

## Young (and Not-So-Young) Eagles Needed in China

By George Chao  
June 30, 2005

**China is currently faced with a major dilemma: how to accommodate a rapidly burgeoning aviation industry with an acute shortage of new pilots. Aviation writer and student George Chao analyzes China's current problems and discusses China's options in resolving its pilot shortage and nurturing its booming aviation sector.**

As China's aviation sector primes itself to step into the shoes left by ambitious forecasts touting it as the "world's second largest aviation country" by the year 2020, an underlying dilemma looms and continues to manifest itself in the wake of its sudden aviation boom.

-Economics 101-

On December 7th, 2004, the Jiangsu Provincial Working Arbitration Committee reached a decision. The bottom line had been set—two China Eastern Airlines (CEA) pilots were ordered to pay the airline 388,000 RMB and 338,000 RMB in order to be able to leave the company. However, the arbitrators declined China Eastern's additional suit of 3.5 million RMB each against the ex-employees for their "human resources" fee. This decision came six months after the pilots initially submitted their resignation papers, yet China Eastern Airlines refused to honor those papers, which kept the two workers from being able to find work at another airline.

[Click for large version](#)



One of CEA's Jumbos, the A340-642  
Photo © Sam Chui

On the surface this case looks like a typical disgruntled employer/employee fallout. In actuality, this case is a microcosm of the current Chinese aviation situation: the exponentially-growing demand for pilots and the lack of newly trained pilots is putting an immense strain upon the world's fastest growing aviation sector.

Basic economic principle dictates that in order to maximize the growth of any market/sector, there must first be sufficient resources to sustain this growth. At the same time, extraordinary rates of growth in a sector that is not entirely prepared will often times lead to negative results in the long run. And as China sits back and enjoys its unprecedented aviation growth year after year, the resources which act as the fuel feeding the fire are quickly approaching questionable status.

The court case outlined above illustrates the interesting dynamic of China's aviation training recruitment and the ensuing results. However, to gain proper perspective on this case, one must first understand how China's commercial pilots are recruited and trained, and how this relates to the future of Chinese aviation.

-A Complex Jigsaw Puzzle-

The present pilot situation in China can be traced back to the mentality and the socioeconomic factors of years past. Prior to the aviation boom and the economic prosperity of the new millennium, China was a country in which citizens depended on their government to survive. The best bet for an individual to receive a steady job with modest pay was to enlist in the military. The military would then recommend a position that best fit their characteristics; if an individual had the advantage of having perfect eyesight, they might be placed in the air-training program. Throughout most of China's aviation history, this was the main method of pilot training, and although private flight training academies were available, few had the desires or the resources to fund private pilot training courses.

To this day, the military is still the number one supplier of new pilots for China's commercial aviation market, but now a problem looms in the background: just how much longer can the military sustain this rapidly growing aviation sector?

[Click for large version](#)





The IL-76, representing the might of the Chinese Air Force  
Photo © Chris Wu

#### -Case Closed?-

The aforementioned China Eastern case may actually represent the increased pilot demand issue coming to a head. In the case, the two ex-China Eastern Airlines pilots submitted their resignation papers to China Eastern with the intention of finding new, higher paying positions with a private Chinese airline operator. However, facing lost profits and the potential bargaining leverage for the rest of China Eastern's pilots (if CEA increased the two pilots' pay, they would have to do the same for the rest of the pilots), the airline decided not to honor the resignations. Instead of responding, China Eastern simply allowed this case to go to arbitration, causing the disgruntled employees to be left in between jobs for months until the arbitrators decided the ruling.

When the results of the arbitration returned, the arbitrator awarded China Eastern 388,000 RMB and 338,000 RMB from the former employees for lost income for CEA. However the additional 3.5 million RMB "human resource" fee that CEA was also seeking was turned down. The "human resource" fee is the answer to the problem outlined earlier; when an uneven distribution of supply (pilots) and demand (airlines) arise, the value of one additional pilot skyrockets in relation to his actual cost/worth. The market price of relocating an additional pilot from public service to the entrepreneurial private sector in this case was argued by China Eastern to be 3.5 million RMB. China Eastern Airlines alleged that this 3.5 million RMB "human resource" fee was the market value paid for each of these pilots; however, the arbitrator did not see eye to eye with the airline and declined the suit.

With cases such as this already surfacing, it appears that the strain of the supply relative to demand is already beginning to surface in Chinese aviation.

[Click for large version](#)



Symbolic of the growing aviation industry in China,  
China Xinjiang Airlines is now a part of China Southern Airlines  
Photo © Jim Newton

#### -Where are all the Young Eagles?-

According to Boeing, China will need approximately 10,000 new pilots in the next 20 years, with the bulk of the total (6,500 new pilots) urgently needed within the next 6 years. The situation has become such a priority that airlines are now pre-ordering pilots currently in flight school. In light of the current situation, the next reasonable question is why is this only happening in China, and how does the rest of the world cope with such a dilemma?

