

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding the commitment towards the Peaceful Development Policy, China's development of its People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy into global-reach capabilities is analyzed to be a result of several scientific factors in accordance to the middle-ground Maritime Power theory. The PLA Navy's development within its operational environment is influenced by physical and economic objective factors, whereas the psychological environment is impacted by the subjective political factors. Through Kearsley's theory, the physical factors analysis examines China's complex geographic locale, and large area of land along with its contested maritime domain. Whilst the economic factors show how China's high GDP as well as large population size supports China's naval development, and additionally the influence of its vast merchant fleet size. Lastly, the political factors accommodate the effect of rich maritime tradition, authoritarian government, and maritime threat assessment from political-military interactions.

In summary, each of the indicators consisted within the physical, economic, and political factors generates the need (if not support) to develop the capabilities of the PLA Navy. Nevertheless, the extent of naval development into global-reach capacity is only a result of several variables with different degrees of influence. The driving factors of global-reach naval development are China's maritime chokepoints, vast merchant fleet size, rich maritime tradition, authoritarian government with militaristic traits, as well as the extensive maritime threats arising

from its political-military interactions within the international arena. Furthermore, the extent of naval development up to global-reach level is also supported by the factors of high and growing GDP along with China's massive population however limited by moderate tertiary educational levels. On the other hand, factors such as China's drastic sea climate, lengthy coastline, large area of land, and maritime domain are analyzed to have no grounds in promoting China's naval development to the extent of global-reach level.

Within the objective physical factors, the geographic locale encourages the PLA Navy development from three standpoints. From environmental circumstances, Chinese seas experience drastic changes in temperature along with seasons of typhoons and cyclones resulting in the need to develop a climate-resilient navy. Nonetheless, the influence of China's maritime climate characteristics subsides as it does not explain the drive behind the development of global-reach capable navy which would need to account the entire maritime climate of all seas. Moreover, China's highly vulnerable coastline with lengthy and flat topography also demands a powerful coastal defense navy instead of global-reach capabilities. Conversely, the extent and significance of China's maritime chokepoints, ranging from the Taiwan Strait to the Persian Gulf, pushes China to build a global-reach capable navy in order to maintain the ultimate security of its maritime military and trade passages.

The massive area of land composing the PRC as the second largest country also drives China to develop its navy into larger and more advanced capacity than most, due to the higher need for protection. Yet the land area factor only drives

China's naval development as far as the forward defense hierarchy and does not explain Beijing's aim for global-reach capabilities. In consideration of Beijing's strong desire in safeguarding its seas shown by its defense papers and speech acts, the factor of maritime domain area becomes significant in constituting PLA Naval development into region defense capabilities.

Proceeding to less tangible yet still quantifiable economic factors, China's extremely high numbers of GDP and its growth supports the PLA Navy's global-reach development with availability of financial resources for the costly protection and modernization. Regardless of moderate levels in GDP per capita, China perpetually increases its defense budget for the PLA Navy with emphasis on procurement, personnel, and operations as well as maintenance, thus further bolstering extensive global-reach naval development. Aside from GDP, China's large and growing merchant fleet size, which may conduct worldwide transactions, promotes the urgency of protection from contemporary threats. As a single cargo transaction may involve ample national security, the merchant fleet size factor urges China to develop global-reach capabilities by naval hardware and escort missions.

As Beijing holds the record for largest population worldwide, in spite of the existence of those in poverty, China is considered to have better standpoint to support its naval development. Nevertheless, the analysis of China's education levels revealed that tertiary school enrollment rates are still moderate. Thus, the supporting capacity of the Chinese population subsides within the PLA Navy's global-reach development, nonetheless is still examined as a significant factor with limited support.

In set of non-quantifiable and subjective political factors, the impact of China's rich maritime tradition is demonstrated by the Chinese Dream where it explicitly hopes to restore the greatness of the earlier dynasties within the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Thus, China is driven to develop a global-reach capable navy by recalling the glorious maritime power possessed in the early Ming dynasty. Additionally, Beijing's maritime heritage has also played its part in present affairs as China utilized its navigational charts constituted by the renowned naval explorer, Admiral Zheng He, in the 14th century to support its South China Sea claims. Therefore, the extent of influence from China's maritime tradition is analyzed as strong in driving China to develop a global-reach capable PLA Navy.

The PRC's authoritarian government with highly concentrated power within Xi Jinping constitutes less complicated defense procurement for the PLA Navy as it requires less debate compared to democratic systems. With Xi's considerable militaristic traits and tendency to prioritize the PLA, the factor of government type becomes even more impactful to the global-reach naval development. Further psychobiography research on Xi Jinping is required to identify whether the driving force of this development is dominated by the Chinese government itself.

The last subjective factor assesses China's maritime threats that have risen from political-military interactions. Several findings include the Chinese reunification and Taiwan separatism issue, as well as the East and South China Sea dispute, are analyzed as drivers in China's PLA Navy development to a certain extent yet not as extensive as global-reach capacity. Exceedingly, the involvement of the United States in all of the aforementioned conflicts due to US-China

hegemonic tensions constitutes the need for China to develop a global-reach maritime power to compete with the (already) global-reach capable US navy, regardless if the dispute only extends regionally.

In spite of the outcomes elaborated above, this research is still subject to limitations as it has not reviewed the entire factor and output variables indicated in Kearsley's Maritime Power Theory. Moreover, as Kearsley's theoretical model constructs the decision-making process as a black box, the analysis is finite due to the inability to comprehend how the input factors are deliberated within China's decision-making mechanism. Thus, the author recommends further studies of Chinese DMP to be incorporated in the analysis of China's global-reach naval development through Kearsley's Maritime Power Theory.

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