

MASTER'S THESIS

Chen Shaokuan's Futile Naval Reform, 1928-1937

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Abstract

As a reputed naval general in modern China, Chen Shaokuan expressed interest in navy at a young age: he began his study of naval matters in Fuzhou Naval College in 1903, and continued his study at Jiangnan Naval College in 1905. Graduating from Jiangnan Naval Academy in 1908, he became a sub- lieutenant in 1909 and was promoted as lieutenant in 1911. After successfully recapturing the Zhaohe cruiser, Chen was promoted as the captain and the commander of the vessel Zhaohe in 1915, marking a remarkable advancement in his naval career. Moreover, Chen had been since his early years in the Chinese navy, interested in and preparing for a visit to Western countries to observe their naval development, which eventually he did from 1916 to 1921 when he visited the United States and supervised naval student groups in France and Italy.

Upon returning to China, Chen's naval career continued to advance. He was initially appointed commander of the training cruiser Yingrui and quickly became the leader of Navy Department after his achievements during the Northern Expedition (1926-1928). Appointed as vice-admiral and nominated as head of the newly established Navy Board, Chen gained power as a policymaker of China's naval development in 1929, stimulating not only his strong desire to initiate reforms in hopes of strengthening China's naval power, but further opening a new breakthrough in China's naval development.

Existing studies of Chen Shaokuan and China's naval development under the Nationalist government, though not rare, carry profound limitations. While there are a number of publications that discuss naval development during the Republican era, few have specifically touched on the issue of naval development under the Nationalist Government. In addition, the establishment of the Ministry of Navy requires more than attention that existing works cover: the financial difficulties, for instance, was a crucial hinderance in China's naval development yet remains neglected in academic discussion. There is no doubt that Chen Shaokuan naval ideology is highly praised and my thesis aims to fill in the gaps by constructing a more complete picture that traces the origins of Chen's naval development. In further understanding his ideas and China's naval development as a whole, this proposed thesis further puts weight on crucial and less discussed names as Du Xigui, Lin Jianzhang and Yang Shuzhuang, all of whom have considerable standing in propelling China's naval progress.

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