

An Analysis of China's Concept of Sea Power

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Introduction

An emerging sea power is usually considered as a critical variable to international power politics. China's growing sea power in the 21st century is such an example. It has become increasingly important for the rest of the world to understand China's sea power. An analysis of this concept should consider, as its starting-point, how China views and uses it. This is as important as the strength of its maritime forces.

This paper examines five aspects of China's concept of sea power. First, China's reflections on its defeat in a maritime war, the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895); second, China's experience of the peaceful employment of its strong sea power, as indicated in its celebration of the 600th anniversary of Zheng He's maritime expeditions; third, China's handling of maritime disputes such as the South China Sea disputes; fourth, China's response to the international maritime order, exemplified by the Chinese naval escort mission in the Gulf of Aden; and finally, China's view of the relationship between its sea power and its pursuit for national development.

The analysis of these five aspects covers almost all scenarios that any nation may experience, i.e. whether it is weak or strong, facing disputes, handling global issues, and engaging in national development. This analysis aims at providing a broader and better understanding of China's sea power.

Reflections on the Defeat in a Maritime War

China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) was a stimulus for China to reflect on its concept of sea power. After the two Opium Wars (1839–1842, 1856–1860), China has been trying to build a modern fleet. By the eve of the Sino-Japanese War, the navy was the first of all the Qing Dynasty's armed forces to transform from a traditional service to a modern one.¹ However, the Chinese navy was defeated by the Japanese navy and China lost the war. The defeat became a focus in China's modern history, and the reflections on this war became important for shaping China's concept of sea power.

A plethora of articles and books have been published on the reasons for China's defeat in this war. Various factors have been launched as explanations, ranging from the efficiency of government, experiences of commanders, strategy and tactics of the navy as well as equipment, to the behind-the-scene factors such as social, economic and culture factors.² A consensus has emerged that the fundamental reason for the defeat was the lack of a seapower thought and doctrine awareness. For instance, the focal points of the two debates on sea defense within the Chinese government between 1874 and 1884 was the buildup of a fleet, leaving the role of the sea power in national defense and grand strategy untouched.³

Since Alfred Mahan, sea power has been closely linked with the nation's fate. Sea power is not only a fleet used for self-defense, but also a powerful means for a country to flex its muscle and pursue its interest in the world. Sea power became a means of statecraft, but due to its negligence of sea power, China suffered defeat and entailed humiliation.

¹ See Jiang Ming, *Longqi piaoyang de jiandui: Zhongguo jindai haijun xing shuai shi* [The fleet with dragon flags flying: the rise and fall of the Qing Dynasty's modern navy] (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian shudian, 2002).

² For a comprehensive summary of 100 years of studies on the Sino-Japanese War, see Wen Da, "Jiawu zhanzheng bainian yanjiu zongshu: 9.17 Jiawu haizhan 106 zhounian jinian zhisan" [A comprehensive summary of 100 years of studies on the Sino-Japanese War, 1894–1895: 106th anniversary on September 17 of the Sino-Japanese War, 1894–1895, Commemorative article], *Jianchuan zhishi* [Naval & merchant ships], <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2000-09-16/5102.html>

³ Shi Diansheng, "Zhongguo jindai haijun jianshe fazhan de ruozhann lishi sikao" [Reflections on modern Chinese naval buildup and development], *Haijun xueshu yanjiu* [Academic studies on the navy], Issue 9 (2000).

Why does China need a navy? In the view of Li Hongzhang, the founder of the Chinese Qing Dynasty navy, the value of a navy was more to support a country's diplomacy than to be used at sea. In 1872 he made this clear when he wrote that "the aim of building our navy is not to sail far on the ocean, but to safeguard territorial integrity and maintain peace."⁴ With his kind of strategic thinking, the guideline for the building of the Northern Naval Fleet was limited to a certain number of ships "to protect China's coast from north to south, to establish prestige by deterring foreign threats, and to safeguard an unshakable foundation for the country." Obviously this was a purely defensive strategy. Due to this, the Northern Naval Fleet was content with its defense capabilities after 1898, and the Qing government stopped giving funds to the navy to procure ships from abroad.⁵ Li Hongzhang's thought on the navy's value was regarded as inactive defense.⁶ Li's employment of the navy was regarded as giving up the command of the sea,⁷ which is believed to be the major reason for the defeat in the war against Japan.

