

Toshi Yoshihara & James R. Holmes. *Red Star over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-16-82-47218-7. Pp. viii, 366. Hardback, \$36.95

Towering proudly over London's Trafalgar Square, the statue of Britain's famed admiral Horatio Nelson stands on a monumental column bearing his name. In many ways, Nelson's command, and especially that decisive triumph over Napoleon's fleet, was the heyday of the Royal Navy's power at sea. The eponymous battle after which the square is called, is remembered as one of greatest engagements in naval history that took place in 1805. Today, in an interesting turn of history, Yoshihara and Holmes argue: 'Europeans are surrendering their claim to sea power' with their pursuit of constabulary functions for the navy (pp. 19-20); while Asia has entered the 'into the naval enterprise with much aplomb and to great fanfare' (p. 21). This point is perhaps best illustrated by China, the country whose navy seems to commission new ships year-round and which now possesses a fleet of over three-hundred ships.¹ Deliberations of quality over quantity notwithstanding, the sheer size of this naval fleet makes China's naval rise worthwhile to pay attention to.² The authors, Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, are respectively connected to the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CNAS) and the Naval War College have written far and large about China's naval development. This book is an updated version of the 2010 book on China's naval rise and the challenge that this development presents.³

By bringing their earlier work into the Xi Jinping era, the authors are able to put the Chinese naval development within the framework of China's rise, and the grand strategy that is associated with this dream of Great Rejuvenation, as Xi's official goal is called. Indeed, while the book's first few chapters note the economic, foreign-policy and historical-cultural components associated with this dream, it sets itself apart by emphasising the martial component of this rise

¹ China Power Team, 'How is China Modernizing its Navy?', in *China Power*, 17 December 2018 (upd. 9 January 2019), at <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-naval-modernization/> (Last accessed 26 June 2020).

² I. Livingstone & M.E. O'Hanlon, 'Why China isn't Ahead of the US Navy, Even with More Ships,' in *Brookings - Order from Chaos*, 10 September 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/09/10/why-china-isnt-ahead-of-the-us-navy-even-with-more-ships/> (Last accessed 26 June 2020).

³ T. Yoshihara & J.R. Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010).

(pp. 1-3). The authors do so by asking 'how naval power and strategy – the strictly military element of sea power – fits into the larger scheme' (p. 5), with China's turn to the sea as a 'permanent complicating factor in Asian affairs, [because of] the forces impelling it to the seas are structural in change.' Here again, the authors note China's rise as a quest for 'wealth and power' (p. 6), and especially the status that is associated with great powers of such regard. In China there is nevertheless, as Yoshihara and Holmes observe, a 'hypersensitive attitude [that] co-exists with mounting self-assurance, [...] a contradictory mix of insecurity and swagger' (pp. 6-7) that belies the Chinese decision-making process and the risk of overreaction.⁴

It is for this reason that it is necessary to make a 'bottom-up assessment of contemporary Chinese strategic thought, [...] to gauge intellectual development and sophistication within China's strategic community,' as noted in the book's section on methodology and sources (pp. 9-14). The way in which this book is composed puts it in a league of its own, especially with regards to its attention to detail and broad reflection on the historical sources behind Chinese naval strategy, how it took shape and how it is reflected concretely, both in terms of fleet development, deployment and contingency-planning. This approach is reflected in the book's table of contents, which tackles in descending order: the 'lingering ghost' of Alfred T. Mahan, the economic and strategic geography of Chinese sea power, the country's strategic will to sea, fleet-building and tactics of the Chinese navy, its relationship with the missile capabilities, how U.S. maritime strategy ought to react to China's, and the future of the developments described within this book (p. vii). Indeed, the work of the American maritime strategist Alfred T. Mahan features as a red thread that runs through much of the authors' work.⁵ Because of the book's extensive scope, this review is primarily concerned with how China's rise, and specifically the grand strategy behind the Chinese Dream, is visible in China's naval turn.

However, the authors are quick to point out the difference between the 'logic of maritime strategy' as described by Mahan and the 'grammar of sea combat' (pp. 31-40). Yoshihara and Holmes note that Mahan's most important contention was 'the necessity to secure

⁴ See also R. Foot, 'Remembering the Past to Secure the Present: Versailles Legacies in a Resurgent China', in *International Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 1 (2019), pp. 143-160; and O. Schell & J. Delury, *Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Random House, 2013).

⁵ A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1894).

commerce, by political measures conducive to military, or naval strength.' This statement remains interesting, for it describes a 'tripartite strategy' in which 'commerce ranks first among equals, [...] and military strategy third.' It is for this reason that, 'no trading state seeks out the hardships, dangers, and sheer costs of warfare, yet no state has foresworn it' (p. 34). The distinction that is made between the logic and grammar of sea power allows the authors to similarly differentiate between states that possess that naval power, and aspiring states that can 'divine inspiration from Mahan's logic of commercial, political and military access yet employ grammar that differs from Mahan's' (pp. 37-40). Where logic is a 'system or principles of reasoning, grammar is a set of rules [...] that regulate' that system (p. 40). Logic and grammar thus relate to each other as employing a general strategy but applying it in such a way that accounts for China's role as 'regionally dominant Asian power facing off with a global hegemon and its allies' (p. 29).⁶

In the next chapter, Yoshihara and Holmes proceed by analysing the economic and strategic geography of Chinese sea power, by arguing that 'perceptions of China's surroundings [...] inform how decision makers formulate maritime strategy, put it into practice, and adjust it as circumstances change.' (p. 48). While studies on Chinese turn to the sea often invoke the great voyages of Zheng He that disappeared as quickly as they emerged as a result of the continental threats that were encroaching on the Ming dynasty's Northern stretches, the authors in this book note that there is nothing abnormal about China's current ambitions at sea. A historical anomaly is however present in the fact that, for the 'first time in its modern history,' there is peace in the north. This security dilemma has been haunting the Chinese leadership's calculus 'from the horsemen of the Central Asian steppes to Soviet nuclear-capable tank divisions.' (p. 63). Be that as it may, Yoshihara and Holmes note, geography does mould fate and strategy (p. 70). In this regard, the island chains, for

