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Seapower and Sino-U.S. Relations

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Porch suggests no alternative approach for Afghanistan, so his critique has limited usefulness for evaluating U.S. strategy in that conflict. Afghanistan, indeed, is a very tough case for Porch's critique. It invites readers to ask whether problems there resulted from trying too much or too little COIN, while domestic support in the United States for the war was high before getting distracted with Iraq. Or perhaps the strategic context was so challenging that nothing better than a weak government in Kabul could have been expected—implying, perhaps, that after scattering Al Qaeda in 2001, the best realistic option would have been to withdraw quickly and turn the struggle over to whatever government the Afghans managed to establish, even if it did not meet many Western standards of good government. Or maybe the problem was that COIN doctrine can lead to unrealistic expectations that provoke precisely the kind of critique Porch has written. Had Porch focused more on what is necessary to make such expectations more sober—how he might have rewritten Army FM 3-24, for example—his book would have been improved substantially. Instead, those who rewrite that manual will have to take both Porch's book and more than a grain of salt into account in developing an approach to COIN that is genuinely sober in its expectations.

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Shi Xiaojin. *Seapower and Sino-U.S. Relations*. Beijing: Military Science, 2013. 320pp. ¥42

Seapower and Sino-U.S. Relations is a comparative study of the quest for sea

power by nations that are considered “maritime power states” and “continental power states” and it is an attempt to apply related lessons to an understanding of current Sino-U.S. relations.

According to the author, traditionally maritime powers, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, have generally adopted a more offensive posture in their quest for sea power, mainly in terms of gaining “command of the sea” or in influencing development on the continent, as reflected in the works of American and British sea-power theorists Alfred Mahan and Sir Julian Corbett. The key to understanding Mahan, the author holds, is his emphasis on the aim of acquiring “absolute command of the sea” through decisive fleet engagement, which requires force concentration and capital ships capable of superior firepower. This central aim relegates other aims, such as sea-lane protection, commerce raiding, and naval blockade, and the building of capabilities requisite for them, to lesser priorities.

Mahan, however, is critically questioned by Corbett, Shi Xiaojin points out. Corbett, for instance, believes “absolute command of the sea” is neither possible nor necessary, because most of the seas, most of the time, are open and contested and accessible for productive use and exploitation. As a result, flotilla operations to protect sea-lanes may be important, but building capital ships for “decisive fleet engagement” may divert resources away from them. Also, the more the strong side wants a decisive battle through force concentration, the more incentive the weak side has to avoid such an engagement, through force dispersion to reduce losses. For Corbett, according to the author, sea control should also serve more useful

objectives like influencing developments on land (the European continent, in his time). He, for instance, believes that such maritime powers as the United Kingdom are particularly advantaged in waging limited wars because of their insulated nature. Consistent with the British role as an “offshore balancer,” these wars may involve naval blockades to keep a continental opponent from entering the oceans; coordination with Britain’s land allies to bog down the opponent in a land war; selection of limited objectives against the opponent in far-away colonies, where the stakes are smaller and the enemy finds it difficult to mobilize; and expeditionary, amphibious operations against limited but critical and vulnerable targets on continental peripheries to restore the equilibrium on land. According to Shi, however, a major challenge facing Corbett’s theory of limited war is how much the United Kingdom can devote to the continental objectives. Too much may get it bogged down in a land war of attrition, but too little may result in a policy of appeasement, where continental development is not impacted.

Unlike maritime powers, according to Shi, the quest for sea power by continental powers, such as France, Germany, and the former Soviet Union, tends to be more limited. Rather than seeking command of the sea, their quests are more characterized by attempts to disrupt or deny the command of the sea by dominant sea powers, through asymmetrical strategies and capabilities. Also, these attempts do not aim to influence fundamental developments in the homelands of the dominant sea powers. Both the French and German navies of the late nineteenth century up to World War II, for instance, generally exploited technologies of torpedoes

and submarines as asymmetrical capabilities. Being the weaker sides, for instance, they gave priority to not frontal fleet engagement but raiding the maritime commerce of opponents like the United Kingdom, a vulnerability of the latter as maritime trading and colonial powers. The Soviet Union during the Cold War also prioritized submarines in its naval development, though it did develop major surface combatants. These ships served mainly to provide surface and air coordination and cover for submarine operations.