China may have the money and the structures to accommodate its rapid aviation growth, but it is quite clear that it has yet to develop the spirit of flying. One reason that the United States is able to sustain the number one aviation sector in the world is partially the result of a reduced emphasis on salary and profit, and an emphasis on the spirit and love of flying.

With its robust general aviation and ultra-light markets, as well as public airspace, the United States has developed a very intricate recruiting system for their next generation of aviators. For example, children within the ages of 11 through 17 can sign up for the Experimental Aircraft Association's (EAA) Young Eagle Program, in which a certified pilot takes a child along for a ride in a private airplane. This kind of youth cultivation ensures that a healthy handful of these kids grow up with the spirit and passion for aviation.

China, on the other hand, has not yet realized this system. Airspace for the most part is still government controlled and there are no existing general aviation or ultra-light programs. At the present moment this problem surfaces in the form of court cases and monetary settlements; but what will happen when the market grows beyond the number of pilots that the military can train in two or three years? What then will happen to the predictions of "second largest aviation nation" in the year 2020?

Long term planning is just as important as how much money is being spent on equipment. China cannot depend solely on new infrastructure and the hundreds of newly imported Airbus and Boeing aircraft to completely fuel the growth of the market. Important support structures such as general aviation, business aviation, ultra-light aviation and public air space are critical to the complete development of the market. The quickest and easiest way to entice new pilots to enter the market is to show them what the major aviation nations already know: that the flying spirit is ultimately fueled by a love of flying, and not by how much potential profit lies within the market.

It is true that this potential problem may hinder future aviation growth in China, but like many other issues in China, the keyword is potential. Recent developments have shown that China has begun taking steps in the right direction. For example, the government is now upgrading pilots with sport aviation licenses to general aviation status, allowing them to fly for profit. This revision points to how just a few changes in policy may just spark the development of the non-existent general aviation sector in China, and contribute to increasing awareness and development within the flying culture.

However, as China continues to encourage youth cultivation and private aviation, the potential problems discussed may only register as a dent in the future of China's aviation sector. According to Gary Young of the international flight training organization Flight Training Australia, although there is

currently a "major shortage of pilots in China," the next 5 to 15 years will be "exciting times" because of the conception and development of "general aviation, charter, business jet, tourism and commercial aviation [in China]." With optimism from foreign firms still sky-high, a little planning and continued execution will be all China needs to cast this issue behind them and continue as the fastest growing aviation market in the world.

[Click for large version](#)



Photo © Thomas Fischer

Written by  
George Chao

*George Chao, 23, is the Productions Director of the China Civil Aviation Report (CCAR), a monthly publication focused on the rapidly expanding Chinese aviation market. Currently residing in Northern California, George is planning to study aviation and the Chinese language first hand in Beijing at the end of the year. This article is a revised version of the February 2005 feature article in the CCAR. The China Civil Aviation Report can be viewed online for free at <http://www.ChinaCivilAviation.com>.*

## 2 User Comments:

**Username:** AirplaneDork [User Info]  
Posted 2005-07-13 19:54:40 and read 15710 times.

True, the next 5 years may be exciting times. China's aviation industry is growing, alongside its demand for oil. However, with the coming oil peak, China may have to curtail its growing oil-based economy demands significantly beyond that time. With a shortage of jet fuel, China and the world will have to reassess their aviation demands and supply. It is likely that beyond the 5-10 year range, China will actually have more pilots than planes that can be flown.

**Username:** Akfotoman [User Info]  
Posted 2005-10-17 18:25:36 and read 15407 times.

This article also points to recently published news about the use of ADS-B in China. While the US aviation industry and air traffic control fight over switching from a ground based air traffic and navigation systems, China will be installing and using a GPS satellite based system. Do to a lack of political resistance China will surge ahead of the US at light speed.

Post your comments on this article:

Username:   
No username? Sign up now!  
Password:   
Forgot Password? Be reminded.

Article related posts only. Other topics here.  
No adverts of any kind. This includes web pages.  
No hostile language or criticizing of others.  
Back all your opinions with facts.  
Do not post copyright protected material  
Check your spelling! [Detailed Rules...](#)

Body:

Read how to include links, pictures and smilies! (opens in new window)  
Please check your spelling before pressing the Post button **once**.

**Discuss other aviation issues in our active Discussion forums!**

[Publish your article on Airliners.net!](#)

[Recommend this article to a friend!](#)

[Read more articles!](#)

[Home](#) | [Photos](#) | [Forums](#) | [News](#) | [Articles](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Aircraft Data](#) | [Search](#) | [Community](#) | [Terms of Use](#)

Partner Sites: [Aviation Videos](#) | [Aviation Photo Gallery](#) | [Answerbag](#) | [How To Articles](#)

[Photos Sitemap](#) | [Forums Sitemap](#)



©Copyright 2010 Demand Media, Inc. All Rights Reserved

Com  
Licen  
Adva  
Float  
Train  
B.C.  
www.a  
SimC  
Train  
Cess  
Recu  
FAA,  
Appro  
www.s  
Fligh  
Beco  
pilot  
Califo  
weat  
flypal  
ICAO  
Aviat  
ESL  
Cont  
www.a