⁶ This point is underscored in separate studies by both authors, with Holmes arguing that an 'Asian way of war,' often attributed to the guerrilla-style warfare pursued by Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh are more a result of their forces being 'the weaker parties at the outset of the war they waged.' As such, 'it was natural for them to embrace strategies of the weak that harnessed deception, indirection, and delay'. See J.R. Holmes, 'Is there an Asian Way of Maritime War?' in *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 35, No.1 (2016), p. 34.

Yoshihara, in turn, has written on the 1974 Paracels sea battle between China and South Vietnam, which saw a Chinese victory despite its 'obsolescent Soviet vessels.' See T. Yoshihara, 'The 1974 Paracels Sea Battle: A Campaign Appraisal', in *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (2016), p. 43

China a lingering element of a bygone era of containment (p. 75), essentially constrain China's current seagoing ambitions and thus form benchmarks for China's ability to go beyond these geographic shackles (pp. 71-82).

Developing sea power is nevertheless a 'political choice,' the authors note (pp. 100). The chapter on China's maritime awareness is especially interesting with regards to China's rise, as it explores how the Chinese leadership from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping, on par with the PLA Navy commanders from Xiao Jinguang to Wu Shengli have pursued the development and modernisation of the country's naval forces (pp. 100-140). It is interesting that the authors emphasise the island-state Taiwan and especially its central position on the first of the island chains described above (pp. 83-87). In doing so, Yoshihara and Holmes are able to connect the Chinese goal of unification with Taiwan not only as a subject of China's naval security but also, and decidedly, its Great Rejuvenation by 2049. This point could have been made even more explicit by linking those zones in Asia where tensions are proliferating closer together.⁷ Indeed, it would be interesting to see how the South and East China Seas, Taiwan, and North Korea all come together in the Chinese strategic calculus. Furthermore, the book's emphasis on China's modern pursuit of battle fleets and how these ships relate to the country's missile forces, does not account for the amphibious landing capabilities that China is currently developing with regards to its goal of unification with Taiwan.⁸

Of course, the size of the Chinese naval fleet is also not counting the China Coast Guard, nor the maritime militia's fishing boats that are often deployed to wage war in the so-called 'grey zone,'⁹ one of the book's limitations that is argued by Yoshihara and Holmes. A

⁷ The Korean War, even more so than dividing the North and South of Korea into two very different camps, essentially froze the territorial conflict between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang. Taiwan, now structurally different politically, essentially remains part of an 'unfinished revolution'. See A. Dirlik & R. Prazniak, 'The 1911 Revolution: An End and A Beginning', in *China Information*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2011), pp. 213-231; J. Fenby, 'China's Unfinished Revolution: The Challenge for the New Leaders', in *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2013); pp. 1-11; and C. Chen, 'Unwitting Bedfellows', in U. Vyas, C. Chen & D. Roy, *The North Korea Crisis and Regional Responses* (Honolulu: East-West Center, 2015), pp. 145-159.

⁸ See for example I. Easton, 'The Question: Why Didn't Mao Invade Taiwan?', in *The National Interest*, 4 June 2019,

<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/question-why-didnt-mao-invade-taiwan-60837> (Last accessed 26 June 2020); and I. Easton, *The Chinese Invasion Threat: Taiwan's Defense and American Strategy in Asia* (Manchester: Eastbridge Books, 2019).

⁹ See for example A. Erickson & R.D. Martinson (eds.), *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019).

similar point can be made with regards to the book's emphasis on the Pacific, which presents the ocean as China's manifest destiny on par with the one previously pursued by the United States.¹⁰ Here, it would have been interesting to posit the South China Sea as an inextricable link between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, especially considering the Belt and Road Initiative, China's globe-spanning infrastructure that is only mentioned in passing throughout this book. That perspective, however, might have been outside the scope of this book. In 2017 for example, the authors for example published an interesting paper with recommendations for the then-incoming American president to 'pivot to the Asia-Pacific more boldly than the Obama administration.'¹¹ Under President Donald J. Trump, we are indeed seeing a greater emphasis on the Indo-Pacific.¹²

With this updated work, Yoshihara and Holmes have nevertheless delivered an excellent primer on China's naval rise, once again. In paying considerable attention to how China's grand strategy of Great Rejuvenation and its military and naval strategies interact with each other, this book is to be recommended for studies on the maritime side of China's rise, for its approach to maritime strategy as consisting of economic, diplomatic and martial dimensions. At the end of the book, the authors recommend that the West, and especially those erstwhile seafaring states of Europe, again yet such a move away from non-combat functions 'suffers from material and human deficits [and specifically the need to] upgrade obsolescent hardware, sensors and weaponry' and the crew to 'relearn tactics, techniques, and procedures befitting a force that expects to venture in harm's way' (p. 249). While this book is largely written from an U.S. perspective, it is a recommendation for the erstwhile seafaring states of Europe as well. Horatio Nelson would tend to agree.

Axel Dessen
King's College London

¹⁰ See for example S. Mountjoy, *Manifest Destiny: Westward Expansion* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2009).

¹¹ See T. Yoshihara & J.R. Holmes, 'Responding to China's Rising Sea Power', in *Orbis*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (2017), pp. 91.

¹² Department of Defense, 'Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region,' in *DoD Gov* (23 June 2020), <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.