, and at that time, it will be easier for Hong Kong to become a part [of China]. When Thatcher went to Beijing in 1982, she really wanted Hong Kong to keep British administrators after 1997 when china resumed sovereignty. Deng did not want British officials governing Hong Kong, but Deng agreed that the rulers of Hong Kong would be local people, not mainlanders.

And the current situation is something that Deng did not foresee at that time. And nobody could foresee it. The time in 1984 when he reached an agreement with thatcher to have one country and two systems, he expected that Hong Kong would remain a very active financial center. In 1997 when Hong Kong reverted to the mainland, the Hong Kong people were richer and they had more knowledge. Now the situation in China is that there are some people who are so rich that they come to Hong Kong and BUY up lots of property. So the property prices rise. And in addition, many mainland students, who are very bright, want to find jobs in Hong Kong. So when they come to Hong Kong and get jobs, it's more difficult for the local

people to get jobs. And since many businesses want to do business on the mainland, naturally the people from mainland have more opportunities to get jobs. So the young people in Hong Kong now feel that they are overpowered by mainland money, which makes their life very difficult. And also, many mainlanders speak Mandarin instead of Cantonese. And sometimes their manners are very crude. For example, there is a famous picture of a mainland mother in Hong Kong who held a baby, and the baby was peeing on the street. So that became a symbol for the ill-mannered mainland people who come. and sometimes the mainlanders buy up key products; there were, for example, shortages of milk powder. So many Hong Kong people are not happy about the mainland domination.

But the current focus is on the political issue, on the question of how the Hong Kong chief executive will be elected in 2017. it is likely that the Chinese authorities will find some ways to have peace in Hong Kong but their range of choices is limited. they fear that if they make concessions people in the mainland will demonstrate for more freedoms and demand concessions. But Beijing can do little things. For example, when they had the dialogue with the students, they used Cantonese. That was very clever. They did not use Mandarin. That meant that people from the Hong Kong government were really local people and they did not use Mandarin, the language of China. So they used [some] little ways like that to show concern for the students.

Q: So you believe that speaking Cantonese is one reflection of the Chinese government's flexibility of dealing with the crisis?

A: At that particular point, the dialogue at this time, of course Mandarin is becoming more important in Hong Kong as more people come to China, but it became a symbol at this time, at this very critical juncture to show you that (it is) the local people who are in charge.

Q: Do you think that strategy actually helps?

A: I think that helps, but I think in the early ways of handling things, the mainland did not do such a good job of meeting with and showing consideration for the people of Hong Kong. They have not dealt with the underlying social issues. So some people in Hong Kong feel that the Chinese communist party of Beijing is siding with the capitalists of Hong Kong, not the ordinary people.

Q: Yale scholars Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan proposed in 1996 in their book *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* that a country will pay a lot if the government rejects democracy when it actually possesses the criteria of democracy, namely a free civil society, the rule of law, a usable state bureaucracy, an institutionalized economic society, and an autonomous political society. Hong Kong is exactly this situation. How do you evaluate such situations?

A: Hong Kong was a British colony until 1997. People in Hong Kong had many advantages of free speech [and] strong court systems, but they did not have regular voting, as you would find in European countries and in the United States for their high officials. It has many aspects of democracy, including free speech and a strong legal system, so it is quite natural that in response to the social conditions with so many mainlanders are buying up property and getting good jobs, many ordinary people do not feel that they are being represented. But actually the current plan for 2017 is a step toward democracy. Many people in Hong Kong want to move to full democracy faster. But actually Hong Kong never had a system of direct votes. So 2017 there will already be some progress because even though you have a committee of 1200 or more people who will select the candidates, the general public will take part in that final SELECTION. So it's a limited stage of democracy. It's a step towards democracy.

One of the other problems in Hong Kong is the difference in opinions between very high officials and the business world, who are very happy with their relationship with Beijing, and some of the intellectuals, students, [and] ordinary middle class people who do not have such connections. And of course the people who will be in the 1200 people group making the selection of candidate are mostly richer business people who have better relations with the mainland.

Q: What do you think about the durability of such social cleavages?

A: I think the basic cleavages will not get better because there will be more mainlanders who want to come to Hong Kong and buy up property. The markets of real estate in Hong Kong will probably not get better. But I think that there are some ways that the Hong Kong government could do to try to keep middle class housing and putting limits on the outsiders' purchases in the way that they tax people who don't live there. So I think there are things that the government can do to reduce the tension. And the universities now have to decide: do they let in any mainlanders

who want to come or just a certain percentage? Hong Kong university, for example, lets in a certain percentage of undergraduates, if I remember correctly it is now about 20 percent, but that's all the mainlanders [who] can get in. so that ensures that many Hong Kong people will be allowed to go to universities. So there are things that can be done in managing education and real estates to reduce the seriousness of the certain tensions, but the basic tensions will not go away and the attractiveness of Hong Kong to mainland people will only increase.

Q: Have you watched the Chinese TV series of Xiaoping?

A: I watched part of it. I will get to the rest of it. But I just watched part of it.

Q: It mainly described Deng's individual contribution to the Reform and Opening Up. How do you view such a perspective?

