

CHINA GOES TO SEA

Maritime Transformation in
Comparative Historical Perspective

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EDITED BY

ANDREW S. ERICKSON, LYLE J. GOLDSTEIN,
AND CARNES LORD

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*edited by Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein,
and Carnes Lord*



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Andrew S. Erickson and Lyle J. Goldstein

Introduction

Chinese Perspectives on Maritime Transformation

IT HAS BEEN OBSERVED THAT THERE EXIST “massive differences in the assumptions of European nations and Asian nations about the significance of sea power, today and into the future.”¹ This represents the reversal of a great historical trend that began six hundred years ago, in which China withdrew from the seas and European naval expansion spread Western influence around the globe.² Now, while the U.S. Navy is diminishing quantitatively and European naval powers are in substantial decline, many nations in Asia are prioritizing naval development. For many observers, China’s rise and America’s relative decline are the central dynamic forces within this great divergence.³

In modern history, China has been primarily a land power, dominating smaller states along its massive continental flanks. But China’s turn toward the sea is now very much a reality, as evident in its stunning rise in global shipbuilding markets, its vast and expanding merchant marine, the wide offshore reach of its energy and minerals exploration companies, its growing fishing fleet, and indeed its increasingly modern navy. Yet, for all these



achievements, there is still profound skepticism regarding China's potential as a genuine maritime power. Beijing must still import the most vital subcomponents for its shipyards, maritime governance remains severely challenged bureaucratically, and the navy evinces, at least as of yet, little enthusiasm for significant blue water power projection capabilities.

This volume presents a comprehensive assessment of prospects for China's maritime development by situating these important geostrategic phenomena within a larger world historical context. It accepts the premise that geography matters but explores precisely how and under what circumstances it matters. In the words of Alan Wachman, "Geography . . . does condition the choices made by policy makers, presenting both opportunities and constraints" but it "does not determine the strategic ambitions or policies of a state."⁴ We use the terms "maritime power" and "sea power" to mean not only explicit naval strength but also the commerce and shipping that underpin it. Sea power is not an end in itself but rather both a medium for trade and a source of national security. China is hardly the only land power in history to attempt transformation by fostering sea power. Moreover, China was not always only a land power—quite the contrary: watertight bulkheads, rudders, and even the compass are thought to have originated there.

This book examines each of these vital perspectives in turn. Too many works on China view the nation in isolation. Of course, China's history and culture are to some extent exceptional, but building intellectual fences actually hinders the effort to understand China's current development trajectory. Historically, China has been profoundly influenced by external religions, ideologies, and sociopolitical models. The need to compare, moreover, is additionally highlighted by the realization that such macrohistorical comparisons are currently ongoing in China—and potentially affecting state policy in Beijing. Some of these current and influential People's Republic of China (PRC) studies are surveyed in the penultimate chapter of this volume. Finally, when undertaking comparative historical studies, there is an imperative to take note of major illustrative differences between cases that may be just as analytically significant as various similarities in the cases. Comparative history has been a rewarding method for the study of international politics and strategic studies, and the present work is inspired by a variety of successful studies relying on these methods.⁵

This present work would be incomplete, however, if it did not grapple directly and intensively with the enigmatic phenomena of Chinese maritime development itself. Comparison in the absence of direct knowledge regarding a given subject raises the specter of crude and inappropriate analogy. The edi-

tors of the present volume are fully aware that historical parallels can, when misapplied, lead to a false sense of certainty and sometimes to grave errors in judgment.⁶ Any seasoned observer of international relations understands that history never repeats itself in identical patterns. To guard against the misapplication of historical analogies, the comparisons are wide-ranging, but they are also balanced by ample analyses in the second part of this volume that review both historical and contemporary developments in China's maritime sector. These analyses review in detail both the high points of Chinese sea power (e.g., the Ming Voyages of Zheng He) as well as the low points (e.g., Mao's Cultural Revolution). It is emphasized in the second part of this volume that contemporary China is not the only case of attempted maritime transformation in Chinese history. Detailed knowledge presented by the distinguished group of China-watchers highlighted here safeguards the integrity of the comparative analytical effort that is the heart of this volume. This volume's contributors include historians, political scientists, industry consultants, and sinologists, not to mention a variety of naval officers, both active and retired. They represent a wealth of talent that holds the potential to yield the best results from such multidisciplinary endeavors. It must be emphasized that the opinions expressed in this volume are solely those of the authors and editors and do not represent the official policies or estimates of the U.S. Navy or any other agency of the U.S. government.

