Strategy Research Project

# CHINA'S MARITIME STRATEGY: PEACEFUL RISE?


BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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**ABSTRACT**

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China is emerging as a global power for the twenty-first century, with undeniable economic influence and growing political and military status. Beijing has committed to a 'peaceful rise.' This rise is based on embracing economic globalization but is in turn increasingly dependent on foreign energy. As a result, the global maritime environment will be key to this continental power's continued growth. As a subset of maritime strategy, China's naval strategy and accompanying People's Liberation Army - Navy development are indicative of the direction of China's overall maritime strategy. This paper will examine China's maritime strategy, as stated and demonstrated, and assess its compatibility with the doctrine of a peaceful rise, including potential intersections with other maritime powers of the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

# CHINA'S MARITIME STRATEGY: PEACEFUL RISE?

> The most common situation in naval war is that neither side has the command; that the normal position is not a commanded sea, but an uncommanded sea.
>
> —Sir Julian S. Corbett

The 21st Century has been hailed as "China's Century" by media and world leaders around the globe. In the United States – and periodicals leading the China Century parade have included *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the *New York Times* – discussion of China's rise almost always conveys a subtext of an eclipsed "American Century." At the very least, China is portrayed as a competitor of the once-dominant United States; at worst, China is a threat. Whether competitor or threat, the comparisons come across almost all domains – economic, financial, diplomatic and military.[1]

The nascent century has more temperately been described as the "Pacific Century" – ascribing shared dominance to China, the United States, Japan, and less often Korea and the ASEAN nations. By association, one might conclude that it is China's exposure to the Pacific Rim – not her traditional continental influence over Asia – that is the avenue to whatever greatness China achieves in the next century.

Indeed, maritime power has been both cause and effect, requirement and result of China's rise over recent decades. In discussions of the China threat, it is in the maritime domain that China offers the greatest and most likely threat to the United States' military dominance. At the same time, Beijing has committed to a "peaceful rise," based on embracing economic globalization.

This paper will examine China's maritime strategy, as stated and demonstrated, and assess its compatibility with the doctrine of a peaceful rise, including potential intersections with other maritime powers of the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

## Maritime Power and Maritime Strategy

The first work offering a scholarly look at sea power and its use in war was Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan in 1890. Mahan highlighted conditions which offered nations the opportunity to develop sea power, but he focused on naval power – an ability to win fleet on fleet actions in the pursuit of national goals. His contemporary Sir Julian Corbett provided more context for naval power, and thus a more convincing study of the contribution of sea power to national power: “Since men live upon the land and not upon the sea, great issues of nations at war have always been decided – except in the rarest cases – either by what your army can do against your enemy’s territory and national life, or else bythe fear of what the fleet makes it possible for your army to do.”[2]

Modern strategist Colin Gray linked sea power to national power in spheres beyond simply the clash of arms: “It has been no accident that from the defeat of Xerxes’ invasion of Greece in 480-479 BC to the defeat of the Soviet Union in the Cold War of the late twentieth century, superior sea power has provided leverage critical for success in strategy and statecraft.”[3]

Beyond military might and Gray’s statecraft in current strategic thought, we examine national power in the dimensions of several instruments of national power: diplomatic, informational, military, and economic. The remainder of this paper will consider maritime power to include diplomatic, informational, and economic dimensions as well as military. Naval power in the strictly military sense is a key element of maritime

power, influencing the diplomatic, informational and economic aspects. However, "All of a nation's maritime capabilities bear on its influence around the world and its ability to establish a peacetime presence at a point of choice."[4] Indeed, economic maritime power may be ascendant today, without resulting in colonial and imperial clashes at sea as in Mahan's and Corbett's time. In addition to the naval sphere, this discussion of maritime strategy will include stated and demonstrated maritime planning in the diplomatic and economic spheres.

Thus this paper will examine China's maritime trade, shipping, and shipbuilding, and the People's Liberation Army-Navy. First, though, this paper will define and discuss the theory of the peaceful rise, and then look at maritime thought and strategy and its place within the predominant strategic culture of China.

## The Peaceful Rise

At the 2003 Bo'ao Forum for Asia, Zheng Bijian, the Chairman of China Reform Forum, and a longtime advisor to Chinese leadership, first described China's peaceful rise: China's development – and the security of its 1.3 billion people – requires that China integrates with the global economy, fosters internal development without depending wholly on the international community, and adheres to peace without seeking hegemony. Previous rises of new powers have disrupted the international system – even to the extent of world war. "China's only choice is to strive to rise, and more important, to strive for a peaceful rise. That is to say, we have to work toward a peaceful international environment for the sake of our own development and at the same time safeguard world peace through this process of development."[5]

In December of that year, Premier Wen Jiabao used the term "peaceful rise" at Harvard University, adding official weight to Zheng's theory.[6] At Bo'ao Forum in April 2004, Zheng Bijian spoke again of "China's Peaceful Rise and Opportunities for the Asia-Pacific Region," while President Jiang Zemin changed the verbiage to "peaceful development."[7]

By 2005, Zheng Bijian wrote on the peaceful rise for *Foreign Affairs* with a change in emphasis. He draws perhaps a stronger difference between earlier plunder by rising powers, and China's emergence through peaceful means. While China's rise is rooted in self-reliance, it requires an hospitable international environment. Zheng speaks of "…a new international political and economic order…China's development depends on world peace – a peace that its development will in turn reinforce."[8] He goes on to say that, "In fact Beijing wants Washington to play a positive role in the region's security as well as economic affairs."[9] Thus while China's peaceful rise may help safeguard world peace, it requires some assurances from the United States as well.