China's defeat was mainly caused by its traditional thinking about sea power, which regarded sea power as "a Great Wall at sea." This made the Chinese navy become a sort of fence at sea and it lost its fundamental function.⁸ Therefore, the lesson learned from the Sino-Japanese War is that to have a correct concept of sea power is as important as the material strength of large ships and heavy artillery.⁹

⁴ Li Hongzhang, "Chouyi zhizao lanchuan weike caiche zhe" [Essay to the Emperor on Shipbuilding Program Should Not Be Suspended], cited in Lei Yi, *Li Hongzhang yu wan Qing sishinian: Cong daobili dao diyi zhongchen* [Li Hongzhang and the last 40 years of late Qing dynasty: from a junior official to the top senior official] (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 2008), pp. 203–207.

⁵ Zhang Wei, "Jindai zhongri haiquan sixiang bijiao" [A comparison of Chinese and Japanese sea power thought in modern times], *Jianchuan zhishi* [Naval & merchant ships], Issue 9 (1994).

⁶ Zhang Wei, "Beiyang haijun de yunyong yu zhongguo zhanlue wenhua chuantong" [The use of the North Fleet and the traditional Chinese strategic culture], *Jianchuan zhishi* [Naval & merchant ships], September 16, 2004, <http://jczs.news.sina.com.cn/2004-09-16/2322227825.html>

⁷ Shi Diansheng, "Haiquan guannian boruo dui jiawu haizhan de yingxiang" [The impact on the Sino-Japanese War, 1894–1895, of the indifference to sea power], *Haijiun xueshu yanjiu* [Academic studies on the navy], Issue 2 (1990).

⁸ Zhang, "Beiyang haijun de yunyong yu zhongguo zhanlue wenhua chuantong."

⁹ Yang Zhiben and Xu Hua, "Cong jiawu haizhan beiyanghaijun de fumie kan zhonghua haiquan sixiang" [Considerations of Chinese sea power thought from the destruction of the North Fleet in Sino-Japanese War, 1894–1895], see *Jiawuhaizhan yu Zhongguo*

Chinese Pride of Zheng He's Peaceful Expedition

Compared to the bitterness and humiliation related to the memory of the Sino-Japanese War, Zheng He's expedition to Xiyang is remembered with pride. It is noteworthy that the Chinese pride was not based on the military power of his fleet, but on the way in which he spread Chinese civilization and tried to maintain international order.

To celebrate the 600th anniversary of Zheng He's voyages on July 11, 2005, the Chinese government appointed a committee, including fifteen agencies such as the Ministry of Communication, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From 2003 to 2005, the committee took the initiative to a variety of programs including maritime knowledge contests, speech contests, summer camps, and academic activities. Apart from the activities organized by government agencies, the Chinese military also organized programs. The most important one was a symposium run by the Institute of Naval Military Academic Studies, the think tank of the PLA Navy (PLAN). The participants were from agencies related to maritime issues within the PLA, central government agencies, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and Beijing University.

All the commemorative activities sent a clear message focusing on non-violence, safeguarding sea lanes and stabilizing international order. For example, on July 7, 2004, one member of the preparatory committee, Deputy Minister of Communication Xu Zuyuan declared at a press conference:

Zheng He's seven voyages to the West explains why a peaceful emergence is the inevitable outcome of the development of Chinese history. The essence of Zheng's voyages does not lie in how strong the Chinese navy once was, but in that China adhere to peaceful diplomacy when it was a big power.¹⁰

jindai haijun [The Sino-Japanese War 1894–1895 and the modern Chinese navy] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1990; Shi Diansheng, "Beiyang haijun he juawu zhanzheng qian de Zhongguo junshi biange" [The North Fleet and the Chinese military revolution before the Sino-Japanese War, 1894–1895], *Junshi lishi yanjiu* [Military history studies], Issue 3 (2004).

