



Book Review

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Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes (Eds.), *Asia Looks Seaward: Power and Maritime Strategy*. Westport: Praeger Security International, 2008, p. 226, ISBN 978-0-275-99403-7.

Paul Kennedy in his magnum opus *The Rise and fall of Great Powers* stated, "... wealth is usually needed to underpin military power, and military power is usually needed to acquire and protect wealth." Globalisation is pushing Asia towards economic growth, social development and cultural prosperity. Consequently, countries in Asia are also beginning to strengthen their military power. Further, the fast-driving Asian economies like China and India are part of the privileged decision-making club in the world. Therefore, with the improving standing on other fields the Asian countries heading towards military modernisation, particularly at sea, should be seen as an obvious turn of event in the evolving history of nation-states.

The book under review deals with the above subject. It comprises a comprehensive account of the entry of Asian states and the subsequent retreat of European states into the oceanic arena. It is a collection of nine contributors divulging the strategic impulses of the major naval forces in Asia. Although the book mentions 'Asia' in its title, and deals with chapters on India, Japan and Southeast Asia, yet it is a misnomer. The book does not cover the entire Asian maritime space and there is a distinctive preoccupation

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with China and its emergence as a major maritime power. Out of nine chapters, including the introductory chapter, three chapters exclusively deal with China. The last chapter deals with China's engagement in Southeast Asia and the territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Therefore, the book could well have been titled *China Looks Seaward: Power and Maritime Strategy*.

The most significant contribution of the book is the lucid elucidation of modern maritime history that has shaped the present maritime strategic contours of the Asian waters. The initial two chapters, one dealing with the last days of the Royal Navy in the Asia-Pacific waters and the US maritime strategy in the continent are particularly incisive. Although Asian countries have been at the centre of ancient civilisations with rich maritime tradition, they avoided hegemonic tendencies in the past as supported by the western maritime literature. It was the Mongols who in their 13th century expedition to conquer Korea and Japan opened the eyes of the Chinese, Koreans and Japanese to a new dimension of power projection. Consequently, after World War I, Japan espoused the vision of Mahan's general advocacy of sea power. Therefore, these events emphasised the concepts of sea power responses in Asia.

The book provides an objective analysis of Chinese maritime lineage, which tries to glorify its benign cultural maritime past. Assessing the expedition of the famous Chinese commander of the 15th century, John Curtis Perry asserts in the book, "Zheng He's policy was implicitly one of force. Beneath any moral gloss, his immensely powerful fleets formed what today would be called an oceanic strike force." On this note, Gavin Menzies in his book entitled *1434* observes, "Zhu Zhanji (the emperor who arranged the expedition of Zheng He in the stated year) realised that China's abdications as Queen of the Seas would have disastrous consequences – not least that the barbarians would cease paying tribute. What is more, the dream of the world united in Confucian harmony would be dashed and the colossal expenditure that had enabled China to acquire allies and settlements throughout the world would be wasted."

The chapter on US maritime strategy in Asia written by Bernard D. Cole is a useful reading for students examining the US engagement with the Asia-Pacific countries. Cole has stated that the US sea power projected into the Asian waters has been the primary vehicle of US foreign policy. He writes, "economic, political and cultural American interests all rode on the back of its warships. The Navy, in turn, constantly strove to design and implement a maritime strategy appropriate to ensure the completion of American policy objectives." Apart from digging the past, analysis also takes the

reader to the 21st century and post-9/11 period wherein the Asia-Pacific strategic architecture has taken a different turn. The major concern for the US maritime strategic thinking in the 21st century is the emergence of China as a prominent naval force in the Asian waters. The relevance of Mahan to the present US maritime strategy in Asia has not yet diminished, nevertheless there is a marked change in the US maritime operative mode. The US remain founded on close relationships with allies and friends, using deterrence as an instrument of statecraft. It focuses on the capability to project power onto distant shores from forward-deployed maritime forces. Finally, the important element of US National Security Strategy in the continent lies in unimpeded sea lines of communication (SLOCs) that, in short, will ensure free flow of sea-going commerce across Asia and the Pacific.

The second section of the book deals with the major regional players involving China, India, Japan, and Southeast Asian region as a whole. Several literature and research papers are evolving on the theme of “21st century” being described as the “Asian century.” One significant work is the volume entitled *The Evolving Maritime Balance of Power in the Asia-Pacific: Maritime Doctrines and Nuclear Weapons at Sea*, edited by Lawrence W. Prabhakar, Joshua Ho and Sam Bateman. The primary assertion is that “with the growing economic power, Asian countries also desire to have greater strategic space.” This is exhibited by the increased development of their respective naval and nuclear deterrence capabilities. The above book, therefore, calls the major regional players as the “naval elephants” of the Asia-Pacific, which are competing for strategic influence. Scholars like Sheldom W. Simon (1996), Andrew T.H. Tan (2004) and Tim Huxley (2007) assert that virtually all the countries in the Asia-Pacific are engaged in arms acquisition, military modernisation and force projection.