A: no I do not think it is about ding along but about the reform and opening policies. One part, for example, was about Gaokao, the return of entrance examinations to universities. It shows how ding resumed entrance examinations for universities. The series of 48 episodes was not exactly a documentary. It was a dramatized version of Deng and the reform period. It was a story based on the reality. The series did not always follow the history as exactly as it was.

Q: For a scale of 10, what score will you give it?

A: It depends on what criteria you have. If you say, was it well dramatized? I would say maybe 9. Did it catch the spirit of Deng and reform? Again maybe a 9. If the criterion is: is it an accurate version of what he did? Maybe 5 or 6, because it did not try to give an exact replication of what he did.

Q: You talked about other people's criticisms of Deng in your book, but you seldom expressed your personal opinions on Deng's shortcomings, either publicly or in the book. Do you have any concern about that? How do you view Deng's weakness? Does your scarce comments on Deng's shortcomings reflect China's reluctance of hearing criticism?

A. In reading the reviews of my book in china, I observed that overwhelmingly

readers praise me for being objective and making an effort to present a comprehensive view of Deng based on many sources. In the book, I tried to describe objectively what he did. If they read carefully, some readers will conclude that he did have some shortcomings. He could have done more for democracy. When I traveled in china, I encountered criticisms of Deng from the right and the left. From the left, people feel that, after all, capitalism has many weaknesses. The people are too selfish. Some people get too rich and have no respect for tradition and for other people. It's too unequal. And he allowed this system to develop. Before Deng, there was more equality, more concern for the whole group, [and] less selfishness. Some of them support Mao. I did not meet anybody who thought that the great leap forward or the Cultural Revolution was a good thing. I have the impression that there is widespread recognition that Mao's policies were very seriously flawed. But I think that some people believe that the system that Deng created did lead to selfishness and corruption and that Deng did not do enough to stop corruption. These leftists who criticize some of Deng's policies and praise some of Mao's spirit reflect those views.

From the right side, including many intellectuals and thoughtful reporters and some liberal officials believe that Deng did not do enough for freedom and democracy. Other people like Hu Yaobang could have done more to promote free discussion and democracy. If he had done that, China would have been stronger today. I think if a reader reads my book carefully, he can make those conclusions. I try to write what he did and give an objective base to the reader, so the readers [can] have an informed opinion about what he actually did. Whether he did well or bad, that is something that the readers [themselves] can [judge].

But both rightists and leftists who wished I had done more to show that their interpretations are correct acknowledge that the book tells an objective detailed account of what happened and that they can refer to the book to see what Deng thought and what he did.

Although I try to be objective, I personally believe that Deng's contribution to Chinese successes is far greater than Mao's. When I considered all that he had accomplished, how informed he was, and how well he managed, I do believe that Deng had an impact on 20th century world history that is greater than any other leader in any other country.

Q: How do you assess the influence of the policy framework constructed in Xi's reforms? Will its legacy be as significant as Deng's policies, which basically

determined the direction of the policies in the following thirty years in China?

A: When Deng took power, the CCP had been a revolutionary party, continuing to make revolutions. He changed it fundamentally into a governing party that was concerned not with making revolutions. He ended the class struggle. He set term limits on how long people could serve. He allowed entrance examination based on exams. He created a meritocracy with officials selected not on the base of political backgrounds or political, social class background. He opened up the markets, and in fact eliminated the communes. Those were very basic fundamental changes in the whole system.

Xi Jinping is operating within that system. He will not make such basic changes to the system as a whole. He will try to adapt that system so it is working well now. China is now a stronger country than when Deng was in power so Xi will want china to play a bigger role internationally. At home, he knows that corruption is too serious and he must control corruption. Although Deng made some progress towards the rule of law, Xi Jinping wants to continue that progress. Xi Jinping wants to be a strong leader like Deng he cannot make such basic changes as Deng did to the basic system. He has operated within the system and tries to be bold in making changes within that system.

Q: Western media have commented on and expressed criticism of Xi's leadership style, as in the case of the New York Times' "Confucian, Stubborn and Macho: China's Leader is 'Xi Bigbig'" and Foreign Affairs' s "China's Imperial President." How do you assess his leadership style?

A: I think that when Xi came to his office, [there were so] many high officials, especially old officials, who believed that the leader ought to be strong, [and] that the leadership under Hu Jintao did not do enough to get rid of corruption. Although he did try to help the poorer areas of inner china, he did not push hard enough on certain issues. Many high officials believe that china needs a stronger leader to get rid of corruption and gain public support. Therefore I think that Xi tries to centralize the authority, and because he was hong erdai, because he has grown up in Beijing and a member of the children of the elites, he had many contacts and was well known. His father has been vice premier and was a very strong supporter of reforms. So there was a general feeling that he had the kind of strength and connections, and that he could do a lot for the government that other people could not do. Now even though many high-level leaders realize that he had to attack corruption, many of them have been worried that they might be criticized for their [own] corruption,

because so many high-level leaders had enjoyed business contacts and are able to buy some portions of companies. Xi faces a very complicated task. He must, on the one hand, continue to attack corruption and not allow corruption in the future. But on the other hand he cannot frighten too many officials for if he does they might try to unite against him. This is a very delicate and difficult job.