¹⁰ "China celebrates ancient mariner to demonstrate peaceful rise," People's Daily Online, July 8, 2004, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200407/08/eng20040708_148861.html

The symposium held by the Institute of Naval Military Academic Studies concluded that,

in contrast with earlier Western sea adventures filled with colonial invasion and robbery, Zheng He's seven voyages advocated peace and good neighbor relations, strengthened the communication between China and Asian and African nations, promoted the spread of Chinese culture, leading to enhanced economic ties and friendship among peoples.¹¹

Articles on major websites in China also reiterated China's promise of "no occupation of even an inch of the land of another nation, no robbery of any properties of local people," which was reflected in Zheng He's voyage.¹² Even in the pre-modern historical tributary system of the Ming Dynasty, China's maritime diplomacy was not aimed at conquering and occupying land, nor even seeking economic profit, but aimed at political and cultural identity.¹³ Some believed that Zheng He's voyages "contributed to building harmonious international relations," while others held that the Ming Dynasty did not bully the world with its powerful maritime forces, but opened up a Silk Road at sea, spread civilization and science and technology, and created peaceful order in the turbulent Asian and African world."¹⁴

This kind of value among the Chinese military, government and general public showed that there is a deep cultural and psychological basis preferring benevolent statecraft to hegemonic statecraft, pursuing a stable international order by peaceful means. When Zheng He's voyages took place, China

¹¹ Haijun junshi xueshu yanjiusuo, "Haijun jinian Zheng He xiixiyang 600 zhounian xueshu yantao huizong shu" [Summaries of a seminar commemorating the 600th anniversary of Zheng He's voyages to the Xiyang], http://www.jszd.gov.cn/art/2007/9/1/art_1127_60555.html. For details of this seminar, see Haijun junshi xueshu yanjiusuo, ed., "Haijun jinian Zheng He xiixiyang 600 zhounian xueshu yantao huilun wenhuibian" [A collection of essays presented at the seminar commemorating the 600th anniversary of Zheng He's voyages to the Xiyang] (June 2005).

¹² To publish on the internet is also an important way to express opinions on public affairs compared to academic publications and political news release.

¹³ Wang Dongqing, *Mingchao chaogong tixi yushi liushi jixiren ruhua celue* [The tribute system of the Ming Dynasty and Western strategies for entering China in the 16th century], PhD diss., Fudan University (2005), available at China Doctoral Dissertations Full-text Database.

¹⁴ "Jinian Zheng He xi xiyang 600 zhounian huodong de Beijing he yiyi" [Background and significance of the 600th anniversary commemorating the adventures of Zheng He], Sina News, <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2004-06-13/1213203901.html>

was one of the strongest nations in the world that had the ability to establish colonies abroad as some Western countries did, but China chose not to do that. It is safe to say that brute force is incompatible with China's strategic traditions. Today, all sectors of Chinese society think highly of China's way of dealing with the outside world, which is very important, especially when China is again growing strong.

One fact that particularly needs to be noticed is China's criticism of the negative side of the Western sea power strategy, while it is so proud of its own. Chinese scholars are very critical of how imperialism reflected in traditional Western sea power strategy. Regarding China's strategic tradition, scholars lament the feature of focusing on the land while ignoring the sea, and passive defense which led to China's humiliation with the foreign invasions. They reiterate that China should get rid of these negative factors in its strategic thought. At the same time, they also emphasize that China should continue to uphold the positive elements of its traditional strategic thought, such as its opposition to the use of brute force, its belief in the use of sea power to enhance the technological and cultural communication; and its advocacy of the principle of peaceful coexistence in handling international relationships. The new expression of this tradition is the pursuit of common security of the whole world, which is embodied in "the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" and "the new concept of security."¹⁵ What the Chinese navy learned from Zheng He's experience is that "the positive and progressive maritime security concept...is against using brute force, robbery, and for safeguarding the sea lanes and keeping maritime peace."¹⁶ It is justified to say that imperialism is not a value pursued by China's navy.