As a foundation for the comparative section on maritime transformations outside China, the volume examines carefully several cases of attempted transformation from the ancient world that may prove illuminating for those considering China's maritime prospects. Gregory Gilbert describes the case of Persia, which initially viewed the sea "as a barrier" but through devoting major financial resources was subsequently able to build "the first truly substantial navy in world history." In contrast, Barry Strauss' description of Sparta's efforts in the maritime realm illustrate that "the maritime option was problematic for Sparta. . . . It ran against the grain of an austere, inward-looking, arrogant, conservative, continental power." Like Persia, Rome saw some considerable success in maritime transformation, described by Arthur M. Eckstein as "simply stunning" in its dimensions. Eckstein also concludes, however, that Rome's maritime transformation was "superficial for a very long time [and] occurred at first only under the extreme pressure of circumstances." Jakub Grygiel, in evaluating the Ottoman Empire's exertions on the sea, suggests that "the most striking fact of Ottoman history is in fact the rapidity of the Ottoman naval rise . . . [and that they] succeeded in challenging, and defeating, the main Mediterranean naval power . . . [Venice]." This

case reveals a continentalist approach to sea power, which stands in marked contrast to that of the classic maritime powers of Europe.

As the center of naval competition moved into the Atlantic and beyond during the modern era, a number of the major continental powers made earnest attempts at maritime transformation with limited success, however. According to James Pritchard, “French maritime transformations were characterized by enormous effort that yielded limited benefits and led generally to outright failure.” Perhaps implying some vital strategic choices for Beijing, he concludes, “It seems clear that France could be a land power or a sea power but not both simultaneously.” In another chapter with strong implications for China’s evolving maritime strategy, Holger H. Herwig reflects on Adm. Alfred von Tirpitz’s initiative to build a fleet by the “patient laying of stone upon stone,” expressing Germany’s yearning for a navy “as a symbol of industrial progress . . . [that] would be forward looking and progressive . . . [and] would “show the flag around the globe” while preventing Britain from severing Germany’s sea-lanes. But he cautions strenuously against the temptation to “build first, design a strategy later” that had disastrous results for Germany. In discussing Russia’s maritime development before World War I, Jacob W. Kipp asserts, “In contravention of Mahan’s concept of sea power evolving out of a nations’ civilian maritime calling, Russian naval power had to be planted and nurtured by an absolutist state directing a continental power,” but this had rather mixed results. A final extremely relevant case for contemporary China concerns Soviet attempts to wield maritime power during the Cold War despite its “extremely unfavorable geostrategic position” with respect to maritime strategy. It remains to be seen whether China will embrace, as Milan Vego outlines, the eventual Soviet perspective that “any country that intends to be a major power must also be strong at sea”—whether Beijing will find its own naval exponent equivalent to the Kremlin’s Adm. Sergei Gorshkov. These historical cases provide ample lessons—lessons that are presently being studied by Chinese strategists as they debate potential blueprints for Chinese sea power.

The volume’s second section, “Chinese Maritime Transformations,” examines selected Chinese attempts to become a more capable maritime power. Andrew R. Wilson recounts that “with the last of the great voyages commanded by the eunuch official Zheng He [郑和] in 1433, the Ming state . . . made a series of conscious decisions to step back from the maritime realm, shifting from a concerted agenda of aggressive navalism to a defensive continental focus.” As Bruce A. Elleman demonstrates, Qing China initially focused on stabilizing its northern and western land frontiers. Suddenly con-

fronted with the threat of rising British, French, and Japanese naval power in Asia, in addition to its internal political problems, it eventually purchased ships from abroad but had neither the reliable infrastructure nor the professional navy to operate them effectively in battle, with disastrous results. Thus, Qing “China’s maritime defeats were directly due to the Qing decision not to modernize and Westernize its navy following the first Opium War.” During the Cold War, Bernard Cole relates, China’s naval development was constrained by U.S. dominance of maritime East Asia and later by internal policy debacles and deterioration of relations with the Soviet Union: The People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) was “viewed by its military and civilian masters as an organization with the primary mission of supporting army forces. Beijing’s maritime concerns were defensive.”

Looking to the Deng era and beyond, then, is China finally overcoming its historical difficulties to achieve enduring maritime development? While hardly discounting the challenges that Beijing continues to face, three chapters suggest that this may indeed be the case. In their review of China’s shipbuilding and other marine industries, Gabriel Collins and Michael Grubb reveal that “China’s current maritime transformation is to a large extent led by an exceedingly dynamic commercial maritime sector, which is in turn creating ample synergies for naval development,” thereby offering a sound basis for transformation that was frequently lacking in other cases examined in this volume. In his chapter on the current state of PLAN development, Rear Adm. Eric A. McVadon, USN (Ret.), assesses that China “has moved dramatically over the last decade or so to modernize its naval forces . . . and is now advancing . . . toward making those forces a truly operational modern navy.” In their chapter on the Chinese government-inspired historical study *The Rise of Great Powers*, Andrew S. Erickson and Lyle J. Goldstein suggest that Beijing is learning from other nations’ historical experiences with maritime development: “a major conclusion . . . is the fundamental value of the market and international trade as drivers for national development and consequently national power.” Finally, in his concluding chapter, Carnes Lord offers insights into the larger factors that have tended to influence the success or failure of maritime transformations. The sobering implication for China is that, while it is making dramatic and in some ways unprecedented progress, maritime transformation is a difficult and treacherous process that no modern land power has fully accomplished: “With the two (partial) exceptions [of Persia and Rome] . . . the historical record has not been kind to powers attempting maritime transformations.”