This additional emphasis was a natural outgrowth. Although Zheng's speech to the 2003 Bo'ao forum is often cited as the first full definition of the peaceful rise, he used the term in speeches to the Council on Foreign Relations and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, both in December 2002. At that time, Chinese leadership was attempting to counter a resurgence of Western concern regarding the China threat. Zheng portrayed China's peaceful rise as an opportunity for both China and the United States.[10] In doing so, he set the stage for the 2003-2005 formulation of the peaceful rise: China will continue on a path of development for its 1.3 billion people; this development cannot be achieved without integration into the global economy;

integration requires a secure and stable international environment – while China will ultimately contribute positively to that secure and stable international environment, China requires the existing great power, the United States, to allow economic integration and China's development.

However, do the stated and demonstrated maritime strategies of China contribute to the secure and stable international environment? Or do they go beyond peaceful integration and constitute a legitimate threat to the international system and the United States?

China's Continental and Maritime Culture

The People's Republic of China and its leaders trace their nation back 5,000 years. Accounts of Ancient China are more tradition than history: of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, only the Zhou offers written records. This civilization arose around the Yellow River, and to a lesser extent the Yangtze River. The archaeological evidence of "…these ancient capitals testify to the power of a kingship based on sedentary, land-locked agriculture, not on mobile, waterborne trade with other areas."[11] With the advent of Imperial China in 221 B.C, as the Qin dynasty unified several warring kingdoms in North Central China, this continental focus continued. Once the canal systems were built, the rivers and the connecting canals provided transportation for people and grain. With the addition of traditional fish farming the needs of the population were met by continental means.[12]

The geography of the littoral area of Northeast China, on the other hand, is less well suited to oceangoing, or even coastal, transport. The coastline was largely reedy marshes. What harbors there were would silt and ice. The land would not support

forests suitable for shipbuilding. “The barrenness and relative inaccessibility of the northern coasts resulted in the commonly held notion that the sea was nothing more than an uncommanded natural defense barrier. Thus ancient imperial courts ignored matters of naval and maritime speculation.”[13]

Prior to the Qin dynasty unification, warfare focused on control of this non-maritime land area. Sun Tzu’s *Art of War* and other classics of military though arose from these periods, but they contribute to a strategic culture with a maritime blind spot. Additionally, any external threat to the Middle Kingdom came over land, from the north.

One other factor contributed to this maritime blind spot: the rise of Confucianism. In *Clash of Civilizations* Samuel Huntington goes as far as to classify China – and other East Asian cultures – by defining them as Confucian.[14] Confucianism contributes to China’s overall culture, with one effect being is a further diminishing of maritime thought in the strategic culture: the Confucian system accorded very low status to merchants – fourth after the gentry, peasants, and artisans. Mandarins and other officials and the canal system bringing grain to the Imperial storehouses were important, but maritime trade was not.[15]

As the Chinese empire grew, the tribute system developed. From the Han dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) onward, bordering tribes and states were encouraged to offer gifts to the emperor. In return, the Chinese emperor would provide gifts of greater value. Eventually, this developed into mutual defense arrangements. The tribute system also developed into China’s principal trade mechanism. Most of the tribute exchanges took place at the borders; goods and livestock were exchanged, and any other cross-border

exchanges were forbidden.[16] For centuries, imperial China's strategic culture looked to the land borders on almost all political, military, and trade issues.

That is not to say that no maritime culture developed. From the Eastern Jin Dynasty to the several Southern dynasties of the Southern and Northern Dynasties period, the lands south of the Yangtze were incorporated into the empire and settled by ethnic Chinese. The Qin-Han dynasties' incorporation of Guangzhou and Annam speaks to seafaring capability. But in terms of imperial attention, seafaring was not and maritime trade was not a focus – entrepreneurship was the province of private individuals or families.[17]

Between the eighth and eleventh centuries, with a larger population pressured by climate change, ethnic Han Chinese began migrating down the Yangtze River to the coast and then southward. The coastal tribes with which the Han now intermingled had not enjoyed the expanses of readily arable land of the Yellow and Yangtze rivers. However, the coasts provided better natural harbors, and the coastal islands and coastal mountain ranges did contain forests capable of supporting shipbuilding. During the Tang and Song dynasties, a maritime culture developed which differed from the continental culture of northern China. Food production was not dominated by the centralized grain distribution system – fishing was coastal, rather than inland fish farms. Second, the coastal merchant was a key player in trade, rather than the primacy of the tribute system in trade. Third, foreign influence and trade came into the coastal port cities.[18]

There is extensive evidence of Chinese sea trade with the Indian Ocean region, East Africa, the Red Sea and even the Persian Gulf. Muslim traders complemented the

Silk Road across Central Asia with this sea trade. Chinese trading junks travelled in the opposite direction, establishing coastal trade routes.[19]

This maritime exploration flowered in the Ming dynasty with Zheng He. The early Ming dynasty bore a familiar continental focus – consolidation of defenses against the Mongols, and revitalization of the Grand Canal, and re-establishment of the tribute system were high priorities.

