

Book Reviews

China's Quest for Great Power Status, by Bernard D. Cole, Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2016, 320 pages, ISBN 978-1-61251-838-1

Reviewed by Chris Buckham

That China has become a major player on the international stage due to its massive population and economic power is without question. However, the role of the development of the Chinese armed forces, specifically the navy, in both the attainment and maintenance of the security of its economy is a very complicated and intricate one. In *China's Quest for Great Power Status*, Bernard Cole has approached this question through an in-depth analysis of the dependence the elements of this triumvirate – armed forces, economy and security – have on the others to maintain their strength. The elephant in the room for China is the effect that this has had on its relationships with the international community. Cole has looked at this in an over-arching influence and looks at the potential impacts as China seeks both to increase its influence and protect its core requirements.

The author has conclusively shown that despite language to the contrary, China's maritime policy diverges clearly in many respects from the accepted protocols of the international community. Areas such as maritime security zones and exclusion zones established in Chinese domestic laws are not in keeping with the international community. This theme is consistent throughout the book as China looks to extend its influence and authority further into the international realm.

Cole has presented an excellent evaluation of the metamorphosis of Chinese naval doctrine and policy in keeping with the emergence of China on to the international stage. The expansion of the People's Liberation Army

(Navy) (PLAN), at the expense of the People's Liberation Army, is a key enabler as well as facilitator of this expansion. It is clear that Chinese naval protocols follow a policy of 'active defence' which translates into one of proactive engagement should certain thresholds be crossed. Additionally, the Chinese are taking a long view of their maritime development. As Cole relates, each step in the expansion of maritime capability relates to a corresponding change in the domestic and international perspective of the Chinese government and vice versa.

Maintenance of Chinese Communist Party control of the country remains the bedrock of all policy-making decisions. Cole's evaluation of the Chinese economy and the factors driving it point clearly to a government that understands that it requires steady and sustained growth to accommodate not only its population but also to expand those defence elements (i.e., navy) that protect the access to markets and resources that sustain the growth. As Cole succinctly points out, China finds itself in a conundrum of its own making in that its expansionist tendencies and aggressive nautical claims, while serving to 'feed the beast' of China's economy, often occur at the expense of relations with neighbours both regional and further afield. Cole clearly outlines how China views the world through a very unique lens based upon a paradigm of 'us and them.' This forms the foundation of China's approach to both foreign and domestic policy and has significant ramifications internationally, as Cole rightly discusses.

This is a very interesting book for those seeking a concise, clear and readable initial analysis of China's efforts to attain both great power status internationally and security for its domestic priorities. Cole has done a commendable job of explaining China's complex approach in a comprehensive way that provides clarity without sacrificing context and depth. 🍷



Danish patrol ships HDMS *Hvidbjørnen* (left) and HDMS *Lauge Koch* dock at Nuuk, Greenland, 27 May 2019.

Credit: Timothy Choi