Certain key questions with respect to maritime transformation will form the core intellectual threads found in each of the chapter case studies.

- What factors affect a continental state's decision to develop significant naval and maritime capabilities?
- What strategic objectives does it serve?
- What are the political or bureaucratic processes that make such a decision possible?
- How important is visionary political or military leadership?
- To what extent is a continentalist strategic culture an impediment to such a decision, and how is it overcome?
- To what extent do economic or commercial considerations drive maritime transformations?
- How does a transforming power understand and assess the trade-offs between land and naval strength?
- What are the operational handicaps that transforming maritime powers face, and how are these handicaps addressed?
- How do maritime transformations develop over time?
- What strategies do rival powers employ to counter transforming maritime states, and which of these strategies are most successful?

These questions will be examined in a series of historical case studies framed by thematic discussion and analysis.

It is also important to understand what this volume is not. It is not a treatise on sea power generally. Thus, the reader may be surprised to see rather little discussion of the conventional sea powers: Portugal, Holland, England, Japan, and the United States.⁷ While some tendencies in these states are relevant, the intentional focus of the chosen case studies is rather on continental states with pronounced land-focused strategic orientations. Persia, Sparta, Rome, the Ottoman Empire, Germany, France, and Russia all fit this mold well and serve as useful test cases in which to examine the processes of attempted maritime transformation. In exploring both ancient experiences as well as non-European cases as part of this wide-ranging comparative analysis, the volume attempts to break substantial new ground, thus adding to the more conventional case studies of strategy in continental powers. The chapters in part 2 that address Chinese maritime development directly aim to cover China's modern maritime history comprehensively. Unfortunately,

because of space constraints, there are some gaps. Thus, the foundations of Chinese sea power established during the Song and Yuan dynasties are not discussed in detail in this volume. Nevertheless, the crucial Ming case is treated in appropriate detail—and this case emerges as an interesting example, among the others, of a genuine maritime power undergoing reverse transformation. The Qing and Cold War cases fit the more conventional pattern illustrated in this volume. Three chapters at the end of the volume describe in considerable detail the actual processes of maritime transformation that are ongoing today in China: commercial, military, and intellectual.

To set the stage for deeper comparison and analysis of China's contemporary development in subsequent chapters, this introduction will briefly survey the intense debate now under way in Beijing regarding China's future trajectory and the role of maritime power in that development process.

China as Land or Sea Power?

It has long been widely acknowledged that China's squandering of its nascent maritime potential in the Ming and successive dynasties represented a tragic mistake of macrohistorical proportions. The following Chinese interpretation is quite typical:

The enterprise of China's ocean development has a splendid history dating back to [Ming Dynasty admiral] Zheng He's seven voyages to the West. But its previous feudal rulers locked their doors against the world. They fettered the Chinese Nation's vigorous ocean-based development. This included especially the Ming and Qing Dynasty's severe prohibition of maritime [focus] for over 400 years. This repeatedly caused the Chinese Nation to miss favorable opportunities [that would have stemmed from] developing civilization from the sea. Then the Western battleships bombarded their way through the gate that China's feudal rulers had locked. Thenceforth, a succession of wars of invasion from the sea visited profound suffering as well as galling shame and humiliation on the Chinese Nation. The beautiful, abundant ocean gave forth only sorrow and tears.⁸

Unquestionably, China's "Century of National Humiliation" (百年国耻) is a powerful motivating force in Beijing's current drive to achieve maritime transformation. In 1995 an Academy of Military Science researcher argued that, in contrast to that of the West, "Chinese geostrategic thinking . . . is

characterized by land power.” More than a decade later, as China’s power, influence, and openness have increased dramatically, a genuine debate regarding China’s land/sea-power orientation is emerging in China. For the first time, a substantial number of analysts and officials contend that China is already a major maritime power and that its development in this realm should be further prioritized.

Yet it is far from certain that this will soon become a majority view and, hence, a decisive driver of national policy and military strategy. While even advocates of a continentalist school of thought accept the need for sea power “consciousness” and development, they nevertheless maintain that China must accept that historical and geostrategic conditions have made it a land power. In between these extremes, a number of analysts believe that China is both a land and a sea power, and that its strategic development must proceed accordingly. Given the mix of challenges and opportunities that China faces on its continental and maritime flanks, and increasingly in the wider world, these strategic choices for Beijing will become even more acute in the coming decades.