Then, between 1405 and 1433, Admiral Zheng He undertook seven expeditions, with as many as 317 ships, and as many as 30,000 personnel. These expeditions went to all of the South China Sea, Sumatra, Java, and Borneo in what is now Indonesia; Thailand, the Indian subcontinent, East Africa, the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz. They neutralized ethnic Chinese pirates in Sumatra, supported tributary states in regional disputes, established new tributary states, and traded goods.[20] As noted above, Chinese merchant vessels had previously traveled these routes, but Zheng He's seven voyages reflected an unprecedented use of maritime power by the Chinese emperor: these fleets projected national power to the end of their known world in support of national objectives, including trade, the tribute system, and a strategic outflanking of continental rival Tamerlane.

However, this maritime focus was short-lived. In 1411 the Grand Canal re-opened, and by 1415, coastal mariners were tasked to work on the Canal. Ship-building was turned to canal barges. Construction of oceangoing ships was halted in 1436. A renewed Mongol threat brought the Ming court's focus back to continental defense. Finally, a newly ascendant school of neo-Confucianism resulted in a philosophical

retreat from maritime expansion. By 1525 coastal officials were authorized to destroy all seagoing junks with more than two masts and arrest the crew.[21]

The continental focus would be the norm for centuries. While imperial navies did exist, they were riverine or were used in *haifang*, or maritime defense. China was ill-prepared when the threat of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came from the sea, in the form of European nations which were committed to maritime power as the path to national power. The 1842 Treaty of Nanjing ending the Opium War is an example. This was the first in a series of unequal treaties that China would be forced into by unequal maritime power. Trade ports were opened, but imperial China would continue to administer them with the maritime superintendencies of the tributary system. China recognized the imbalance of maritime power and undertook a program of naval self-strengthening, but the emphasis continued to mirror that of *haifang* – maritime defense of continental China. This would hold true through showdowns with the British, the French and the Russians until the disastrous naval defeat in the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese War.[22]

This strategic culture would continue to hold sway through the Open Door period of European, American, and Japanese seeking trade privileges, naval shipbuilding contracts, and influence. Following the revolution of 1912 abdication of the Qing dynasty, most of China's energies were directed internally, as warring factions attempted to consolidate control. In terms of maritime focus, the situation looked very similar: the Navy and other maritime matters were a means of engaging with the maritime powers, but actually exercised little to no defense, as with Japan's advances in the 1930s.

After the war, the Navy continued to exist as an institution – capital was invested and it was a vehicle to engagement with Western nations. One highlight was the 1946 expedition to plant the flag on the Paracel and Spratly Islands. It is worth noting, though, that this operation of relatively short reach was essentially about protecting Chinese territory, not in extending maritime influence abroad. The next significant naval action was defecting to the Communist side in spring of 1949.

People's Republic of China Strategic Culture

The strategic culture that would develop in the PRC can be described in two broad strokes – its main source material is Mao Zedong's version of communism, and it has maintained Chinese characteristics. Some of these Chinese characteristics are emblematic of Imperial China, as "…the PRC is an empire in that it appropriates an imperial idea of China, reinventing a 2,500-year-old autocracy to control its populace and hector non-Chinese neighboring peoples."[23] The Chinese Communist Party may have replaced Confucian Mandate of Heaven with a more scientific mandate of history, but Mao's dealings with Khrushchev, Kissinger and Nixon at times resembled Imperial China's relationships with tributary states. The inherited characteristics include the continental nature as well – even the paragraph quoted above highlights that the PRC's desires for control are local, rather than global.[24]

Mao Zedong Thought does nothing to minimize the continental focus. First, Mao's version of Marxism-Leninism focuses on agrarian revolution and the rural peasant. Second in importance is the army – first the Red Army, and from 1946 the People's Liberation Army. Those tenets drive a continental outlook.

The nomenclature of the People's Liberation Army-Navy reflects the relative importance of continental and maritime affairs. From 1949 on there was attention paid to maritime matters and to the Navy – there were maritime threats to the newly formed People's Republic, with the Nationalists occupying Taiwan and many offshore islands, and with the U.S. Seventh Fleet operating in the region. However, the PLA-N was a defensive force, a continuation of the mindset that had existed since the late-Ming Dynasty. Following the failed assault on Kinmen (Quemoy), PLA-N coastal defense would closely resemble *haifang.*[25]

Beyond the PLA-N, the PRC worldview continued for decades to be more continental than maritime. The PRC's main focus was internal, but where it looked abroad, it was overwhelmingly aligned with the Soviet Union. This turned attention to the interior. While the early PRC may have acted aggressively in Korea and Vietnam, it did so at its land borders.

From 1960, Sino-Soviet relations suffered from a split. China's main foreign policy emphasis was to seek international leadership of the left, but the only maritime adventure of note in that time was the repair and training of Albania's ex-Soviet Whiskey class submarines. With border clashes with India and with the Soviets, the main external focus was continental. [26]

Internally, the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution was anathema to the development of a strategic culture supporting a global maritime view. In the PLA-N, politics trumped performance and professionalism. The PLA-N's first political commissar, Admiral Su Zhenhua made an attempt to blend the Communist ideologue and the technical expert, but he did not measure up to the political ideals of the Cultural

Revolution and he and the second political commissar, Vice Admiral Du Yide were purged. In July of 1967, the Wuhan Military Region CommanderGeneral Chen Zaidao ordered PLA troops to move against leftists in Wuhan – the response included gunboars of the East Sea Fleet. More purges of PLA-N leadership at the same time seem to have been directed against those unwilling to support the Red Guards. The most visible purge in the navy was that of Admiral Fang Qiang, who was in charge of naval construction and research and development. He was linked to head of state Liu Shaoqi. Their efforts to import Western shipbuilding technology were counter to self-sufficiency, and their emphasis on shipbuilding for maritime trade and economic interests – in addition to being evidence of Liu's taking the capitalist road – were a threat to the PLA-N's defense against imperialism. Shipbuilding – both naval and commercial felt an extensive political and technical impact.[27]

