

Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered. By Jon Tetsuro Sumida. Baltimore, Md.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. ISBN 0-8018-5800-3. Selected Analytical Index to the Writings of Alfred Thayer Mahan. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xix, 117. \$24.95.

Jon Tetsuro Sumida argues that Alfred T. Mahan published his histories of sea power between 1890 and 1913 in order to advance two sets of arguments, the first widely familiar, the second unnoticed until now. The first set of arguments took three forms. The first was political: "seapower had played a decisive role in the history of international relations and would continue to do so." The second was political-economic: "national prosperity—and in turn the capacity of the state to wage war—depended to a very great degree upon external trade, which required the protection of a strong navy." The third was governmental: "decision-making, by the state or its primary agents in peace and war could play a decisive role." These arguments supported the works' "subtext, a navalist political agenda" (p. 6).

The second set of arguments comprised those concerned with elucidating grand strategy and teaching the art and science of command in war. Sumida focuses on these topics as overlooked and subtle arguments worthy of analysis. Unfortunately, the book opens with extended discussions of Zen Buddhism and the education of a musician which are intended to explain Mahan's insights. While I strongly encourage reaching across disciplines, these metaphors seem more likely to confound than enlighten a military historian or officer. Lacking any evidence, Sumida even suggests that Mahan may have been exposed to Zen during his 1868–69 visits to Japan (p. xviii). More cogently, Sumida suggests that Mahan's detailed histories were intended to explain command by exposing the reader to sound command decisions. By balancing intuition, intelligence, a sound knowledge of technological and human capabilities, commanders can make good decisions. Eschewing the command axioms for which he has often been blamed, Naval War College professor Mahan sought to teach officers the contingency of command needed to respond to the fluidity of battle. Rather than providing tactical rules, Mahan attempted to impart wisdom by exposing his officer-readers to serious historical study.

Less convincingly, Sumida credits Mahan with the invention of grand strategy and the field of international security studies (pp. 99–100). Mahan did reveal many of the important links between maritime, naval, and national power. But because Mahan viewed Great Britain and the United States as natural partners in a "transnational naval consortium," Sumida charitably credits him with devising a system theory like those of Immanuel Wallerstein or William McNeill (p. 108). To the contrary, Mahan urged U.K.-U.S. cooperation because the two powers were island nations with citizens of a common race and culture. He was a proselytizing High-Church, Anglophilic, social Darwinist who ultimately believed that the white races needed to unite against the rest of the world. Sumida does not bother refuting this widely-held conclusion.

Mahan scholars should read this book. Sumida casts new light on the most important strategic writer of this century. While it is sometimes obtuse, they should not ignore his argument which distinguishes Mahan from navalism. It emphasizes a Clausewitzian Mahan and dismisses the Jominian. The writing style is pleasant, and the author appreciates the value of brevity.

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