The Maritime Faction

As might be expected, the PLAN leadership is a strong proponent of China becoming a major maritime power. Writing in the official journal of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, PLAN commander Wu Shengli and political commissar Hu Yanlin review China’s past two centuries of maritime history to argue that lack of naval power exposed China to disastrous attack by the “strong vessels and sharp cannons” of the West. “Only when the navy is strong can the maritime rights rise,” they write, “which will bring the rise of the nation.”

Moreover, China’s sea power development can address the Taiwan issue, which “involves our national security and development—the full unification of our nation. It is also the key interest of the Chinese nation and one of the three important historical missions for our Party. To ensure the unification of our nation is the holy mission of our army. A powerful navy is a key force that can shock the ‘Taiwan independence’ separatists, and defend the unification of our nation.”⁹ Wu and Hu envision PLAN missions beyond and in addition to reunification with Taiwan, however: “In order to protect normal fishing, oceanic resource development, oceanic investigation and scientific tests, to maintain the safety of the oceanic transportation and the strategic passageway for energy and resources, ensure the jurisdiction of our nation

to neighboring areas, continental shelf, and exclusive economic zones, and effectively safeguard our national maritime rights, we must build a powerful navy.”¹⁰

This conception of China facing both challenges and opportunities from the sea is prevalent among Chinese analysts:

As the democratic revolutionary pioneer Dr. Sun Yat-sen himself pointed out, in terms of world trends, a nation’s rise and fall often lies not on land but at sea. It is maritime power that produces victors. . . . At present, the world’s population is increasing severely, land resources are acutely decreasing, [and] environmental pollution is severe. One after another, nations have trained their sights on the sea. The strategic status and use of the sea are of obvious importance. Contradictions and contention for maritime rights and interests are increasingly violent. The 21st century is a Maritime Century. Facing the Maritime Century’s call, the Chinese Nation’s desire for resurgence has never been as strong, and its maritime connection has never been more inseparable.¹¹

China’s reliance on the seas has been growing constantly throughout the post-1978 reform period.¹² “The navy is concerned with China’s sea power, and sea power is concerned with China’s future development,” states Zhang Wenmu, a prominent professor at the Center for Strategic Studies at the Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics.¹³ “If a nation lacks sea power, its development has no future.”¹⁴ Zhang allows that the sources of sea power have evolved over time: “In military history, command of the sea was at one point an important factor behind the rise and fall of nations. Today, in the 21st century, command of the sea based on the mastery of satellite communications technology, guided missile long-range attacks, and precision intercepting technology is still a decisive factor in determining a nation’s rise and fall.”¹⁵ The lesson for China, in Zhang’s view, is that “with its aviation and space undertakings taking big strides forward, China today is a flying dragon. But that is not enough, not by a long shot. China must also be a dragon in the deep pool of the western Pacific. Otherwise, it will not achieve the great revitalization of the entire Chinese nation.”¹⁶ This theme is echoed by two PLAN officers who argue forcefully that sea powers are more economically vital and less militarily vulnerable than land powers.¹⁷

A former member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference and director of China’s State Oceanic Administration has empha-

sized the need to “build a strong maritime nation [海洋强国].”¹⁸ PLAN senior captain Xu Qi builds on this theme, emphasizing that “the country’s long period of prosperity [as well as] the Chinese nation’s existence, development, and great resurgence [all] increasingly rely on the sea.”¹⁹ Xu notes, “Historically, great powers struggling for supremacy have invariably focused their attention on the ocean and spared no efforts in pursuing their maritime geostrategic rivalries.”²⁰

In a major naval history treatise, which has reportedly entered the curriculum of China’s naval academies,²¹ PLAN deputy commander Vice Adm. Ding Yiping and his coauthors write, “In order to uphold national rights and resist foreign invasion, China must build a powerful navy, so as to solidify national defense and safeguard maritime rights and interests.”²²

The individuals cited above appear to see rapid PLAN development as an urgent priority. This is hardly unprecedented. As early as 1997, the director of a PLAN headquarters research institute wrote, “Establishing a Chinese maritime strategy has become a task of top importance.”²³ In 2001 Adm. Zheng Ming, then director of the PLAN Armament and Technology Department, reportedly “stressed that the PLA must speed up the modernization of its naval forces so that China can transform from a large oceanic country into a strong ocean power at an early date.”²⁴ Another article frames the issue in stark terms: “China faces a grim naval strategic environment in the 21st Century. If the unfavorable maritime situation is allowed to continue deteriorating, if we continue to be surrounded in our coastal waters, then how can we speak of China rising to prominence? How can Chinese naval power be promoted? How can China’s maritime rights and interests be guaranteed? How can a country with just a ‘brown water’ navy win the respect of other countries for its naval power, or have any right to prattle on about becoming a world power or to carry out an Asia-Pacific strategy, let alone a global one?”²⁵ Zhang Wenmu contends that “what China is doing today in exercising its maritime rights falls far short of ‘pursuing sea power.’”²⁶

