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## Book review: the Great Wall at sea: China's Navy in the twenty-first century; China, the United States, and twenty-first-century sea power: defining a maritime security; China's new diplomacy: rationale, strategies and significance partnership

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join me in campaigning against this technological abortion. So far I am a lonely voice.

Diana Lary

*Diana Lary is the author of The Chinese People at War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and Chinese Migrations: The Movement of People, Goods, and Ideas over Four Millennia (forthcoming).*



Bernard D. Cole. *The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy in the Twenty-first Century*. Second edition. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010. Hardcover \$36.95, ISBN 978-1-591-14142-6.

Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Nan Li, editors. *China, the United States, and Twenty-first-Century Sea Power: Defining a Maritime Security Partnership*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010. Hardcover \$47.95, ISBN 978-1-591-14243-0.

Zhiqun Zhu. *China's New Diplomacy: Rationale, Strategies and Significance*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010. xv, 248 pp. Hardcover \$99.95, ISBN 978-1-409-40167-4.

Writing about Chinese foreign and security policy will always be a challenge because of the rapid pace of change. Given China's turn from relative caution to marked assertiveness in the last three years, however, it may be the case that 2008 will be seen as something of a watershed. If so, then the three books reviewed here may be seen as spanning an important transition to great power status. Taken together, they provide a broad survey of Chinese foreign and defense policy and can be highly recommended for their wealth of empirical information and insights. Because their contents are in the main based on research conducted before the global financial crisis heralded a major shift in world power, they are imbued with a relatively optimistic tone.

This can be seen most explicitly in Zhiqun Zhu's survey of China's new diplomacy, which deserves credit as one of the first accounts of the subject that goes beyond East Asia and the Pacific. Zhu adopts a social constructivist perspective with the intention of giving a more balanced version of China's rise than is offered by the pessimistic predictions of realists, resulting in the positive portrayal of a China that "no longer shies away from international responsibilities" (Zhu, p. 7)

and is projecting “a new national image as a responsible, friendly and peaceful player in international affairs” (Zhu, p. 4).

When Zhu cites Hu Jintao’s declaration that China will strive to build a “harmonious ocean” as he presides over the display of naval power on the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the PLA Navy (PLAN) (Zhu, p. 13), however, readers of a more realist persuasion might find the reliance on ideational factors less than satisfactory. The same can be said of Zhu’s attempts to address concerns over the development of China’s hard power by falling back on government white papers as evidence of military transparency and the way he sees the spread of Confucius Institutes as evidence that its soft power is on the rise. His statement that the launching of the English version of the *Global Times* reveals a desire to show “how China is closely connected to global affairs” and to present “the complexity and fascination of China to the world” (Zhu, p. 9) will surprise readers who are familiar with the anti-Western chauvinism and militarism that characterizes this newspaper.

Such evidence certainly conveys a good account of how Beijing wants its presence to be perceived. Zhu may be right, for example, to argue that the dispatch of aid and a special representative to Darfur shows a new willingness to play a role in preventing genocide and revealing a new ability to learn. A more cynical interpretation could dismiss this as just a reluctant attempt to save face in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics while Beijing’s fundamental norm of non-interference remains in place. Similarly, the claim that “even the United States looks up to China for crisis control” when it hosts the Six Party Talks on North Korea (Zhu, p. 8) might be dismissed as an example of how China attempts to evade international pressure while Pyongyang continues to manufacture nuclear weapons.

In the absence of a more systematic assessment of official claims against alternative sources of evidence, it is hard to know which interpretation is correct. A more robust theoretical framework might also help to judge the trajectory of China’s behavior. A realist interpretation, for example, would have no problem in explaining why the shift in relative economic power to China since 2008 has led to actions such as the hardening of claims to the South China Sea and Beijing’s uncompromising stance toward Japan following the arrest of a Chinese fishing boat skipper off the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in 2010. Public relations fiascos such as the inauguration of the Confucius Peace Prize (to rival the Nobel Peace Prize) and the incarceration of the world-famous artist, Ai Weiwei, might also be easier to explain as the symptoms of a corrupt political elite trying to hold on to power than as expressions of growing soft power.

Given this growing discord between diplomatic rhetoric and actions and the incompatibility of stated goals, it is tempting to see Zhu’s optimistic appraisal as typical of the way in which Beijing’s diplomacy has managed to shift the academic terrain. This is not to say that the book is lacking in criticism. Each of the chapters

on the various regions of the developing world is, in fact, careful to give a good survey of the problems that China's presence is creating, from human rights issues in Africa to anger over economic competition in Mexico. Such concerns are invariably offset, however, by the citation of reports from sources like *Xinhua* and the *People's Daily* to demonstrate how China is playing a positive role. Having said this, Zhu's conclusion can already be seen to be moving in a decidedly less optimistic direction, summed up in his concluding remark that "China will be a half-baked 'responsible stakeholder' in the twenty-first century world if it cannot satisfactorily tackle 'problem countries' such as Sudan, Zimbabwe, Iran, Myanmar and North Korea in its foreign policy. Relations with these countries, together with Beijing's policies towards Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang, will be a litmus test of China's new role in the twenty-first century" (Zhu, p. 231).