¹⁵ Zuo Liping, "Lunzhong xi haijun zhanlue lilun zhili shicha yi" [On the historical differences of naval strategies between China and Western countries], *China Military Science*, No. 5 (2000); Gu Tongxiang and Zheng Bo, "Lunzi Ma Han yilai meiguo haijun zhanlue de bubian yinsu" [On the invariant factors of American naval strategies after Alfred Thayer Mahan], *Haijun xueshu yanjiu* [Naval academic studies], No. 1 (2002); Xu Qi, "Lunhai quanli lunfa zhanzhi yu zhongguo haiquan shijian" [Sea power theory and Chinese sea power practice], *Haijun junshi xueshu* [Naval military academics], No. 4 (2001); Haijun Junshi Xueshu Yanjiusuo [The Navy's Military Academy], "Haijun jinian Zheng He xiaxyang 600 zhounian xueshu yantao huizong shu" [Summary of the naval symposium on the 600th anniversary commemorating the adventures of Zheng He], http://www.jszd.gov.cn/art/2007/9/1/art_1127_60555.html

¹⁶ Li Hailin, Zhang Li and Hu Desheng, "Zheng He de junshi wajia ocheng jiudui haijun jianshe de qishi" [Zheng He's military and diplomatic achievements as an inspiration for the navy's developments], *Journal of Naval University of Engineering*, No. 2, Issue 2 (June 2005).

Handling Maritime Disputes

The South China Sea territorial disputes, which are believed to have the highest possibility of triggering conflicts, provide a good case for study. The Chinese government pursues a policy to settle disputes peacefully or temporarily put aside disputes and seek mutual benefits.¹⁷ Although the conciliatory policy and “soft power”¹⁸ of China has not completely reduced neighboring countries’ concern over its growing naval power, China does not have any inclinations to enlarge its international influence or settle territorial disputes by coercive means. M. Taylor Fravel has pointed out that China chooses not to use military power, even though force would be a feasible choice in disputes.¹⁹ In handling the South China Sea issue, China has not used coercive deterrence demonstrating its military strength. On the contrary, it tried to conciliate its neighbors so as to eliminate the factors that would increase tension.²⁰

In addition to political conciliations and restraints on the use of military force, China has made great efforts since mid-1990s to adjust its behavior to accord with the requirements of mutual conventions and declarations; signaling its will to share its development benefits with other countries in this region. The Chinese government has adopted a cooperative position toward regional multilateral arrangements by recognizing the dominating position of some mid-size and small countries in ASEAN and by actively joining and accepting the regional convention and regimes created by ASEAN.

¹⁷ M. Taylor Fravel, “Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China’s Compromise in Territorial Disputes,” *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005), pp. 46–83.

¹⁸ Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China’s Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); John Garofano, “China-Southeast Asia Relations: Problems and Prospects,” in Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes eds., *Asia Looks Seaward: Power and Maritime Strategy* (Westport, Conn.: London: Praeger Security International, 2008), pp. 176–78; Cao Yunhua, “Yuanqin buru jinlin: Zhongguo jiaru Dongnanya Youhao Hezuo Tiaoyue de Yiyi” [A near neighbor is better than a distant cousin: The significance of China joining the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia], *World Affairs*, No. 20 (2003).

¹⁹ M. Taylor Fravel, “Zhongguo junshi jueqi chutan” [A preliminary analysis of China’s military rise], *Zhongguo guoji zhanlue pinglun* [China international strategy review] (2009), pp. 292–311.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

The most recent evidence is that project designed by ASEAN's East Asia Community "10+6" in which China is regarded as an equal partner with other small countries rather than a great power with some prestige. With Australia and Japan, the introduction of these two U.S. allies into the East Asia Community increases the balancing power against China. However, the Chinese government chooses to support this project, because China wants to be identified with and accepted by the ASEAN countries. It is dedicated to "reduce ASEAN's concerns and fears, and to enhance mutual trust and avoid setback of regionalization."²¹

Any serious and objective assessment of the East Asian security would conclude that China's reluctance to use or threat to use military power in the South China Sea territorial disputes and its efforts to work with ASEAN with great patience and sincerity should be considered one of the main reasons for lasting peace and stability in East Asia in the past decade.²²

²¹ Qin Yaqing and Wei Ling, "Jiegou, jincheng yu daguo de shehuihua: Dongya gong-tongti jianshe yu Zhongguo jueqi" [Structure, process and great power socialization: The construction of the East Asian Community and China's rise], in Zhu Feng and Robert S. Ross, eds., *Zhongguo jueqi: Lilun yu zhengce shijiao* [China's rise: Theoretical and political perspectives] (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 2008), pp. 222–64.