Following the Cultural Revolution and its failings, a number of elements began to align. The Soviet Union became the primary foe – China and the USSR fought a border war in 1969. The Soviet naval threat was emphasized, and specifically their presence in the Indian Ocean. In foreign policy, the pragmatic Zhou Enlai began moving toward détente with the U.S. At the Fourth National People's Congress in 1975, Zhou Enlai introduced the Four Modernizations (modernizing agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense). Following Zhou's and Mao's 1976 deaths, Deng Xiaoping took control of the party in 1978. At the 11$^{th}$ Party Congress in 1978, Deng formally launched the Four Modernizations, leading to an era of opening and reform. This opening and reform, especially as it led to China's increasing integration into the world economy would lead, finally, to a new maritime flowering.

China's Present Maritime Status and Strategy

Today, as Zheng Bijiang indicated, China is integrated into the global economy. Because of the importance of maritime trade, China is led to becoming a maritime power. As China's national interests take on an increasingly maritime focus, the development of a blue water navy is conducive to support of those national interests.

China's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2007 was over $3 trillion. China's exports in 2007 accounted for $1.2 trillion – 36% of the GDP. In addition to these exports, China's 2007 imports totaled $955 billion. Despite China's pre-existing continentalist tendencies, a look at trading partners quickly indicates the importance of maritime trade.[28]

| Rank | Partner | Volume (US$ Billion) | % Change (from 2006) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | United States | 302.1 | 15.0 |
| 2 | Japan | 236 | 13.9 |
| 3 | Hong Kong | 197.2 | 18.8 |
| 4 | South Korea | 159.9 | 19.1 |
| 5 | Taiwan | 124.5 | 15.4 |
| 6 | Germany | 94.1 | 20.4 |
| 7 | Russia | 48.2 | 44.3 |
| 8 | Singapore | 47.2 | 15.4 |
| 9 | Malaysia | 46.4 | 25.0 |
| 10 | The Netherlands | 46.3 | 34.3 |

Table 1: China's Top Trading Partners 2007

At least 80% of trade with those top ten partners is maritime. In 2003, the senior executive vice president of the China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO) indicated that 85% of all import and export trade was maritime.[29]

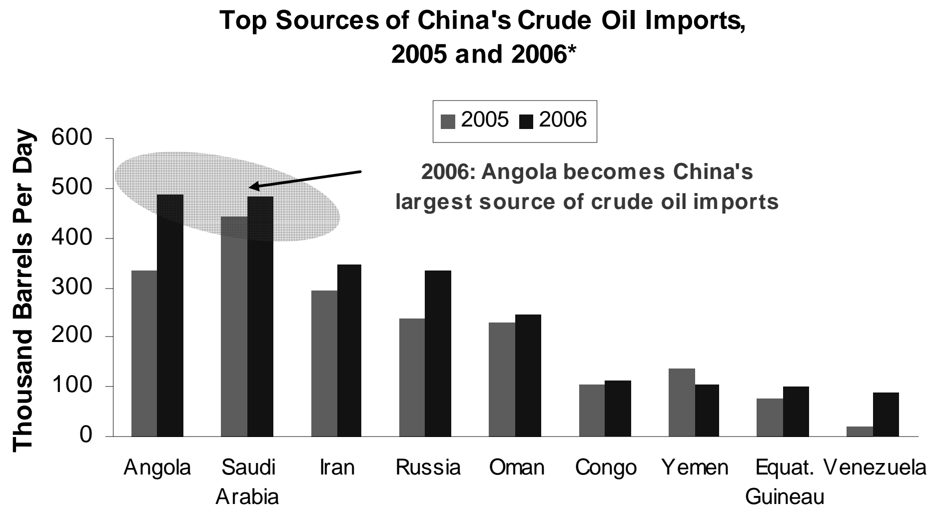
China's reform and opening has led to a booming economy. But her booming economy leads to a requirement for maritime trade, for access to the international commons of the sea lines of communications (SLOCs).

China’s maritime shipping industry has grown to meet the trade requirements of the economic rejuvenation. COSCO was not formed until 1961 – with 25 ships and a capacity of 200,000 tons. By 1978, China’s tonnage was twelfth in the world, and by 2002, fourth in the world with an international ocean shipping fleet of 37 million tons.[30]

China’s shipbuilding industry ranks third in the world. A market share of approximately 20% is a distant third to Japan and South Korea, but has been steadily growing. In addition to supporting the growth of China’s merchant fleet, 90% of the shipbuilding industry is to meet international orders, taking advantage of labor costs.[31]

The shipbuilding industry and its advantage of labor costs is an example of one of the key drivers behind China’s export growth and overall economic growth. As China’s economy increasingly harnessed the productive capability of its population, it exceeded its capacity to power the growing industries. At the same time, urban centers – especially in coastal regions – grew exponentially, adding to the energy demand. China became a net importer of petroleum products in 1992 and of crude oil in 1993. China is attempting to develop energy alternatives, and to find new resources in her own territories, but overall, dependence on oil imports is unlikely to change. Pipelines from Russia and from Central Asia are an important pillar of China’s attempts to diversify oil transportation. By one estimate, pipelines could reduce ocean-going tankers from 93.5% of oil imports in 2004 to only 83% of oil imports in 2010. While that reduction is significant, the resultant projection is still more than eighty percent of imports totaling 3.6-4.0 million barrels/day coming via ocean-going tanker. China’s energy and economy are inescapably tied to the maritime domain.[32]

What are the sources of China's maritime oil imports? China imports 46% of its crude oil from the Middle East and 32% from Africa. As the chart below shows, Angola in 2006 surpassed Saudi Arabia as the number one supplier of crude oil.




