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CHINA'S NAVAL MODERNIZATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS



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June 2021

Manipal Academy of Higher Education
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**CHINA'S NAVAL MODERNIZATION
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Geopolitics and
International Relations in Partial Fulfilment for Master's Degree
in Geopolitics and International Relations**

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By
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June 2021



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(Deemed to be University under Section 3 of the UGC Act, 1956)

Date: 15 June 2021

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled “**China’s Naval Modernization and its Implications**” submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Geopolitics and International Relations of Manipal Academy of Higher Education is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

S.Endaw

(Sujata Endaw)

CERTIFICATE

I recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|--|
| A2/AD | Anti-Access/Area Denial |
| AAD | Area Air Defence |
| AOR | Area of Responsibility |
| ASBM | Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile |
| ASCM | Anti-Ship Cruise Missile |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| BRI | Belt and Road Initiative |
| BRICS | Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa |
| C4ISR | Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance |
| CMC | Central Military Commission |
| COSCO | China Ocean Shipping Company |
| CPC | Communist Party of China |
| CPEC | China Pakistan Economic Corridor |
| DF | Dong Feng |
| DOD | Department of Defence |
| EEZ | Exclusive Economic Zone |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| HA/DR | Humanitarian Assistance/ Disaster Relief |
| IOR | Indian Ocean Region |
| KMT | Kuomintang |
| MOOTW | Military Operations Other Than War |
| OTH-T | Over-the-Horizon Targeting |
| PLA | People's Liberation Army |
| PLAGF | People's Liberation Army Ground Force |
| PLAN | People's Liberation Army Navy |
| PLAAF | People's Liberation Army Air Force |
| PoK | Pakistan occupied Kashmir |
| PRC | People's Republic of China |
| SAM | Surface to Air Missile |
| SLOC | Sea Lanes of Communication |
| SLBM | Submarine Launch Ballistic Missile |
| SS | Ship Submersible (Submarine) |
| SSN | Ship Submersible Nuclear (Nuclear Powered Submarine) |
| SSBN | Ship Submersible Ballistic Nuclear (Nuclear Powered Ballistic Missile Submarine) |

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation on the theme “China’s Naval Modernization and Its Implications” has made an attempt to understand the need for China to have a coherent and effective naval power to meet with its far seas ambitions. China has been accelerating its warship building program as its navy is extending its reach to cover increasingly far-reaching interests of the country. The protection of the territorial and maritime neighbourhood has become very important to China with the progress in its naval modernization, which could provide for the protection in the near, middle and far seas. As the history of China evolved over the years, so did its outlook and strategy for achieving its ambitions. With extensive focus on modernization of the navy, the dissertation looks into the modernization of the naval forces and their upgradation and its geopolitical implications, especially with a focus on its far seas ambitions and strategies.

As China transitioned from the era of Mao Zedong’s leadership to that of Deng Xiaoping, the country transformed its outlook from a continental paradigm to a more maritime one. This became important as China opened up its economy and pursued the development of a sea based nuclear deterrent. China’s oceanic interest and national defence capability have been increased. The desire to build a powerful navy has become greater, enhancing modern national defence of China. China’s improved maritime capabilities have attracted the attention of China’s neighbours in East Asia and the U.S. Countries are cautious of China’s plans to acquire new naval ships, and the potential implications of this expansion for the region’s security. The PLAN has made considerable progress in both operationalizing and modernizing its navy.

Liu Huaqing, generally regarded as the founding father of contemporary China’s navy, was a key person in China’s turn to the sea. Being the principal architect of this systemic reform, he laid the groundwork for a clear national agenda and naval strategy to create a modern and strengthened navy upon whom his successors would focus. Liu particularly based his theoretical thinking on the works of Mahan. In Liu’s memoirs he explicitly refers to Mahan’s *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, citing it as one of the most detailed analyses of insights ever published on sea and naval policy. He had articulated a phased strategy towards China’s naval modernization and expansion from its coastal waters to the blue waters, which is being followed to this day.

Even though PLAN retains mainly centered on the near seas, where the sovereignty of various islands and relevant maritime rights are contested in China, PLAN has progressively concentrated in recent years on the development of naval capabilities for the far seas. Chinese acquisition trends also indicate an increasing focus on ships that are capable of multiple operations and are sufficiently large to support far seas operations. China has incorporated in its naval strategy over the years strategies such as the coastal defense strategy (*jinan fangyu*), from coastal to offshore defense strategy, offshore active defense strategy (*jinhai fangyu*) and far seas operations (*yuanhai huwei*).

A blue-water navy is widely seen as one of the ultimate examples of naval growth, with its capacity to function far from land and conduct naval operations in accordance with weapons. The PLAN's most apparent function is to safeguard China's maritime rights and interests, a principle that usually involves but is not limited to preserving China's sovereign rights in its coastal waters and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and guaranteeing Chinese high-seas vessel navigation independence. It is also one of the priorities highlighted in the 2015 defense white paper for the PLAN. Many Chinese analysts often claim that a powerful navy is the cornerstone of maritime power, as it is important to provide all the maritime operations with security guarantees. The evolution of PLAN's military structure is largely affected by the importance given to capabilities of the near seas policy and the far seas.

As a growing force seeking political power and appeal, China knows the significance of partnering with the other countries to improve major global institutions, such as the BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperative Organization and the Confidence-Building Measures in Asia. These new open-ocean transits and drills contrast spectacularly with previous naval PLAN activities. Through a military standpoint, current exercises were more important than those of the past. In fact, the PLA, particularly the navy and air force, has begun to develop new military capacity which should benefit China's A2 / AD strategy in its surrounding waters and skies. Besides the deterrence factor, it is important for the PLA to pursue and eradicate U.S. troops in waters as far as possible in order to ensure active warfare. India has become a regional naval power in the Indian Ocean, seated on one end of crucial control points sitting atop the supply routes for China's vital sea trade. Hence, China's far seas ambitions are also linked to its near seas protection.