

Review - Chinese Aerospace Power, Evolving Maritime Roles

Written by Harry Kazianis

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Chinese Aerospace Power: Evolving Maritime Roles edited by Andrew Erickson and Lyle Goldstein takes on the timely subject of Chinese aerospace technology and its role in the creation of a modern Chinese naval maritime force. Both editors are well respected professors at the US Naval War College's Chinese Maritime Studies Institute (CMSI) located in Newport, RI. The book was shaped from a US Naval War College conference of the same title back in 2008. By utilizing modern aerospace technology China is creating a modern naval and maritime force while altering the balance of power in East Asia in its favor. One of the main concepts of this work is to demonstrate China's multi-pronged aerospace rise in respect to naval power. China is developing, testing, and fielding large quantities of modern land and sea based cruise missiles, land and sea based fighter aircraft, naval based anti-ship cruise missiles, and fearsome long range anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBM).

Erickson and Goldstein are uniquely positioned in their roles to edit and discuss such an important topic. Both are experts in the field of Chinese military technology and have written extensively on the subject. Professor Erickson is widely sought for his views on China's military rise, naval technology, and possible US strategic responses to such challenges. Both are well suited to the challenge of editing such an important work.

Both editors together with multiple authors attempt to define the role of Chinese aerospace technology in terms of China's maritime rise. The goal: "(To) Provide a broad and objective assessment of Chinese aerospace and maritime power by professional researchers who take their analyses with the up-most seriousness."

The book is divided into six sections. Each section and indeed each article could be read as part of a whole or separately, a tremendous strength for the casual reader or dedicated scholar. Each piece is well researched using current academic scholarship and original open source Chinese academic works. The articles that are presented are timely and each controversial when considering current East Asian tensions.

One detail of importance is in the selection of authors to write pieces in this edited volume. Dennis Blasko, the leading scholar on the rise and re-birth of the PLA army writes a timely and well researched piece on Chinese helicopter development. Eric Hagt, director of the China program at the World Security Institute also contributes a fascinating piece on China's integration of aerospace power into the maritime realm. The selection of authors demonstrates a senior level of analysis that most edited volumes lack, which is a major strength of the book.

The DF-21D: The Birth of Conventional Deterrence?

Of particular note is Part V, *Maritime Strike: Ballistic Missiles*. The much discussed DF-21D ASBM, and the history of the 2nd Artillery Corp (who would field such a weapon) is detailed together with pertinent strategic analysis. China's widely feared anti-ship ballistic missile is also analyzed in this section. Fired from mobile truck mounted launchers into the atmosphere using over the horizon (OTH) radar, satellite tracking and possibly unmanned aerial vehicles while incorporating a maneuverable warhead to find its target, the ultimate anti-access weapon would theoretically find its way to a ocean going vessel. With a range of 1500 km or more (Chinese officials have recently suggested a range of 2700 km) US and allied naval vessels would face Chinese land based missiles armed and ready to challenge US dominance of the Pacific Ocean. Erickson and Yang also in Part V in a section entitled *Potential for Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles* even predict a possible "Sputnik moment": "If and when the DF-21D is developed sufficiently, Beijing might reveal a dramatic weapon test to the world- with or without advance warning."

The most sobering read in the whole of the volume was Toshi Yoshihara's *Chinese View of Sea-Based Ballistic Missile Defense*. This piece discusses Chinese strategists ideas for defeating Aegis based US and allied ballistic missile defense systems. The article predicts that Chinese rocketeers may not need to damage a US naval vessel, just simply exhaust its compliment of defensive measures. Yoshihara suggests, "Even inaccurate ASBM's, then, could compel the Aegis to exhaust its weapons inventory, leaving it defenseless against further PLA actions." Such a revelation is sobering as it points to a new era of conventional deterrence where Chinese forces could threaten US and allied surface vessels with multiple land based missile systems in excess of their capability to defend, exhaust their stores of defensive measures and either force them to return to port or face unacceptable losses. Chinese missiles can make up in bulk what they can't deliver in accuracy.

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The Textbook on China's Aerospace Rise to Military Relevance

This volume has numerous strengths. Its greatest contribution to existing literature is that it uses a great deal of open source Chinese based literature to add credence to the authors ideas. Much of the existing literature that details Chinese military affairs uses only western sources, an obvious flaw.

With the large amount of scholarship that details Chinese aerospace technology and its application into military power, there is always the danger that any work, especially an edited volume, could get *lost in the crowd*. This book clearly has no such troubles. The work assembles what constitutes an all-star cast of scholars to discuss one of the most timely security studies subjects of the 21st century. China's aerospace sector's rise has given China a powerful new asset. China has incorporated cruise missiles, fearsome anti-ship ballistic missiles, 4th and soon to come 5th generation fighter aircraft into its strategic maritime arsenal. China's much discussed anti-access strategy is at its foundation an aerospace created affair. When considered as a whole or in part, this work should give US strategic planners a moment of pause.

Erickson and Goldstein have created a volume that is balanced, dense in scope but still readable and enjoyable. Combined with the assemblage of a "who's who" in Chinese security studies, the appeal of such a work is hard to deny. This volume should serve as the textbook to any security studies student who wishes to gain a scholarly perspective on China's aerospace and military rise to power from a maritime perspective. It is a work I will keep close at hand for years to come.

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About the author:

Harry serves as Editor-In-Chief for The Diplomat as well as a CSIS: WSD Handa Fellow. He has served in the past as Deputy Editor for e-IR. He specializes in security studies with a keen interest in modern Chinese military strategy and foreign policy. Harry has written in publications including The Diplomat, East Asia Forum and the Foreword Report.