If the aforementioned views carry the day, to what uses might a strengthened PLAN be put? There is a wide variety of opinion on this matter. An article in the PLAN publication *Modern Navy* lists as possible threats “fishery disputes, controversies regarding continental shelves, fights over islands and reefs, ownership disputes over deep-sea resources, conflicts regarding maritime surveys, and disagreements related to maritime anti-terrorism.”²⁷ Among advocates of Chinese sea power, there is a strong sense that China must have an independent military capability to defend its growing maritime interests. Since the seas are a “lifeline for the future existence and development of the

nation,” opines a recent article, while China does “not want to become an overlord, . . . neither can we let an overlord control our oceans.”²⁸

Safeguarding trade and economic development is a major theme of Chinese sea power proponents. According to Ni Lexiong, director of Shanghai Normal University’s War and Culture Institute, “In the last decade or so, overseas trade has become more critical within our economic structure. ‘The maritime lifeline’ has become increasingly important. It has become necessary to establish a powerful naval force.”²⁹ Two Logistics Command Academy specialists maintain that “the Navy is a necessary investment for a nation to safeguard and develop its overseas trade.”³⁰ A nation’s overseas trade requires strong naval support. This positive interaction is the basic rule of sea power development.”³¹ This economic rationale for PLAN development is seconded by Vice Adm. Feng Liang, deputy director of the Naval Command Academy’s Strategy Teaching and Research Office.³² Many analysts stress that China’s coastal economic development has shifted its strategic center of gravity eastward.³³ Protecting seaborne energy is another major rationale for the expansion of Chinese sea power. Zhang strongly believes that China must control its sea-based oil supplies: “We must build up our navy as quickly as possible. . . . We must be prepared as early as possible. Otherwise, China may lose everything it has gathered in normal international economic activities, including its energy interest, in a military defeat.”³⁴

Maritime territorial sovereignty remains a major theme. A magazine published by the Academy of Military Science has called for a strong PLAN to defend China’s more than 6,961 islands, which “are symbols of a nation’s sovereignty, and the legal basis to delimit a nation’s territorial sea,” potentially creating situations in which—like their analogs around the world—“every island must be fought for, and every inch of sea must be owned.”³⁵ In this vein, a Naval Command College analyst contends that China must fortify the Spratlys and Paracels as bases for forward deployment.³⁶

The Continentalist Faction

China’s growing sea power faction confronts a massive and well-established array of “continentalists,” however, who maintain that China’s geopolitical situation remains relatively unchanged, fear military confrontation with other powers, and believe that critical remaining challenges in China’s internal development demand renewed prioritization. Perhaps the most visible representative of this school of thought is Ye Zicheng, a prominent Beijing University international relations scholar.³⁷ As part of his major

theoretical key project for China's Ministry of Education, "Research on the International Environment of China's Peaceful Development: The Geopolitics of China's Peaceful Development Environment," Ye has specifically called for Beijing to "focus on peaceful development in its land space" and "not engage in armed expansion overseas." While some sea power advocates might dismiss the later scenario as hyperbole, Ye strongly believes that maintaining a "land power" strategy will "lower the possibility of a head-on clash" among "great powers competing for maritime supremacy."³⁸ Aircraft carriers permeate the maritime-continentalist debate, with members of the former faction often advocating their construction by China and members of the latter faction typically opposed. Ye is no exception: He questions the utility of China building vessels for a "blue water navy" and contends that advances in precision strike make aircraft carriers a poor investment for China.³⁹

Ye maintains that "in the current stage we must regard the building of China's land homeland as the central task and develop land power as the strategic focus, [while] the development of sea power should be limited and should serve and be subordinate to the development of land power." China's strategists must remember "the lesson of the late Qing: When there are major problems in the building of a country's system, it is impossible to become a sea power just by developing maritime military forces."⁴⁰

In sum, Ye contends,

when choosing whether to focus on sea or land power or a balance of both, quite big arguments and differences are prone to arise in those countries that are both sea and land powers, and although many viewpoints of so-called balance of sea and land are produced, very few can truly achieve such a balance; the second is that those countries that were originally maritime and wanted to change their maritime nature and become both sea and land powers due to the limits of maritime space are all powerful countries. . . . [The histories of Russia, Japan, and the United States] tell us that mankind can to a certain extent overcome the constraints formed by the natural situation, but there is a limit here, and one will encounter defeat by going beyond the limit.⁴¹

