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Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405–1433

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no first use of nuclear weapons (NFU). Indeed, the authors demonstrate that, alarmed at the prospect of a conventional attack on its strategic infrastructure, China's military planners have recently revisited NFU. This, and lingering problems with military aviation (despite the catalyst of the 1991 Gulf War, subsequent Russian imports, and incremental domestic progress), have caused Beijing to seek additional deterrence through a growing arsenal of conventional missiles.

Finally, the authors assess the degree to which China's military has met the strategic imperatives of its ancient strategists and modern leaders. They reach the sobering conclusion that despite China's continuing difficulty in approaching Western technological and even organizational levels, Taiwan's importance to Chinese identity, strategic value, and position as a bellwether of national territorial integrity justify extraordinary expenditure of blood and treasure. Moreover, China's military planners appear to believe that by investing selectively in asymmetric weapons, they can reconcile these conflicting realities without fueling an arms race and hence mutual insecurity. It is to be hoped that a new generation in Beijing, Taipei, and Washington, drawing on Lewis's and Xue's research, will find the collective wisdom to avert conflict that would devastate all parties involved.

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Dreyer, Edward L. *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405–1433*. Old Tappan, N.J.: Pearson Longman, 2006. 238pp. \$20.67

The military history of China has become a common element in the professional reading of many American military officers. Journals like this one have included an important focus on the Chinese past and present, and Edward Dreyer's book contributes important new history and analysis to that understanding. Studying the Chinese foreign expeditionary armada of the early fifteenth century, Dreyer outlines a Chinese strategy and set of naval tactics that are familiar to today's naval officer.

Starting in 1405 the eunuch Admiral Zheng He led a series of seven voyages from the shores of the Ming empire into the South China Sea and Indian Ocean. These voyages were made by fleets larger than any the world had ever seen; armadas of over two hundred vessels, the largest wooden vessels ever constructed, carrying roughly thirty thousand sailors and marine infantry. Scholars and Chinese government historians have characterized these expeditions, which reached as far west as the coast of Africa, as peaceful voyages of discovery. Dreyer, however, disagrees. He writes instead, "After thoroughly reviewing the primary Chinese sources, I concluded that the purpose of the voyages was actually 'power projection' . . . rather than mere exploration. Zheng He's voyages were undertaken to force the states of Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean to acknowledge the power and majesty of Ming China and its emperor."

The book is structured in a straightforward manner, chronologically moving from Zheng He's personal biography and the background history of the voyages to the voyages themselves. While not a professional naval architect, Dreyer has obviously done his research.

He provides documentary and archaeological evidence, as well as explanation of basic principles of naval architecture, to support his conclusion that the largest of the ships, the *baochuan*, or “treasure ships,” were at least three times larger than Nelson’s flagship HMS *Victory*.

While the book is not annotated, the level of academic rigor is evidenced by an impressive group of appendixes. The reader should expect nothing less from Dreyer, a leading sinologist who is well versed in not only the history but also the language of the original Chinese source materials. Much of his history comes directly from contemporary primary sources, and the appendixes include translations of the original historical material. This inspired inclusion allows readers to draw their own conclusions. There are also time lines, a valuable index, and a bibliographic essay discussing previous interpretations of Zheng He’s voyages from academic, journalistic, and Chinese government sources.

Conventional wisdom in the military-history community holds that China’s small naval heritage is of little value. Naval battles on the grand lakes and rivers of the Middle Kingdom are not afforded the consideration or importance given to Admiral Matthew C. Perry’s victory on Lake Erie or Rear Admiral David Porter’s gunboat campaigns on the Mississippi. Dreyer’s profile of Zheng He and the history of the voyages of the Foreign Expeditionary Armada provide a new view of Chinese naval heritage, one that includes interesting parallels to American naval strategy important to today’s naval professionals. The Chinese government has held up the voyages of Zheng He as

exemplars of their own future naval strategy. Dreyer’s book offers a compelling revision of past views on the Ming fleets that can help guide future discussion on China’s modern naval ambitions.

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Bauer, Gretchen, and Scott D. Taylor, eds. *Politics in Southern Africa: State and Society in Transition*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2005. 404pp. \$26.50

In the first few pages of this book it becomes clear that Gretchen Bauer and Scott Taylor are not Afri-pessimists. Indeed, one rather suspects that they have little tolerance for observers who look at the African continent and see nothing but misery, defeat, and despair. Such a depiction, according to the editors, relies on far too broad an analytical brush. Bauer and Taylor warn, quite reasonably, against treating Africa as some sort of political and cultural monolith and argue instead for a more regionally focused research approach.

The editors defend with convincing logic their choice to examine the region of southern Africa. Southern Africa contains some of the strongest economies on the continent and is more closely intra-linked than other African regions. If, as Bauer and Taylor contend, regional success stories are being submerged by Africa-wide studies, this work should give those stories the exposure and credit they deserve. *Politics in Southern Africa* is certainly organized to identify regional and local state success. Having made a convincing argument for a regional approach, they