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## Spotlight: Aviation experts hail strong momentum of China's aviation industry

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China's homegrown large passenger plane C919 makes its maiden flight in Shanghai, east China, May 5, 2017. (Xinhua/Ding Ting)

MOSCOW/WASHINGTON, May 6 (Xinhua) -- China's homegrown C919 passenger plane completed its first public flight test on Friday, marking a milestone in the development of China's civil aviation industry.

The successful flight signals China's entry into the global aviation market, and moves the country one step closer to transforming itself from a manufacturer of low-cost goods to a creator of advanced technology.

**AVIATION AT NEW LEVEL**

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important step in the right direction.

"This event can only be welcome. This indicates that the Chinese aviation industry is gaining momentum and is rising to a new level," said Nikolay Yakubovich, an aviation engineer and aviation historian in Russia.

The twin-engine C919 is made by the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC). With a standard range of 4,075 km, the narrow-body jet is comparable with updated Airbus 320 and Boeing's new generation 737 planes.

Michel Merluzeau, director of Aerospace & Defence Market Analysis for AirInsightResearch in Seattle, was also impressed by the great efforts made by the Chinese government in accelerating innovation.

"What really impresses me with COMAC and with Chinese aerospace industry as a whole is that, we have traditional aerospace cycles in Europe and North America every 10, 15 years," Merluzeau said.

The aviation expert noted that there are two things to understand: First, "the role of Chinese government to accelerate innovation and to push innovation and program very fast." Second, "the ability of COMAC to probably innovate fast and shake up what we see as a cycle here in North America."

Merluzeau also expressed confidence in the future development of COMAC, the Shanghai-based manufacturer of the C919.

"I think by 2030, 2035, COMAC may very well do well in aircraft together to compete with the new aircrafts of Airbus and Boeing," said Merluzeau.

However, despite the successful test flight, it still takes time for the C919 to take off in the market.

### **GAINING EXPERIENCE IN AVIATION**

Shaking the dominance of giants Boeing and Airbus in the near future is unrealistic, as the experts have pointed out, but the Chinese jetliner could be a strong option for global carriers in decades to come.

"I believe that this first Chinese passenger airliner will find a niche, and will occupy an important place in the domestic Chinese market, as well as will start some kind of advance to the outside market," said Vasily Kashin, a senior research fellow at the Center for Comprehensive European and International Studies of the Moscow-based Higher School of Economics (HSE).

Kashin said that C919's development, production and operation will allow China to accumulate experience, and at the next stage, when a new airplane generation or a new significantly improved version of C919 is developed, to release a full-fledged competitor, which can challenge Boeing and Airbus.

"Using a number of existing advantages, including the possibility of some price reduction due to its own very large domestic market and the attraction of cheap credit resources from Chinese state-owned banks, China will be able to compete seriously with American and European producers and catch up with them," Kashin said.

### **FOCUSING ON DOMESTIC MARKET**

A total of 23 foreign and domestic customers, including China's national carrier Air China, have placed orders for 570 aircraft, according to COMAC.

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into business success.

"Over the very long term COMAC is likely to become a major player in the airline segment," said Douglas Royce, senior aerospace analyst at Forecast International, an aerospace market research firm in the United States.

However, the expert also pointed out it is not something that will happen over the next decade, but rather a long-term process that will require ongoing support from the Chinese government.

At least in the early years of service, demand will be centered in the Chinese market and a few satellite markets, said Royce, adding that Airbus and Boeing have spent decades competing fiercely against each other and are lean and mean in the airliner market.

"The world market is so complex and competitive that it is difficult to hope that it will be possible to break into it immediately with a product that will beat all others and drive out all competitors," Kashin said, echoing Royce's remarks.

Boeing predicted last year that China will become the world's top aviation market within 20 years, projecting a demand for more than 6,000 new aircraft in the next two decades with a total value of 1 trillion U.S. dollars.

The C919 will be a strong competitor in this field as it is economical and comfortable, according to a research note from Guosen Securities.

KEY WORDS: *China*

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