

Dragon Wings: Chinese Fighter and Bomber Aircraft Development by Andreas Rupprecht. Shepperton, UK: Ian Allan Publishing, 2013, 219 pp.

Dragon Wings: Chinese Fighter and Bomber Aircraft Development is a history of Chinese military aircraft development, acquisition, and modification from the declaration of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 to the current day. Andreas Rupprecht authored multiple books and articles on Chinese aviation development and is recognized as an expert on the subject. His ability to extract information on China's aviation industry, despite limited resources on the subject, is impressive.

Rupprecht catalogues Chinese aviation history into easily digestible sections beginning with imports and indigenous designs from first-generation to fifth-generation fighters while also detailing bombers, antisubmarine aircraft, and new projects such as the use of unmanned aerial vehicles. He astutely draws connections between aircraft development and political turmoil that plagued the PRC during the economic and technological downfalls throughout the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolutions. Rupprecht also highlights the importance of PRC diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and Russian Federation and analyzes how those relations impacted PRC acquisition of aviation technology.

This book focuses on aircraft development and not operational successes or failures. This is recommended for someone who is interested in the aerodynamic and engine development of the PRC aviation industry and desires a clear understanding of differences and similarities of variants between platforms (e.g., J-8H versus J-8F). However, the reader would have a better understanding of the impact of aircraft development if operational performance were discussed. Some mention is made to operational intentions, but lacks a follow-through. For example, the PRC was incapable of successfully intercepting high altitude US reconnaissance aircraft during the 1960s, and efforts were made to develop an aircraft that could successfully engage aircraft like the U-2. Rupprecht goes on to mention a PRC pilot who attempted to ram the U-2 unsuccessfully, and how ramming was later developed as a tactic, but it does not elaborate on how these tactics were employed—successfully or unsuccessfully.

Finally, the author's intent was to detail how China developed its aviation industry since its inception. One of the biggest surprises in the West has been the development and operational status of the J-20 fifth-generation stealth fighter. It is widely known that the PRC committed industrial espionage against the US and other Western countries to develop the J-20, but the book downplays the importance of how the Chinese acquired information illicitly about the F/A-22 or F-35 to assist in J-20 development.

Dragon Wings is a very thorough and comprehensive catalogue of Chinese military aircraft development and details the challenges, failures, and successes of its aviation industry and is recommended for anyone interested in PRC aircraft development.

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