Sustaining faith in China's diplomacy, however, ultimately depends on overlooking the degree to which these fundamental issues challenge the rhetoric of a harmonious world. Zhu, thus, sees no problem in praising China's appointment of representatives of Tibetan opinion to explain to foreign audiences that all they have heard or read is untrue because they have been misled by Western media reports is "probably more effective than any Chinese official propaganda" (Zhu, p. 213). He also sees no inconsistency in agreeing with Africa expert Chris Alden that China's actions in the developing world are distinct from colonialism because they do not involve the ideology of a "civilizing mission" (Zhu, p. 210), then giving a generally positive appraisal of the establishment of a "Serfs Emancipation Day" to celebrate how the People's Republic of China (PRC) has fundamentally changed "dark and feudal old Tibet" (Zhu, p. 213).

When discussing Taiwan, Zhu is sympathetic with the mentality that drives the claim to the island rather than seeing it as fundamentally incompatible with the idea of a "peaceful rise," explaining that it is "understandable why China pushed hard to squeeze Taiwan's international space, especially when Taipei's pro-independence government under Chen Shui-bian constantly provoked Beijing (and Washington) before May 2008" (Zhu, p. 227). Explaining that "Beijing may also end the honeymoon if Taipei continues to shy away from political dialogue on the basis of 'one China'" and that "the final resolution of the Taiwan issue remains remote" (Zhu, p. 228), he does not explore what might happen in the eventuality of a Democratic Progressive Party return to power in a future election.

While Zhu's book is thus to be welcomed as the most up-to-date and broadest account of China's diplomacy, it also reveals the need for a more critical approach to the gap between Beijing's rhetoric and its actions. Only by downplaying the challenges is it possible to claim that China "has largely succeeded in projecting an image of a peaceful and constructive power in the world, despite some concerns about its increasing military budget and human rights policies" (Zhu, p. 230). The biggest challenge of all, however, is what China's growing power implies for the role of the United States. Restating Beijing's position that China wants to "establish

a multipolar world in which it can play an increasingly more active role in international political economy as one of the greatest powers” (Zhu, p. 230) is less informative than taking into account the difficulties of maintaining a multipolar system through power balancing and the poor historical record of hegemons relinquishing preponderant power.

This more realist interpretation of China’s rise might be expected from the proceedings of the conference on Sino-U.S. naval cooperation held at the U.S. Naval War College in 2007, edited into an impressive volume by Erickson, Goldstein, and Li. Yet the general tone of these papers is again positive, with the contributors devoting themselves to finding ways to offset the major strategic challenges inherent in great power transitions by promoting cooperation on more mundane, functional issues such as the Container Security Initiative, combating global terrorism, policing the oceans, and working together on humanitarian, rescue, and health operations. The general faith in confidence building is summed up by Wu Shicun, of China’s National Institute for South China Sea Studies, who states that “Cooperation between China and the United States can start from the easier and less sensitive areas to combat non-traditional threats in the region” (Wu, p. 371).

When Wu adds that so long as the Americans realize that “[w]orrying about the rise of China is an obstacle to cooperation” (Wu, p. 371), however, he only reveals the tendency of the Chinese contributors to take a less than critical view of their own state’s strategy. The same can be said of the overview of China’s maritime strategy by Zhuang Jianzhong, deputy director of the Center for National Security Studies at Shanghai’s Jiao tong University. This opens the book by building on a quotation from Hu Jintao’s speech to the Seventeenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party: “We are determined to safeguard China’s sovereignty, security and territorial integrity and help maintain world peace” (Zhuang, p. 4). Just as in Zhu Zhiquan, Zhuang sees no inconsistency in pointing out that “Most importantly, the reunification and the integrity of our country remain unfulfilled, and most of the key areas are situated in the East China Sea, South Sea, and Taiwan Strait” (Zhuang, p. 4). The tendency to assume that China’s claims are beyond question is typified by Wu Shicun’s dismissal of all claims in the South China Sea than those of “the real Sovereignty State of the Spratly Islands, China (including Taiwan)” (Wu, p. 366).