²² Liu Zhongmin, "Lengzhan houdong nanya guojia nanhai zhengce de fazhan qu-xiang yu Zhongguo de zhengce sikao" [The development trends of the policies on the South China Sea of Southeast Asian Countries], *Guoji wenti luntan* [International forum] (Autumn 2008).

China's Position on International Maritime Order

In a way that differs from the sea power tradition of the United Kingdom and the United States, China has considered the sea as a natural Great Wall, a protective screen and not as a passage for its overseas expansion, since the most powerful ocean navy in the world was abandoned by the Chinese Ming Dynasty after Zheng He's seven expeditions in the early 15th century. The growing experience of the Chinese navy in modern times is the product of its efforts to resist foreign invasions. Constant political turbulence made it impossible for China to foster a Western-style concept of sea order. China's main contributions to modern sea order are its efforts to facilitate the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, through working with other third world countries to seek legitimate sea rights of coastal countries at the UN conferences on the Law of the Sea. Naturally, the Chinese concept of sea order is also a result of resisting foreign invasions from sea, and participating in the development of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. This unique procedure results in the deep combination and embedment of sovereign principles and international law in the core ideas of Chinese sea order theory.

On December 20, 2008, China announced that it would dispatch two destroyers and one replenishment vessel for an escorting mission against piracy in the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao stated that China's decision was based on the UN authorization and the requirements of the Somali government. He also said that China will "conduct the escorting mission strictly in accordance with the resolutions of the UN Security Council and related international law."²³ A statement by a spokesman of the Ministry of National Defense clearly expressed the willingness of the Chinese navy to work together with navies of other countries to safeguard international sea order. The Chinese navy would like to, together with other navies, "enhance all range cooperation in

²³ "Zhongguo zhengfu jue ding pai hai jun jian ting fu yading wan, su mali hai yu zhi-xing hu hang ren wu" [Chinese government decision to send naval crafts to exercise escort missions in the gulf of Aden and Somalia waters], Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/xwfw/fyrth/t473950.htm>

safeguarding international seaborne security and improve the capabilities to mutually respond new challenges and threats.”²⁴

This was the first time for the navy of the People’s Republic of China conducted a combat mission outside its home waters in modern times. China does not show an impulse or any desire to use force, even when it has the capability and opportunities of other naval powers to conduct overseas missions or safeguard its own benefits and interests. On the contrary, in addition to the highlighted prudence and caution, the Chinese government explicitly expressed that it would only take actions within the framework of international law.

The Liberation Army Daily published an article which complemented the above information.²⁵ The article explicates the laws and regulations that Chinese navy would comply with in international waters, including exclusive economic zones. In international waters, the Chinese navy should abide by treaties and conventions on military actions that the Chinese government has signed. In the territorial waters of other countries, although enjoying the right of harmless passage, the Chinese navy need to accord with the laws and regulations on passage in territorial waters of the related countries as well as international law, in order to avoid causing damages to the coastal countries. The article also points out that all countries’ fleets and ships enjoy full right of free navigation, the Chinese fleet also needs to respect the right of navigation of the fleet and ships of other countries. Even when it takes military actions against pirates with the authorization of the UN, the Chinese navy should also abide by the “principles of moderate strike and humanitarianism.” In addition, “until its safety is threatened, the Chinese navy would not launch first strike.”²⁶

This article in the Liberation Army Daily reveals China’s consistent position. While China requests other countries to respect its rights as a coastal country, when they exercise their right of free navigation, China also applies this principle in its dealings with other coastal countries during the Chinese navy’s escort mission. The principles and position in international waters held by China reflect its consciousness as a responsible power.

