

BOOK REVIEW:

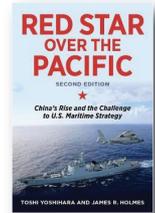
Red Star over the Pacific: China's rise and the challenge to U.S. maritime strategy

Revised second edition

by Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes

United States Naval Institute Press: Annapolis, Maryland; 2018; ISBN 978168247218; RRP \$139.99;

Ursula Davidson Library call number 702 YOSH 2018.



Yoshihara and Holmes bring to this assessment of how the rise of Chinese seapower will affect United States maritime strategy in Asia a considerable reputation for scholarship in the field. There are 44 pages of notes in the book with many references to original Chinese works – which are not the easiest of texts to follow or translate. Their selection of Western texts is also comprehensive.

The book starts with an introductory chapter titled 'China's Dream' followed by a refresher course in naval strategy. All the familiar names from staff college are there – Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, Mahan, Corbett, Liddell Hart and a host of more recent scholars. Yoshihara and Holmes are 'true believers' in Alfred Thayer Mahan and his theories, and they take his view that there are three planks to maritime power and hence national wellbeing – commerce, ships (both commercial and naval) and bases. They then make the connection with the trajectory of China's 'move to the sea' since the latter years of the 20th Century. The authors demonstrate that China has become a major entity in world trade in a remarkably short time. Its merchant fleet is everywhere the seas can take it, and the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has grown exponentially from a coastal protection force to one with aspirations to be a blue water navy. The Chinese have established first-class facilities in China itself as well as bases in ports remote from China to support the PLAN.

Yoshihara and Holmes then examine and explain why there has been so much Chinese emphasis recently on the naval element of the Mahanian triangle. The growth of its international trade has overturned traditional Chinese views of their country as a continental power. The importance of their ports and the shipping that uses them have tilted the national concentration towards the sea and the protection of these assets and the contiguous oceans. As well, the Chinese seem to have become convinced that foreign powers – especially the United States and its allies – have (or may develop) the intention of blockading China's access to the sea.

To date, there is no evidence of any such intention; rather the United States and its allies have upheld the freedom of Chinese shipping to move across the world's oceans. However, this has not lessened the concern of the Chinese maritime strategy establishment about the 'First Island Barrier', which extends from the Kamchatka Peninsula, Korea, Japan, the Senkaku Islands, Taiwan, the rocks and shoals of the South China Sea and the

Philippines all the way to Malaysia. Chinese strategists apparently believe that these are all likely sources of interference with their shipping which must be at least neutralised or even captured. To keep the 'enemy' further at bay, the 'Second Island Barrier' – Japan-Guam-New Guinea – must also be subjected to Chinese coercion short of occupation.

Accordingly, the Chinese have invested enormously in developing the capability of achieving these goals. Four chapters catalogue Chinese advances in shipbuilding, aircraft design and construction, armaments, information technology and command and control. The outcome, say the authors, will be a United States Navy and its allies either destroyed by Chinese combined land-based, naval and air power or forced to relinquish control of the sea to escape this fate.

We heard something similar during the Cold War about the Soviet Union, so these projections should be regarded with caution. The PLAN has made great strides in its presence and war-fighting material capabilities, but whether the PLA is capable of bringing all its potential resources to bear in co-ordinated attacks on an 'enemy' force, is another matter. *Red Star* might have presented a more balanced consideration of what the PLAN can now, and may in the future, reasonably field at sea and with what chances of success. The authors, though, do make the point that conjecture about the rise of the PLAN must take account of potential developments in the international, political, technological and financial fields into the future, which are most unlikely to be linear.

The penultimate chapter reviews United States maritime strategy in Asia after World War II, illustrating the waxing and waning of political interest and the switches between a constabulary role for the United States Navy and preparations for fighting wars, issues Australians have also recognised in the alliance. Australia rates just a few mentions, with the authors noting that the Chinese are likely attempt to dissuade us from supporting United States action to 'contain' Chinese ambitions, which has already happened.

I would recommend *Red Star over the Pacific* to both experts and the general public as a useful insight into the remarkable shift in attitudes towards the sea and the maritime dimension in Chinese strategic, military and commercial thinking. It might also prompt Australians to consider the critical importance of the sea to our own nation, and how we can defend our own maritime interests.

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