Q: In the 1980s Deng was called “Deng Gong,” while currently Xi is called “Xi Dada (Bigbig).” To a large extent, such nicknames are intentionally established by state officials. Is there any relationship between the two? What does the “nickname phenomenon” reflect about the general mentality of citizens in China?

A: Of course, when certain nicknames become popular, it reflects a public attitude. When people referred to Mao, they always said “Mao Zhuxi”, Chairman Mao. But in 1984 when Deng was so popular, they instead said, “Xiaoping Nihao.” that means that they were more familiar with him and can refer to him by his first name. And to me, “Xi Dada” is a term similar to “uncle.” It denotes kindness. In fact, Xi has been quite tough. But he still wants people to feel comfortable with him. So he is trying to promote the impression that he is a comfortable person who is trying to promote a healthier society.

Q: You mentioned in Deng’s biography that most Guangdong leaders in 1980s and 1990s are revolutionary leaders and gain Beijing’s support in practicing new ideas. Today many leaders in Guangdong are neither local citizens, nor will they stay long in the province. What does the changing political leadership mean to Guangdong? Do you think Guangdong’s changing autonomy is a reflection of China’s strengthening trend of authority centralization?

A: Guangdong had very strong localism in the 1950s, compared to other regions. Many leaders there were people who had taken part in guerilla activities in the southern china, before 1949. But in 1952, Mao [wanted to ensure] that Guangdong was under central authority, so he sent down a group of people including Tao Zhu, and at that time Zhao Ziyang was a young man. Those people remained in power from 1952 to the Cultural Revolution, for a long time. Then in the 1980s one of the leaders in Beijing, Ye Jianying, had come from Guangdong. He had been a local leader in Guangdong from 1949 to 1952. In the reform period after 1978, he encouraged people who were sent in to top positions in Guangdong after 1978, including Xi’s father, Xi Zhongxun, to make use of the local cadres, to have better relations with

local people. Xi Zhongxun, Yang Shangkun, and Ren Zhongyi (First Party Secretary of Guangdong from 1980 to 1985) gave very strong support to local cadres, many of whom had felt pushed aside and mistreated from 1952-1978.

The people after Ren Zhongyi in top positions in Guangdong were local people like Lin Ruo. By that time, localism was no longer a serious problem. They were all loyal to Beijing. So unlike Mao in 1952, Deng did not have to worry about local independence. So it was possible to use some local people in the highest positions. More recently, Beijing decided to use Guangdong as a place to test out the leaders who might rise to even higher positions in the politburo in Beijing. So they let some of the leading candidates for the politburo serve a term in Shanghai or Guangdong, some of the largest, most populous, and most open provinces, to test them and give them experience for higher-level leadership in Beijing. Now localism is not a problem. It did not go away completely, but it was very strong in the 1950s. Local people from Guangdong can rise to higher position. Now all local leaders speak Mandarin quite well. So there was no longer such a serious difference between the local citizens and the outsiders.

Q: How do you evaluate yourself as a social scientist? How do you view your influence and popularity in China?

A: One of my colleagues said I have not contributed to sociological theory or method. I think that's fair. I have not created original theories for sociology. I tried to apply what I learned from sociology and psychology to understanding a certain part of the world. So I contributed to western understanding of China and Japan. I am very lucky because one [of my books] Japan as Number One, became a bestseller in Japan. As far as I know, in my generation, I am the only westerner who wrote a book about Japan that became a bestseller in Japan and wrote a book about China that became a bestseller in China.

I speak both Chinese and Japanese. When I am in China, I give lectures in Chinese. When I am in Japan, I give lectures in Japanese. So in my generation this has given me an unusual opportunity to reach audiences in China and Japan and discuss relations between the United States and these countries.

But at Harvard and in the United States, I helped educate generations of Americans about China and Japan. I used to give a core curriculum class [at Harvard] called Industrial East Asia, a course that traced the development of industrial society in Japan and then in South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Mainland China. I

organized an undergraduate concentration in East Asian studies. I had many good students in that program. I also served in the government for two years. That time I had a chance to use my understanding of Asia to provide background for officials dealing with East Asia.

Q: Would you recommend some scholars on Chinese studies or books about China?

A: We have lots of excellent scholars at Harvard. On the communist period, Roderick MacFarquhar has done much excellent research. Dwight Perkins has done pioneering work on the Chinese economy. Elizabeth Perry had done pioneering work on social movements. Iain Johnston is a young scholar in Chinese politics. Martin Whyte has provided leadership in the study of Chinese society, and Tony Saich, Bill Alford, and Bill Hsiao have provided excellent leadership in our professional schools. Then we have many other scholars teaching about history, language, and literature. And in other universities, we also have many outstanding leaders. We have especially strong departments at Columbia, Michigan, U of California - Berkeley, Stanford, U of California - San Diego, SAIS, and George Washington. And we have excellent think tanks in Washington D.C.

(Qitong Cao contributed research and translated part of the interview.)