A major reason for continental powers to be rather limited in their quest for sea power is the security challenges they face from both continental and maritime fronts. France, for instance, had to deal with threats from both Germany and the United Kingdom, while Germany faced challenges from France and the United Kingdom. Similarly the Soviet Union during the Cold War had to prepare for a land war in Central Europe, while at the same time handling challenges on its maritime flanks. The continental threats have generally constrained the resources that could be used for naval development.

The author believes China’s geostrategic position today is quite similar to those of the historical continental powers. It faces challenges from an insulated maritime power, the United States, that intends to influence developments on the Asian continent and whose disadvantages of distance are reduced by modern technologies and forward basing. Also, faced with land-based challenges that may constrain resources, China’s quest for sea power is likely to remain defense dominant. To enhance its security, however, and not be pressed against its own shores, China is likely to strive to

extend its maritime strategic depth and to disrupt and deny the absolute U.S. superiority in the narrow “East Asian littoral” or turn it into a “zone of contestation.” China’s strategies and capabilities, according to Shi, are likely to be asymmetrical, and they can benefit from such modern technologies as long-range combat aircraft and missiles. China’s acquisition of major naval surface combatants mainly serves to supplement such capabilities, as well as to protect vital sea-lanes on which China’s economy depends. On the other hand, reduced U.S. military forward presence and globalization-induced nontraditional security challenges are likely to offer opportunities for Sino-U.S. cooperation. This is probably one of the few Chinese books that reflect not only an in-depth understanding of Western naval literature but also analytical ability to evaluate this literature critically to gain insight into current U.S.-China relations. Because the author serves as a research fellow and a managing editor of the journal *Strategic Studies* at the War Theory and Strategic Studies Department of China’s Academy of Military Science, the book may reflect an important perspective for understanding the extent and nature of China’s quest for sea power.

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Yahuda, Michael. *Sino-Japanese Relations after the Cold War: Two Tigers Sharing a Mountain*. New York: Routledge, 2014. 146pp. \$149.50 (paperback \$33.18)

Veteran East Asia international relations analyst Michael Yahuda explores the

traditional Chinese aphorism *yī shān bù róng èr hǔ*, or “two tigers competing for one mountain” (一山不容二虎), in analyzing the changing relationship of the two great powers of East Asia—China and Japan. The proverb is a good foil for his subject and has led to a nuanced and balanced essay on Chinese-Japanese relations during the forty-plus years since the two established diplomatic ties in 1972. His book is succinct. Each sentence pushes the narrative forward, making the book an ideal synopsis for busy policy analysts or East Asia students with extensive reading lists.

The chronological meat of the book is a detailed discussion of key periods in Chinese-Japanese relations, starting with the rapprochement between Mao Zedong and Kakuei Tanaka in the 1970s. In 1972, Mao forgave the Japanese for twentieth-century aggression, even forgoing war reparations. China’s economic reform movement began with Deng Xiaoping’s visit to Japan in 1978, setting the stage for the 1980s honeymoon period before the Cold War ended. This is instructive, because it demonstrates that tigers can more happily coexist during some periods than at other times. Yahuda then discusses Japan as the first country to reembrace China after the isolation imposed on Beijing in the wake of the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989. As the Soviet Union folded in 1991, bringing the Cold War to a close, the trajectory of Japan as number one leveled off into a two-decade period of economic stagnation. In contrast, Deng successfully transferred the helm and the reform mission to Jiang Zemin before passing away in 1997. By 2000 Chinese gross domestic product (GDP) had grown to 25 percent that of Japan’s. The relationship between Jiang and Prime