The reviewer recognises that the objective is not to comment on cooperation or competition in the maritime domain of Asia-Pacific, rather he limits himself to examining the phenomenon of sea power in Asia from a variety of functional and country perspectives. In the second section, Andrew S. Erickson explores China and its maritime strategy and naval capability. His chapter “Can China Become a Maritime Power?” ends with an affirmative note. It is an accepted fact that China is already an Asian maritime power and soon will emerge as a global maritime power. His chapter provides a comprehensive report on Chinese naval developments and force projections. Erickson, from the beginning, unambiguously points out that though China is determined to create a modern navy, yet in the near future it is not developing long-

range power-projection capabilities. He observes, “rather, Beijing seems to be constructing a navy geared to achieving asymmetric sea-denial capabilities on its immediate periphery in order to defend its growing maritime interests, and in particular to resolve the volatile Taiwan issue.” He also explains this assumption through detailed analyses on Chinese submarine force, naval mines, surface ships, amphibious forces, People’s Liberation Army Naval Air Force (PLANAF), as well as command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities. Examining the future modernisation plans and regional naval relations, Erickson states that Chinese analysts view their nation’s actions as inherently defensive. However, since this book is a product of western intellectual mind, serious challenges are held over the Chinese viewpoint.

The chapters on India and Japan are informative, yet simplistic for their respective country-scholars. The chapters begin with the assumption that these two important Asian players are potent naval forces for the future but not for the present. Although the authors from both the chapters do not deny the growing preparedness among India and Japan of using military power in pursuit of national interests, yet the identified laxities have been pointed out. While dealing with India, the chapter points out the country’s absolute blindness towards her rich maritime history. K.M. Panikkar, remembering the good old times, wrote in his book *India and the Indian Ocean*, “... the control of the Indian waters was in Indian hands till the middle of the 13th century and no power strong enough to challenge Indian control appeared on the ocean.” Many Indian scholars have noted the unfortunate tendency to overlook the sea while discussing national defence. Andrew C. Winner has brought out both the issue of lack of budgetary allocation for the Indian Navy and the land-based security threats dominating India’s strategic mindset. In addition to resource constraints, the chapter touches the theme of unavailability of defence technology, sea-based deterrence and economic and energy security. On a positive note, the author has applauded the recent naval diplomatic initiatives and asserted that for the first time in centuries India will become a significant player in Asian waters beyond her immediate neighbourhood.

The chapter on Japan is engaging as it brings out a comparison between the Mahan-phase of Imperial Japanese Navy and the post-Mahan phase of Japanese Maritime Security Defence Force (MSDF), that evolved after the end of World War II. The intriguing episode of Japanese naval ambition during the inter-war period shows that Japanese officials welcomed Mahan’s command of the sea, which seemed to be drawn

from their experience of wars with China and Russia. On the contrary, the present Japanese maritime strategic thinking lacks vigour, deriving from an unquestioned assumption about US security commitment. The author thereby proposes the need for a home-bred strategic theorist and asks Japanese strategic community to draw inspiration from Julian Corbett, the greatest maritime strategist in Great Britain at the beginning of the 20th century.

The chapter contributors deserve our commendation for bringing out a volume on such a pertinent subject. But just like any good work, the present book under perusal leaves certain lacunae. Firstly, the book would have been enriched by an inclusion of a bibliography. Secondly, although the geo-strategic importance of China in the Asia-Pacific cannot be ignored, while dealing with Southeast Asia, China completely overshadows the region. As Joshua Ho (2006) and Geoffrey Till (2007) through their work have explained, Southeast Asia as a region has formidable maritime entity since the individual countries such as Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia are spending enormously on their maritime capabilities. Therefore, it will be parochial to view Southeast Asian countries solely as China's backyard. Finally, the reviewer identified traces of Euro-centric biases in some chapters. Unquestionably, Europe must be credited for fusing new global networks and discovering new regions on the map, yet John Curtis Perry's view that "East Asia is not oceanic in a cultural sense, as compared to Europe," is debatable. Asian scholars working on the above subject might have a different view.

In sum, despite the shortcomings, the book is a laudable work. The volume makes an interesting reading for the maritime security experts while a valuable collection for the strategic thinkers and Asian security experts mostly concerned with the general strategic overtures.

Book Review Guidelines

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- A good book review provides a critical evaluation of the work. We would appreciate if the review goes beyond simply summarising the contents of the book. The review should ideally include a discussion of the purpose of the book, the author's approach to the subject matter, and an evaluation of the author's success in fulfilling the stated purpose. A reviewer communicates an understanding about the scope and nature of the contents. Beyond this, however, a good review will itself become a piece of theoretical work by developing the author's theoretical ideas and engaging the author in dialogue.
- It is important to address the broadest possible range of readers as the readership of the *Maritime Affairs* varies considerably in terms of disciplinary and/or scholarly background.
- Good criticism is aimed at the book's contents and not the author(s). In addition, both strengths and weaknesses of the work should be identified.
- It is also useful to situate the work in the current context of maritime issues and compare (if appropriate) to similar publications.

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