

Wolf Ladejinsky

1899–1975

Wolf Ladejinsky's name appears in few of the academic economic journals, but there is little doubt that if someone from another world were asked to review the work of all economists and then list those economists who have had the widest impact on their fellowmen, Ladejinsky's name would be high on the list. Trained as an agricultural economist at Columbia University, he joined the Department of Agriculture's Foreign Advisory Service in 1935, specializing in Asian problems. But his career accelerated after 1945, when he played a major role in developing and introducing the land reform program in Japan after the Occupation. The impact of this reform on Japanese society and the rural economy has been profound; it is probably one of the most significant and long-standing legacies of United States influence in that country. This was followed by a period as adviser on land reform to President Chiang Kai-shek's government, first in mainland China and then on Taiwan; here again, Ladejinsky played a significant role in the introduction of land reform on that island, a program often referred to as a model for other countries. Thereafter he served as adviser on land reform in South Vietnam, and then worked for the Ford Foundation and the World Bank in a variety of research or advisory assignments—largely in Asian countries. Much of the last decade of his life was spent in India as a member of IBRD visiting or resident missions.

Ladejinsky's great intellectual contribution, expressed both in his speaking and in his writing (sometimes formal articles; but more often, less formal reports and letters), was his profound awareness of the historical, social, and political roots of the farmer's economic behavior—the close relationship between the institutional structure of a society and the directions of change in the rural sector. This was based on a deep awareness of, and sympathy for, the condition of the Asian farmer. He was listened to not only because he spoke to the rulers in a country (and spoke to them honestly and directly), but because what he said to the rulers was based on what he learned from the farmers—large and small, landed and landless. He visited them and talked to them; they felt his deep commitment to their improved well-being and were willing to respond.

He was not an academic; he did not want to leave the field, and it was appropriate that he died in the field. He did not find writing easy; he worked hard over his articles, polishing and honing them until they said precisely and stylistically what he wanted them to say. As a result, each of his articles—whether in *Foreign Affairs*, the *New York Times*, or an Asian journal like the *Economic and Political Weekly of India*—is a gem, fully understandable and highly informative. Each conveyed the message that he wished to convey on the economic condition of the farmers, and how that condition might be improved. Because he advocated change, he was a figure of controversy and argument in many of the countries in which he worked and in the United States—and he preferred it that way.

He appreciated the work of academics. He read widely and in all manner of works that he thought relevant to understanding a country's society and behavior: economics, history, politics, but also literature and art. This wide range of knowledge and interest was clearly apparent in both the substance and style of his own writings. He was also very helpful to those academics whom he felt sympathetic; he was widely respected by academicians in the United States and Europe, as well as in the Asian countries in which he worked.

Unfortunately, he left no single book containing his ideas; and articles are ephemeral. Clearly, his greatest operational contributions are embodied in the results of his work overseas. However, his most valuable intellectual contribution to scholars throughout the world is in his writings. Therefore, the best memorial to him would be a volume containing his most significant writings; it is most appropriate that the World Bank will be publishing such a collection in the near future.

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