Source: FACTS, Inc. *China Oil and Gas Monthly*
*2006 data is January through September only

Figure 1. Top Sources of China's Crude Oil Imports

In addition to the imports depicted above, China's state-owned oil companies are investing in Africa for exploration and production. In Angola, China outbid India's state-owned oil companies to acquire Shell's 50 percent stake in BP-operated Block 18. China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) has invested over $8 billion in Sudan's oil sector. China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) is the largest operator in Indonesia's offshore oil sector. CNOOC spent $2.3 billion for a 45 percent stake in an offshore oil and gas field in Nigeria's Niger Delta. CNOOC also has similar if smaller deals in Equatorial Guinea and Kenya. These newly acquired assets abroad provide about 8.5% of China's imports, but they are indicative of China's continued pursuit of access to energy resources. All of these energy resources will come to China by the

sea, and will require free passage through maritime chokepoints like the Strait of Malacca.[33]

These efforts are more than just a natural outgrowth of energy resource needs. Much like Zheng He's on trade routes that were active before and after his voyages, the significance goes beyond the activity itself. The significance is in the degree and extent of centralized, national commitment to the maritime domain.

Overall, however the increasing integration of China's growing economy with the global economy remains compatible with a peaceful rise. China's energy dependency is part of that integration. Direct competition for resources will almost certainly continue in the economic realm, but not in a clash of arms. As with other exports and imports, China's dependence on oil and other energy imports creates a virtuous cycle. While China's energy imports are particularly vulnerable to interruption at chokepoints, particularly the Strait of Malacca and the Strait of Hormuz, the dependency on imports creates a dependency on continued, peaceful, international access to the SLOCs of the Indian Ocean and the world.

China has committed resources towards improved access to the maritime international commons. China has provided technical assistance, some 450 workers and as much as 80% of the funding for the deepwater port of Gwadar in Baluchistan in southwest Pakistan. China provided $198 million of $248 million for the first phase of the port's construction. If expenditures on the second phase maintain that ratio, China could spend another $500 million in expanding the port to a dozen multi-purpose berths, a bulk cargo terminal, a grain terminal, and two oil terminals.[34]

Beijing is also working with Burma building or improving port facilities in the Coco Islands, Hianggyi, and Khaukphyu. The last specifically is in conjunction with pipelines to Kunming to carry oil from the port facilities and natural gas from local fields.[35]

China's expansion of maritime access is not limited to petroleum resources. In 1997 and 1998, COSCO received national media and even Congressional attention when the City of Long Beach California cancelled a contract awarding a lease in newly expanded port facilities in the converted naval port.[36] Attention was paid to Hong Kong firm Hutchison Whampoa Ltd taking over port operations under contract to the government of Panama after control of the Panama Canal transferred from the U.S. to Panama.[37]

People's Liberation Army-Navy Strategy

In 2004, PLA-Navy Senior Captain Xu Qi published "Maritime Geostrategy and the development of the Chinese Navy in the Early Twenty-First Century" in *China Military Science*, a leading Chinese defense journal. He acknowledges China's historic maritime blind spot – "Chinese Maritime Strategic Thought Was Gravely Restricted" is one subheading – based on a continental agriculture and continental threat axes. The sea offered little but was viewed as an adequate barrier until the western powers invaded from that quarter.[38]

In the modern era, however, "The 'collapse of the Soviet Union'…and the '9/11' event of the twenty-first century…have provided historical opportunities for China's maritime geostrategic development…At the same time, the geostrategic environment along China's borders has obviously improved."[39] China's economy and development, the key national interest, are inextricably tied to the sea. The main threat to China – the

encircling hegemony of the United States – also comes from the sea. Development of a blue water navy, and an ability to defend against a threat which occupies the open ocean is essential to China's long term national interests.

The 2006 White Paper *China's National Defense in 2006* [40] alludes to the peaceful rise ("peaceful development") in the first sentence of its foreword. The pledge of peaceful development is repeated in an introduction juxtaposing opportunity and challenges. On a global scale, hegemonism leads the list of challenges, but is not ascribed specifically to the United States. For China, "China's overall security remains sound…However, China's security still faces challenges which must not be neglected." The threat of Taiwan independence is cited as a grave threat to China's sovereignty as well as to regional peace.

The White Paper does not provide much more detail or specifics on PLA Navy development. The previous version of the defense white paper, issued in 2004 identified the PLA Navy as a priority for development, along with the PLA Air Force and the Second Artillery (theater ballistic missile forces).[41] This priority for development has been proven out by events. China has increased its surface combatant and submarine fleets, in both cases by both indigenous construction and purchase abroad.

