

China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformations in Comparative Historical Perspective

Tuesday, November 17, 2009

CGIS South, Belfer Case Study Room, S020

5:15 pm Session I The Maritime Transformation of Ming China



Andrew R. Wilson
*Professor of Strategy and
Policy, US Naval War College*

Unlike those continental powers that have elected or been impelled to transform themselves into significant maritime powers, Ming China, it is generally believed, very rapidly turned its back on the sea and squandered its

opportunity to be the dominant maritime power in Asia, if not the world. As with all conventional wisdom, there is some element of truth to this narrative. More fundamentally, however, Ming China is the unique case of a continental power blessed with sufficient wealth, raw materials, technological acumen, and native talent to emerge rapidly as a sea power. Few premodern empires could rival the Ming's wealth, talent, or strategic flexibility; but the Ming was also plagued by systemic flaws and fundamental ideological and institutional paradoxes that prevented it from sustaining a dominant maritime edge.

6:30 pm Dinner Break

We welcome participants who wish to attend both sessions of the New England China Seminar to join colleagues for a buffet dinner at 6:30-7:30 pm, in Room S050. The dinner cost is \$15 per person (\$10 for students). Please register by November 12, 5:00 pm, with Wendy Duan at wduan@fas.harvard.edu.

The presenters are affiliated with the US Naval War College's China Maritime Studies Institute. These lectures draw on their recently published edited volume, *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective* (2009). This volume is the third in the series, Studies in Chinese Maritime Development, following *China's Energy Strategy: The Impact on Beijing's Maritime Policies* (2008) and *China's Future Nuclear Submarine Force* (2007).

7:30 pm Session II China's Maritime Transformation



Andrew S. Erickson
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Research, US Naval War College*

China's turn toward the sea is evident in its stunning rise in global shipbuilding markets, wide ranging merchant marine, expansive offshore energy exploration, growing fishing fleet, and increasingly modern navy. From its recent challenging

of USNS *Impeccable* in the South China Sea to its counter-piracy deployment in the Gulf of Aden, China's navy is receiving increasing attention. But analysts and policy makers alike remain deeply divided as to Beijing's prospects as a sea power. History offers valuable insights; many continental powers have elected or been impelled to transform themselves into significant maritime powers in order to safeguard their strategic position or advance their interests. Cases from the Persian Empire to the Soviet Union, as well as China's unique advantages, suggest that it has turned the corner on a genuine maritime transformation. This would be an extraordinary event in the history of the last two millennia, with tremendous ramifications for the world.

Moderator: **Robert Ross**, Professor of Political Science, Boston College
Discussant: **Lyle J. Goldstein**, Associate Professor, Strategic Research, US Naval War College

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