The chapters of this book that analyze the extent of small-scale naval cooperation are, indeed, impressive and full of useful information. Readers of a more realist persuasion, however, may be more convinced when geostrategic dilemmas are more directly confronted in the section on Perspectives on Regional Security. Here James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara give a well-informed account of how China’s rise is being met with a nineteenth-century style of geopolitics from India in the Indian Ocean. Michael J. Green contributes a particularly good chapter on the regional implications and prospects for U.S.-China naval cooperation that

draws attention to the emerging tendency of China's neighbors to look to external balancing (with the United States, Japan, or India). Having been senior director for Asian affairs in the National Security Council under the George W. Bush administration, it is not surprising that Green is most aware of how the potentials of confidence building through military-military relations ultimately depend on the broader political context and that "[c]ooperative engagement can only go so far in building trust and confidence if it does not lead to a better understanding of doctrine and intentions" (Green, pp. 363–364).

Although the conference from which most of the chapters are drawn was held in 2007, the editorial process has allowed some of the authors to focus debate on the March 2009 harassment of the U.S. surveillance ship, *Impeccable*, in the South China Sea. This generates some very useful explanations as to why it is so hard to use international law when China and the United States approach maritime territorial issues and issues of jurisdiction from what David N. Griffiths calls such different "national narratives" (Griffiths, p. 49). Yet, even after peppering his chapter with warnings about how accidents will happen and can lead to unintended consequences that "can bring nations to the brink of crisis, sometimes to the detriment of the carefully crafted plans and policies of their political leadership," Griffiths is able to conclude that "[w]ith the right 'political space' and a commitment to better mutual understanding, the two nations can transform their security relationship at sea" (Griffiths, p. 52). The editors make a similar point in their introduction when they indicate the importance of finding a coordinated Chinese-American response to the sinking of the South Korean naval vessel, *Cheonan*, in March 2010. Maybe the fact that the Chinese naval delegation withdrew from the Naval War College conference in 2010 under Beijing's freeze on military-military relations after the Obama administration went ahead with arms sales to Taiwan shows just how difficult it is to create this kind of "political space."

If confidence building looks increasingly thin, the only cause for optimism for those concerned about China's assertiveness appears to be the material constraints on its naval modernization. As Zhuang Jianyong puts it, "We can only build a relatively moderate People's Liberation Army Navy to defend our coastal areas, not a blue water navy or a strong sea power to control the sea as the United States does" (Zhuang, pp. 4–5). Maybe the best way to assess the weight of such a claim is to turn to Bernard Cole's account of China's naval strategy and deployment.

Although this is the second edition of Cole's book, it is sufficiently up-to-date to accept that the PLAN "is developing into a maritime force of twenty-first-century credibility in all warfare areas" (Cole, p. 113). Although he does accept that the capabilities of the PLAN remain limited in many respects, and that it faces formidable adversaries not only in the U.S. Navy but also from some regional powers, he is careful to explain how measuring total naval forces against each other is less useful than a Clausewitzian measurement of "how much [and, we might add, how effective a] naval force China can deploy against a given objective

at a time of Beijing's choosing. Whether this mission concerns Taiwan or an East or South China Sea objective, it seems fairly certain that China will be able to seize the initiative when employing its new Navy" (Cole, p. 113).

As the scale of the global power shift that began in 2008 becomes clearer, maybe even this cautious view will need to be rethought. If so, then it is not just the fast rising scale of China's defense spending that needs to be taken into account, but also the way in which events since 2008 are shaping the country's domestic politics. Most interesting in this respect are Cole's chapters "Personnel, Education, Training, and Exercises" and "PLAN Doctrine and Operations." What stands out here is the way in which the professionalization of the military is creating tensions with the political leadership, leading to concerns in Beijing over loyalty and a possible separation of the officer corps from the CCP. Given that the PLA officers view themselves "as chief protectors of China's territorial interests and national honour" (Cole, p. 138), and the increasingly frequent incidents that raise suspicions over the impact of the military on policy making, from articles and books by Chinese military personnel to the unveiling of China's indigenous stealth fighter during the visit of U.S. defense secretary Robert Gates to Beijing at the start of 2011, this dynamic could be increasingly important.

In this respect, Cole shares some common ground with commentators such as Michael Green in indicating the importance of understanding how political factors shape the use of growing material capabilities. Zhu Zhiqian also touches on this issue when he cites in his conclusion the statement by the Chinese historian Zhang Baijia that only "Through reforming itself and changing its undesirable policies, a new identity—a more confident, peaceful, and responsible China—is created" (Zhu, p. 217). Whether this optimistic outcome is possible or likely may depend on going beyond the very informative accounts of China's foreign and security policy to be found in these three books, to look in more detail at factors like the increasing salience of nationalism, the higher profile played by the military since 2008, using a more critical, realist approach to penetrate the rhetoric of the harmonious world.

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