



HIGH HOPES FOR CHINA'S HELICOPTERS

Wu Zhendong,
Founder and Chairman,
Avion Pacific Limited

Interview by Anthony Lam

Wu Zhendong is founder and current Chairman and CEO of Avion Pacific Limited, one of China's leading general aviation service providers since 1993. The entrepreneur and general aviation visionary has also developed a Shenzhen-based company holding an AOC called Kings Aviation, which supports and manages China-based aircraft and various ab-initio and advanced special training services for pilots. As a pioneer in China's business aviation market, Wu began offering consultancy services as well, imparting his knowledge and experience to Western companies including Federal Express, Mobil Oil, NBC, Exxon, Conoco Phillips, and Netjets.

After graduating from Sun Yat-sen University, Wu got his start in the industry when he was assigned to the CAAC. He later joined the state-owned Guangzhou Helicopter Company in 1983, where he dealt with numerous western oil companies like BP and Exxon, who were needing offshore helicopter operations for their newly established Chinese set-ups. Everything was leased at the time, and instructors were brought in from the West. "I was responsible for translating all the flight manuals and pilot training materials," said Wu, who continued: "After spending five years in this role, I spent some time in California to develop my experience and expertise with a western company. Upon returning to China, I made the decision to set up my own company, Avion Pacific."

When Wu started in the industry, the helicopters he leased most frequently were Sikorsky aircraft, which were especially good for offshore operation. "I served as a radio operator and interpreter during that period, accumulated over 1,000 helicopter flight hours in that capacity, and developed a special love for Sikorsky helicopters," said Wu. Believing China would one day purchase many Sikorsky aircraft, Wu approached the company in 1994 and, after extensive background checks, was officially endorsed as their agent in 1997. Several years later, he also became an agent for MD Helicopters. Now nearly twenty years later, he remains an agent for Sikorsky.

Wu views China as a market with great potential for helicopters. The largest sector is offshore, deep-water oil drilling operations in South China. Offshore operations have increased by 10-25% annually in recent years, based on exploration and production by oil companies. Key areas for offshore bases are Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Sanya, Bohai Bay, and Yantai. Forty percent of China's helicopters are involved in offshore operations, in contrast to the Western market, where offshore operations only account for 25% of helicopter usage. China's helicopters are becoming increasingly involved in Search & Rescue and Law Enforcement applications. This is especially true for Sikorsky and Airbus Helicopter, mostly

due to the government's plans for expanding general aviation. EMS operations have yet to begin, but Wu hopes that the potential for this market will be realized through dedication and cooperation in the industry.

Wu has likewise seen profound demand and successfully expanded into the fixed wing market, particularly with Beechcraft's King Air series of propeller aircraft. In 2009, Avion Pacific had become Beechcraft's master dealer, and within a year the company had sold their first two Beechcraft C90 aircraft to Shenzhen Airlines for advanced flight training. The C90 has set a record of flying over 1,400 hours a year, making it the most cost effective high performance trainer in the industry in China. Avion Pacific has further promoted the aircraft to major GA firms in China for special missions including weather modification, geophysical survey, maritime patrol, EMS, commuter transport, aerial mapping, flight inspection, and more.

Wu believes the greatest challenge in China's general aviation sector is the development of the necessary

infrastructure to support the industry. "There are currently just under 200 airports nationwide, a number far short of what is needed to support the current demand in general aviation, much less the future demand," said Wu. The government is encouraging private interests and investments in China's

aviation infrastructure, including flight schools, FBOs, and airports. This, coupled with CAAC's support for the industry, gives Wu great hope for the future.

Wu cites the CAAC's plans for construction of an additional over 90 airports in the next five

years as a reason for optimism. He also hopes to see increased involvement and support from the private sector, creating a cooperative atmosphere in which government and private interests work together to create the assets

that will allow China's aviation market to become one of the world's finest.

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