China's most advanced platforms and weapons systems are at present ships and submarines purchased from Russia – while the technology involved in the Russian purchases is benefiting the Chinese defense industrial base, they certainly provided a quick fix to higher end capability gaps in the PLA Navy. In the surface fleet, the most notable of these acquisitions are four *Sovremmenyy*-class destroyers. These were designed by the Soviet Union to target U.S. aircraft carriers with its primary weapon

system, the long-range, large-warhead SS-N-22/Moskit/Sunburn missile. [42] In the submarine fleet, China has purchased twelve *Kilo*-class diesel submarines from Russia. While they are of different models and fits, the last eight match the *Sovremmenyy* in threatening an open-ocean aircraft carrier strike group, as they are equipped with the SS-N-27B/Sizzler anti-ship missile: a submerged-launched, hundred-mile-range missile with a supersonic, evasive attack profile.[43] These platforms, and their missile systems provide a specific, credible threat to U.S. carrier battle groups. The *Sovremmenyys* and *Kilos* are all assigned to the East Sea Fleet, opposite Taiwan.

While the *Sovremmenyys* and *Kilos* provide a niche ability, the majority of the PLA Navy fleet was growing in numbers and in capability, largely through Chinese construction. Dating back to the 1990s Chinese shipyards began numerous, tentative runs of multiple ship types, attempting to incorporate piecemeal technology derived in whole or in part from foreign designed weapons systems. In destroyer classes, these 1990 runs included two *Luhu*-class and one *Luhai* class, equipped with moderately capable medium-range anti-ship missiles. In frigates, *Jiangwei*-class were comparable to the destroyers and reflected advances over the older *Jianghu*-class frigates. All were lacking in command and control, anti-air warfare (AAW), and anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities. As the 21$^{st}$ century opened, Chinese shipbuilding advanced, launching ship classes with capable antiship cruise missiles, improved electronics, and other capabilities beginning to reach par with modern Western Navy's standards. The *Luyang I*-, *Luyang II*-, and *Luzhou*-class destroyers all incorporate gas-turbine technology, some "stealth" characteristics, and much improved AAW. The *Jiangkai*-class frigate reflects some of the same advances over the *Jiangwei*.[44]

Prior to the induction of the *Kilo*-class, China's submarine fleet was already the world's largest force of non-nuclear powered submarines. Almost 60 *Romeo*-class diesel boats – 1950s technology – were augmented by 17 updated *Ming*-class. The indigenous *Song*-class submarine was China's first boat with a submerged-launch-missile capability. After fits and starts in construction, at least 12 *Songs* are in the fleet or in production. Five Han-class nuclear submarines entered service beginning in 1980. These boats were based on 1950s Soviet November-class technology, and had sufficient problems with noise and mechanical challenges that the conventional Kilos were widely regarded as an overall capability upgrade. The indigenously produced and much improve Shang (Type 093)-class have now entered service as well.[45]

Other shipbuilding programs since 2000 have increased PLA Navy capabilities. Two 21,000 ton Fuqing-class replenishment vessels were augmented in 2005 by two 28,000 ton Fuchi-class replenishment ships. In the amphibious arena at least 17 ships have been built since 2000, highlighted by th 4,800 ton Yuting I- and Yuting II-class tank landing ships. In 2006, an 18,000-25,000 ton displacement amphibious ship resembling the U.S. San Antonio-class LPD-17 was launched, offering a force projection capability of four helicopters, four air-cushioned landing craft, and up to 400 troops. This amphibious shipping is wholly inadequate to the task of forcible entry across the Taiwan Strait, but offers a limited, regional force projection capability.[46]

The PLA Navy development shows an inarguable trend toward development of blue-water, open-ocean capability, but to what end?

The PLA Navy is designed for the stated strategic goal of "active offshore defense." First announced in 1985, active offshore defense was a strategic paradigm

shift from “coastal defense” which relegated the PLA Navy to a close-in role in support of a land war. Offshore defense involves maritime operations to:

- Keep the enemy within limits and resist invasion from the sea;
- Protect the nation’s territorial sovereignty; and
- Safeguard the motherland’s unity and maritime rights.

The second of these missions can be linked both to defense of continental China and to the sovereignty issue of Taiwan, as highlighted by the 2004 and 2006 Defense White Papers. The acquisition of platforms and capabilities specific to denying U.S. Navy access to the battlespace in and around Taiwan has been a key focus of U.S. concerns.[47]

The evolution of PLA Navy definition of “offshore defense” in terms of all three missions highlights other sovereignty concerns. China has territorial disputes with a maritime flavor in the East China Sea -- the Daiyou or Senkaku Islands, disputed with Japan -- and the South China Sea -- the Xisha or Paracel Islands with Vietnam and the Nansha or Spratly Islands with Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei.[48] Admiral Liu Huaqing defined China’s maritime defensive perimeter in terms of the First and Second Island Chains, which bound China’s access to the Pacific Ocean and to the key chokepoints to the Indian Ocean (Figure 2).

When viewed from the perspective of United States planners, the first and second island chains represent an aggressive goal of sea control. Senior Captain Xu, however notes that the United States States has a system of bases and allies in the island chains, from South Korea and Japan in the north to the Philippines and Australia in the

Figure 2: The First and Second Island Chains[49]

south. With China's development dependent on maritime trade, and more importantly imported energy resources, however, it can be argued that the First and Second Island Chains represent a barrier, an obstacle to be overcome in defense of the homeland.[50]

Undoubtedly, China is developing capabilities to contest U.S. Navy access to the battlespace around Taiwan. Beyond a conflict over Taiwan, however, China's naval developments are compatible with the concept of a peaceful rise.