Ye's interpretation of China's century of humiliation is quite different from that of China's maritime theorists: "The reason why China suffered aggression and bullying from western countries at the time—although the backwardness of sea power was an important factor—was first of all caused

by the relative decline of China's land power, which meant that the western powers could win battles not only at sea but also on land." More broadly, "China's historical and cultural traditions and its national condition determine that China was a great land power for a long time in the past, and in the future it can only have the basic strategic orientation of being a great land power."⁴² In an argument similar to that of American sinologist Robert Ross,⁴³ Ye asserts: "China's land power development strategy helps to ease the strategic contradictions between China's rise and the United States; the strategic special nature of Sino-U.S. geopolitics determines that the two countries can avoid the tragedy of strategic confrontation."⁴⁴

In a similar vein, Feng Zhaokui contends,

In the future, land, rather than the sea, will continue to be a main source of wealth to China, and will continue to be the most important space and the most important venue that the Chinese people rely on for survival and for seeking a greater development. Viewing from this perspective, we can say that it is true that we need to work hard to enhance our sea power and safeguard our maritime rights and interests, yet we must never ignore the need for protecting and utilizing more effectively the resources on our own land.⁴⁵

Given these larger realities, the U.S. enjoys "absolute dominance" at sea. Beijing has "no intention, neither does it have the ability, to challenge the maritime hegemony of the United States."⁴⁶

The "Maritime-Continental" Faction

Some Chinese analysts embrace a "middle-of-the-road" approach of developing both sea power and land power. Beijing University professor Li Yihu appears to have developed the intellectual basis for this school of thought most thoroughly thus far. China, Li explains, "is a geopolitical entity with a relatively high sea/land ratio, having a dual identity as both a land and sea power." This dual identity gives China independence and geostrategic flexibility. Yet China's dualistic identity poses dangers as well. While "in terms of maximum integration of geopolitical potential and power, China has the endowment conditions for being a world power . . . China is also very greatly geopolitically constrained, and if the situation of sea-land dichotomy cannot be changed, it will be driven by geopolitical inertia to a stage where it is forced to ward off blows." To make the best use of China's position, "we

must replace the traditional simple mentality of attaching much importance to the land and little to the sea with the all-round mentality of overall sea and land planning. . . . [The PLAN] must switch from coastal water defense to ocean defense; their capability cannot just be limited to the first island chain but break through beyond it." The new strategic posture Li envisions requires "maintaining strong land power, and . . . developing strong sea power; for a certain time, however, developing strong sea power can be given a more priority status."⁴⁷

Li Yihu believes that his nation is well placed to avoid the worst of a critical historical dynamic. China's "location on the eastern fringe of the Eurasian continent means that China is unlike 19th century Prussia and Austria, restricted to being surrounded by land powers, or countries like Germany and Russia that have struggled hard to find sea outlets, thus incurring lack of forceful land power backing."⁴⁸ Yet Li cautions that

as a large country with both sea and land, when coveting the continental hinterland and developing in depth toward the Pacific, China is always facing a typical "historical predicament": Giving priority to developing land power will cause other powers such as Russia and India to feel insecure; giving priority to developing sea power will arouse suspicion among maritime countries such as the United States and Japan (a similar problem has in the past encumbered geopolitical powers possessing both sea and land: France, Germany, and the Soviet Union. Their external strategy always hovered between the continent and the ocean, to the extent that they would lose one out of concern for the other, and would fail in different geopolitical tussles).⁴⁹

As with the other factions, there is a wide range of thinking within this one. Some maritime-continental advocates caution against overemphasizing sea power. "The present argument over the status of land and sea, centering on building aircraft carriers, somewhat emphasizes the importance of the sea, and there is no need at all to doubt this; what we need to guard against is the trend of boundlessly elevating the status of the sea and the navy, in which case we may go to another extreme."⁵⁰

Some military analysts are also advocating for balanced development. A decade ago, former Academy of Military Sciences director Lt. Gen. Mi Zhenyu wrote that "China is a nation of both land and sea . . . [with] needs and opportunities in two directions, and also faces security challenges on two fronts. Having historically emphasized land and taken sea development lightly, China needs to foster a maritime consciousness among its citizens, develop a

maritime economy, and develop its naval security forces."⁵¹ Similarly, an article in *Modern Navy* (当代海军) suggests that "As a nation comprised of both land and sea, China can neither ignore the sea nor neglect the land."⁵² On this point, PLAN Commander Wu Shengli has called for Beijing to "research and formulate our country's maritime security strategy."⁵³

Undergirding these debates are the difficult trade-offs that China, like many continental powers surveyed in this volume, faces regarding maritime development. Factors competing for China's investment of capabilities and resources include the need to develop and purchase new high-technology weapons systems while improving salaries and benefits to attract and retain technically capable military personnel to operate them; the need to secure China's land borders (especially with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the appearance of a U.S. presence in Central Asia); and the need to maintain internal stability, in part by addressing China's social problems (e.g., income inequality, unemployment, social safety net, environmental protection). While some of these issues do not relate directly to naval or even military matters, they do present competition for China's vast (but still limited) resources and the attention of China's leaders.

Conversely, unless it wants to depend permanently on the goodwill of the U.S. Navy—something it seems reluctant to do—China may decide to secure militarily its seaborne trade and energy imports. Already, a major study led by Rear Adm. Yang Yi, PLAN, and advised by such influential bureaucrats as Dr. Qiu Yanping, deputy director of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee's national security leading small group office, emphasizes the importance of securing China's sea lines of communication.⁵⁴ Other factors that may fuel PLAN development include the long-simmering issue of Taiwan's political status and the potential challenge of a strong Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force.

Beijing's Emerging Maritime Orientation

While intense debate is ongoing among academics and also military analysts, a range of leadership pronouncements, state media statements, and official documents appear to reflect a gradually increasing maritime perspective at the highest levels of China's government. In recent years, Beijing has increased its naval and civil maritime capabilities, developed an increasingly broad-based maritime surveillance and security network, signed a variety of international conventions, and passed relevant domestic laws.

Statements by China's top leaders appear to focus increasingly on the nation's maritime interests. According to former PLAN political commissar Yang Huaqing, "Comrade Deng Xiaoping unequivocally pointed out that seas and oceans are not a moat and China must face the world and go beyond seas and oceans in order to become prosperous and strong. Comrade Jiang Zemin has taken a further step and put forward a new outlook on seas and oceans that combines the outlook on territorial waters, outlook on marine economy and outlook on maritime security."⁵⁵ As President Jiang declared during a 1995 inspection of a PLAN unit on Hainan Island, "Developing and using the sea will have more and more significance to China's long-term development. We certainly need to understand the sea from a strategic high-point, and increase the entire nation's sea consciousness."⁵⁶ In a 1999 speech to the PLAN, Jiang stated, "the people's navy shoulders the sacred mission of safeguarding the sovereignty of our country's territorial waters and defending the state's maritime rights and interests."⁵⁷

President and Central Military Commission chairman Hu Jintao appears to conceptualize China as a growing sea power. In a speech to China's powerful CMC (Central Military Commission) in September 2004, Hu introduced the "historical mission of the army" concept, which states that the PLA must "provide a security guarantee for national interests" for the party, and for ensuring national development.⁵⁸ According to a subsequent article in *Liberation Army Daily*, this included maritime rights and interests. Specifically, Hu Jintao "further enrich[ed] and expand[ed] the contents of the PLA's historical mission . . . [by] requir[ing] our military to not only pay close attention to the interests of national survival, but also national development interests; not only safeguard the security of national territory, territorial waters, and airspace, but also safeguard electromagnetic space, outer space, the ocean, and other aspects of national security."⁵⁹ On 27 December 2006, Hu reportedly "stressed, since our nation is a great maritime power [海洋大国],⁶⁰ our Navy plays an important role in defending our national sovereignty and security, as well as safeguarding our marine rights and interests, and hence is undertaking an honorable mission. . . . We must . . . solidly make good preparations for military competition so as to ensure effective fulfillment of tasks at all times."⁶¹

The Five Year Plan is an authoritative expression of overall national priorities. Whereas the outline for Beijing's 10th Five Year Plan made the general statement that China needed to "strengthen ocean resources surveys, development, protection, and management," and to "use and management of sea areas and protection of our maritime rights and interests," the 11th

Five Year Plan contained an entire section titled "Protect and Develop Ocean Resources." It called on China to "strengthen the protection of islands, . . . improve the demarcation of maritime areas, regulate the orderly use of the sea, [and to] develop in a focused way the resources in the exclusive economic zone, continental shelf, and international seabed."⁶²

Chinese white papers reflect an increasing maritime focus. A "White Paper on Maritime Programs," promulgated by Beijing in 1998, laid out a "sustainable marine development strategy" to "safeguard the new international maritime order and the state's maritime rights and interests" and to improve management of maritime resources.⁶³ China's defense white papers provide increasing detail concerning naval issues. China's 2000 Defense White Paper alluded to "maritime rights and interests" as part of "border defense."⁶⁴ According to China's 2002 Defense White Paper, "taking effective defensive and administrative measures to defend national security and safeguard maritime rights and interests" were among the "goals and tasks of China's national defense."⁶⁵ Instead of merely mentioning China's maritime interests, the 2006 Defense White Paper explained how they might be defended. China "endeavors to strengthen its border and coastal defense, administration and control, and to build a modern border and coastal defense force," it stated. Beijing has promulgated "relevant laws and regulations and updated its border and coastal defense policies and regulations pursuant to international laws and practices." In an unprecedented statement, it charged the PLAN with achieving "gradual extension of strategic depth for offshore defensive operations and enhancing its capabilities in integrated maritime operations and nuclear counterattacks."⁶⁶ Given this record of commitment to maritime affairs dating back to Deng Xiaoping, China's new turn to the sea should not be underestimated.