China's naval diplomacy reflects the growth of the maritime dimension in national strategy. Tables 2 and 3 show PLA Navy engagement abroad, both high-level exchanges and port visits. During the 1980s, China sent only 2 task groups to 4

countries. During the 1990s, China sent 10 task groups to 20. Between January 2000 and August 2006, 13 PLA Navy task groups visted 37 countries. This naval diplomacy has been tied to arms deals and to specific anniversary events, but overall, is in keeping with an increased global maritime profile and is not incompatible with a peaceful rise. Of note, PLA Navy commanders have never visited the Middle East and have visited Africa only once (Tunisia in 1992).[51]

| Date | Country | Commander |
|---|---|---|
| Mar 1982 | Thailand | Ye Fei |
| Nov 1983 | Pakistan, Bangladesh | Liu Huaqing |
| Nov 1984 | Britain, Yugoslavia, West Germany | Liu Huaqing |
| Nov 1985 | France, United States | Liu Huaqing |
| Dec 1989 | Thailand, Bangladesh, Pakistan | Zhang Lianzhong |
| Oct 1991 | North Korea | Zhang Lianzhong |
| Jun 1992 | Turkey, Tunisia | Zhang Lianzhong |
| Apr 1993 | Russia | Zhang Lianzhong |
| Jul 1995 | Italy | Zhang Lianzhong |
| Jul 1996 | Pakistan, Chile, Brazil, Argentina | Zhang Lianzhong |
| Nov 1997 | Pakistan | Shi Yunsheng |
| Sep 1998 | United States | Shi Yunsheng |
| Nov 1999 | Russia | Shi Yunsheng |
| Apr 2000 | United States, Britain, Portugal | Shi Yunsheng |
| Apr 2001 | France | Shi Yunsheng |
| Mar 2002 | Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Australia | Shi Yunsheng |
| 2003 -2006 | None | |

Table 2: PLA Navy Commander Visits Abroad: 1982-2006.[52]

| Dates | Countries Visited | Ships |
|---|---|---|
| Nov 1985 | Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh | Luda destroyer Hefei 132 and replenishment ship Fengcang 615 |
| Mar 1989 | United States (Hawaii) | Zhenghe training ship |
| Mar 1990 | Thailand | Zhenghe training ship |
| Oct 1993 | Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Thailand | Zhenghe training ship |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| May 1994 | Russia (Vladivostok) | Dajiang Sub Tender Changxingdao 121, Luda-II destroyer Zhuhai 166, and Jiangwei frigate Huainan 540 |
| Aug 1995 | Russia (Vladivostok) | Jiangwei frigate Huaibei 541 |
| Aug 1995 | Indonesia | Luda-II destroyer Zhuhai 166, Jiangwei frigate Huainan 540, and one replenishment ship |
| Jul 1996 | North Korea | Luhu destroyer Harbin 112 and Luda destroyer |
| Jul 1996 | Russia (Vladivostok) | Luhu destroyer Harbin 112 |
| Feb 1997 | United States (Hawaii, San Diego); Mexico, Peru, Chile | Luhu destroyer Harbin 112, Luda-II destroyer Zhuhai 166, Replenishment ship Nancang 953 |
| Apr 1998 | New Zealand, Australia,Philippines | Luhu destroyer Qingdao 113, Training Ship Shichang 82,Replenishment ship Nancang 953 (PI - Qingdao only) |
| Jul 2000 | Malaysia, Tanzania, South Africa | Luhai destroyer Shenzhen 167, Replenishment ship Nancang 953 |
| Aug 2000 | United States (Hawaii, Seattle);Canada | Luhu destroyer Qingdao 113, replenishment ship Taicang 575 |
| May 2001 | India, Pakistan | Luhu destroyer Harbin 112, replenishment ship Taicang 575 |
| Aug 2001 | France, Italy, Germany, Britain,Hong Kong | Luhai destroyer Shenzhen 167, replenishment ship Fengcang 615 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sep 2001 | Australia, New Zealand | Jiangwei frigate Yichang 564, replenishment ship Taicang 575 |
| Nov 2001 | Vietnam | Jiangwei frigate Yulin 565 |
| May 2002 | South Korea | Jiangwei frigate Jiaxing 521, Jiangwei frigate Lianyungang 522 |
| May 2002 | Singapore, Egypt, Turkey, Ukraine,Greece, Portugal, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru | Luhu destroyer Qingdao 113, replenishment ship Taicang 575 |
| Oct 2003 | Brunei, Singapore, Guam | Luhai destroyer Shenzhen 167, replenishment ship Qinghaihu 885 |
| Nov 2003 | New Zealand | Jiangwei frigate Yichang 564, replenishment ship Taicang 575 |
| May 2004 | Hong Kong | 8 vessels |
| Nov 2005 | Pakistan, India, Thailand | Luhai destroyer Shenzhen 167, replenishment ship Weishanhu 887 |
| Aug 2006 | United States, Canada, Philippines | Luhu destroyer Qingdao 113, replenishment ship Hongzehu 881 |

Table 3: PLA Navy Commander Visits Abroad: 1982-2006.[53]

Assessment

China has historically been a continental power. By pursuing economic development, China has become immersed in the global economy, and has become a maritime power by choice and by necessity.