Sailing into a Strategic Headwind?

China's uniqueness is often overstated. Moreover, stereotypes have the debilitating effect of hindering the ability of scholars and analysts to foresee change in the international system. The inertia of centuries of decline leads many to subject China's seapower prospects to significant skepticism.

The comparative approach taken in this volume, from one perspective, can serve to reinforce that skepticism. Almost all the cases in this volume illustrate the series of failures that have ensued when land powers attempted to transform themselves into genuine maritime powers. Whether in the form of the Ottoman fleet's failed attempt to project power into the Indian Ocean,

Germany's catastrophic lunge for sea power prominence, or the Soviet ambition that exposed itself as a "house of cards" in 1991, major land powers have encountered seemingly insuperable difficulties in trying to accomplish maritime transformation. In this sense, China's new maritime orientation is itself sailing into a strategic head wind—the obstacles, material and intellectual, that stand in the way of Beijing's emergence as a genuine maritime power are immense.

Still, this volume is not an indictment of China's new maritime orientation. In fact, a close reading of the cases presented herein reveals distinct differences between China and other historical powers that have attempted maritime transformation. Beijing has impressive commercial maritime dynamism, is discovering that it has a robust historical maritime tradition that predates the modern period and has recognized that stable relationships with continental neighbors will be a prerequisite for the growth of maritime power.⁶⁷ Given the security of China's eastern seaboard, its trade routes, and the delicate Taiwan issue, China also has vital national interests that are impelling its new maritime orientation. This is not simply a matter of the Kaiser or the Kremlin fancying big, shiny toys.

Because Chinese maritime development is a phenomenon of great complexity, however, readers are invited to draw their own conclusions with respect to the appropriateness (or lack thereof) of the various historical cases presented in this volume. In that sense the book may have greatest value as a heuristic tool that brings a variety of significant data and analysis together, offering insights to generations of future strategists.

China's evolution as a maritime power (or, alternatively, failure in that regard) will give rise to macropolitical phenomena in the twenty-first century of epic proportions—with the potential to overturn the balance of power in East Asia that has endured since the end of World War II. Of late, serious economists are beginning to entertain the possibility of a Chinese economy that one day outstrips that of the United States. Though perhaps still unlikely given the many constraints enumerated in this volume, it may not be too early to consider the possibility of some future era in which China (again) dominates the world's oceans.

Notes

This chapter represents only the authors' personal opinions and not the policies or analyses of the U.S. Navy or any other element of the U.S. government. The authors thank Ian Chong for his detailed reviews of this and several other chapters in this volume.

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3. See, for example, Robert D. Kaplan, "America's Elegant Decline," *Atlantic Monthly* (November 2007), <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/prem/200711/america-decline>; G. John Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?" *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2008): 23–37.
4. Alan M. Wachman, *Why Taiwan? Geostrategic Rationales for China's Territorial Integrity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 41.
5. In the field of international relations, there is, for example, Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001); Peter J. Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); Jack L. Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); William C. Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2003). The method finds increasing resonance in China studies: see, for example, Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Mingxin Pei, *From Reform to Revolution: The Demise of Communism in China and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).
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United States supported the Open Door policy in China, in fact, was the recognition that it lacked the naval and force projection capabilities to compete militarily against Japan and Russia.

Unlike the continental powers surveyed in this volume, however, the United States had a robust tradition of domestic shipbuilding and overseas maritime commerce that predated its founding as a nation. Moreover, thanks to its uniquely favorable land borders, the United States is not a continental power in the traditional sense because it has not faced substantial continental threats—in the same way that Portugal and Holland are not, despite possessing nontrivial land borders. As a maturing power, therefore, the United States did not face the difficult choices in geostrategic prioritization that so beset the true continental powers studied in this volume. As such, scrutinizing its course of naval development would not be particularly instructive in elucidating this volume's central questions. The issue is addressed to some extent, however in the "United States" section of the chapter on "China Studies the Rise of Great Powers" by Erickson and Goldstein.

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64. Xinhua, 16 October 2000.
65. Xinhua, 9 December 2002.
66. See “China’s National Defense in 2006,” Information Office of the State Council, People’s Republic of China, 29 December 2006, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/china/doctrine/wp2006.html>.
67. On this last point, see Jakub Grygiel, *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 169–70; M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China’s Territorial Disputes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).