China's growth as a maritime nation is wholly compatible with the concept of the peaceful rise, as the economic development that is the central goal of the peaceful rise is fuelled by maritime development and requires stable peaceful access to the international commons. Even China's development of blue water navy capabilities is, on the whole, attuned to a maritime nation's overseas national interests.

The one notable exception is in China's contingency planning for Taiwan. In this emotional issue of national sovereignty (to the Chinese) there are access denial capability goals that are designed to enable the targeting of U.S. Navy assets on the high seas. This niche capability – and the assurance of defeating it to achieve the United States' stated national interests – should remain a key concern of United States strategic planners.

Taiwan is not necessarily the only scenario wherein a conflict of the United States' and China's maritime national interests is conceivable. Direct competition for resources, even petroleum resources, seems on the low end of probability. But interests could develop at cross-purposes in arenas where China requires maritime access to critical resources. The Gulf of Guinea or Angola are areas where China's maritime interest are of growing importance. Absent the emotional importance of Taiwan and sovereignty, however, the risks to China's development in an increasingly interdependent global economy make the peaceful rise the most probable path.

There are destabilizing aspects of China's pursuit of energy resources, as, "Sudan and Iran need China just as much as China needs Sudan and Iran. Politics and trade, votes in the UN Security Council, and the Chinese desire to diversify its imports of oil all come together."[54] Six percent of China's oil imports come from Sudan; China is the

leading arms supplier to Sudan. If, for example, Sudan cannot return itself to the good graces of the United Nations and the international community, then political fallout, diplomatic showdown, and even conflict between China and the West over Sudan is certainly possible. Any conflict would not be over the maritime specifics of China's relationship with Sudan, notwithstanding the strong maritime flavor of that relationship.

China clearly seeks to be primus inter pares in Asia and has standing territorial disputes as listed above. At the present time, however trade has trumped territoriality, with the possibility of direct conflict in the South China Sea waning. In fact, China's Bo Ao Forum was initiated with the intent of promoting regional peace: it was in this forum that Zheng Bijian first fully elucidated the peaceful rise. None of these Asian regional maritime disputes is as emotional an issue as Taiwan.

The United States is not the only maritime power one can imagine in a dispute with China. India, for example, is on a development arc like China's: a nation with a population of a billion, of growing importance to the globally interconnected economy. India is already a regional naval power in the Indian Ocean, sitting astride the supply lines for China's crucial maritime trade, at one end of important chokepoints.

The critical question for China's maritime development to continue in a peaceful rise is whether China is willing to step up the role of “responsible stakeholder.” If China merely demands a stable international environment, the path is uncertain. If China's leaders choose to proactively contribute to the global economy and to help ensure international access to the maritime commons, a peaceful rise is a far more likely outcome.

## Endnotes

[1] Among those mentioned, the "threat" is conveyed most strongly by Fareed Zakaria in "Does the Future Belong to China?" *Newsweek*, 9 May 2005; available from http://www.newsweek.com/id/51964/output/print; Internet; accessed 5 March 2008. The other articles mentioned are Ted C. Fishman, "The Chinese Century," *New York Times Magazine*, 4 July 2004; Internet; available from http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/04/magazine/04CHINA.html; Internet; accessed 5 March 2008; and Michael Elliott, "China Takes on the World," Time 11 January 2007; available from http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1576831,00.html; Internet; accessed 5 March 2008.

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[8] Zheng Bijian, "China's 'Peaceful Rise' to Great-Power Status," *Foreign Affairs* 84 (September/October 2005): 24.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Zheng Bijian "A New Opportunity for Relations Between China and the United States," 13 December 2002, speech to the Council on Foreign Relations and "The Sixteenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party and China's Peaceful Rise: A New Path," 9 December 2002 speech to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, reproduced in *China's Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian 1997-2005* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 67-73 and 74-81.

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[12] Bruce Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1982), 2.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order,* (New York: Touchstone, 1996). Huntington introduces the idea of a "Sinic" culture of China, Chinese in Southeast Asia, and "the related cultures of Vietnam and Korea," 45-47. He further discusses Confucianism and the rise of East Asian countries and economies, 102-109. Huntington's first full exploration of this theme – including a "Confucian" China – dates to 1993: "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 82 (Summer 1993): 22-49.

[15] Swanson, 15.

[16] Ibid., 13-15.

[17] Fairbank and Goldman, 190.

[18] Swanson, 17-18.

[19] Fairbank and Goldman, 192-193.

[20] Swanson, 28-40.

[21] Ibid., 40-43.

[22] Ibid., 54-112.

[23] Ross Terrill, *The New Chinese Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 3.

[24] For a description of describes Mao's reception of Khrushchev, Kissinger, and Nixon, and a firsthand account of the treatment received by the party accompanying Australian Opposition Leader Gough Whitlam to Beijing, see Terrill, 4-8.

[25] Swanson, 183-215.

[26] Ross Terrill describes China's driving logic from the late 1950s to the late 1960s as "United Front from Below" pushing aside a soft left for Maoism, and attempting to lead the "countryside of the world." From 1969, Terrill posits a "United Front from Above" philosophy, with the priority being opposition to Moscow, 258-261. The incident regarding Sino-Albanian submarine cooperation is detailed in Swanson, 227-230.

[27] Swanson, 237-244.

[28] Figures on GDP and trade are from the US-China Business Council; Internet; available from http://www.uschina.org/statistics/tradetable.html and http://www.uschina.org/statistics/economy.html; Internet; accessed 24 February 2008.

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[50] Xu Qi, 56-57.

[51] U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence, 111-117.

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