²⁴ Zhongguo net, <http://www.hnwchina.com/news/gn/131082.html>

²⁵ “Zhongguo fu suomali huhang junjian xiangyou duoxiang huomianquan” [Chinese convoy ship in Somalia enjoys rights of immunity], *Jiefang junbao* [Liberation Army Daily], December 22, 2008.

²⁶ “Ribei dui Zhongguo junjian fu suomali huhang biaoshi ‘jiaoly’” [Japan feels anxious about Chinese Navy’s escort missions in Somalia], *Global Times*, December 22, 2008.

China's perception of the rights and obligations of sea order and its behavior is based on its perception of the international order. In the past three decades, China's international role has changed dramatically from keeping an alert and scared stance aimed to topple the international order, to a player who makes efforts to integrate into the current international order and is committed to act as a responsible power.²⁷ The Chinese navy takes action for maritime security in a prudent and gradual manner, so as to avoid provoking the suspicion and revenge of countries dominating the current international maritime order. When these dominant powers express doubts about and take precautions against China's growing strength and pursuit of its interest, China chooses to cooperate²⁸ and enhance its influence within the framework of international organizations and international laws, the way which is considered as more legitimate. In handling its relations with other developing countries that have possible conflicting interests, China advocates to "highlight the long-term strategic interest and respect the other party's interest arguments."²⁹ It can be concluded that China is not discontented with or hostile to the existing international order, nor wants to resort to military force to achieve its goals.

²⁷ Hu Jian, "Zhongguo guoji juese zhuanhuan yu guoji shehui de renzhi" [The change of China's international role and its perceptions of international society], *Contemporary International Relations*, No. 8 (2006); Qin Yaqing and Wei Ling, "Jiegou, jincheng yudaguo de shehuihua," pp. 222–64.

²⁸ Zhu Feng, "Zhongguo heping jueqi: yu danji de guanxi" [China's peaceful rise: The relations with the Sole Polar], in Zhu and Ross, eds., *Zhongguo jueqi*, pp. 222–64.

²⁹ *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* [Selected works of Deng Xiaoping], Vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), p. 330.

China's View of the Relations between its Sea Power and its National Development

Many foreign analysts believe that it is inevitable that China will build a powerful navy, since the country relies so much on overseas energy and commerce.³⁰ Looking back at the Western countries' paths to be the masters of world order, sea power was of extraordinary significance as Alfred Mahan showed in his well known book.³¹ It is a type of resource whose absence predisposes states to a passive role as consumers of the world order.³² According to this Western logic, China may become a devastating power with its newly achieved sea power, which means that China will grow at the expense of the West.

This will become a major concern when China's sea power cannot meet the requirements of the country's economic development. Some analysts believe that sea power will become much more important in a globalized era. Any nation who wants to become prosperous and strong needs to keep the resource market and sea lanes safe.³³ However, due to China's unfavorable geographical location, the "Malacca Dilemma" exemplifies China's concern of the security of strategic energy sea lanes. Whoever controls the Malacca Strait can put the hands on China's strategic energy sea lanes and hurt its national security at will.³⁴ In brief, in the view of extremely anxious people, China will not be able to ensure its equal right of competing fairly with other powers to obtain access to resources and global markets without the support of its sea power. That is to say, without a strong sea power,

³⁰ As to this kind of arguments, see James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, *Chinese Naval Strategy in the 21st Century: The turn to Mahan* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

³¹ A. T. Mahan, *Haiqun lun* [The influence of sea power upon history, 1660–1783] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2006); *Yazhou wenti jiqi dui guoji zhengzhi de yingxiang* [The problem of Asia: Its effect on international politics] (Shanghai: Shanghai sanlian shudian, 2007).

³² George Modelski and William R. Thompson, *Sea Power in Global Politics, 1494–1993* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 11.

³³ Liu Yijian, "Zhongguo weilai de haijinjianshe yu haijun zhanlue" [China's naval buildup and the naval strategy in future], *Zhanlue yu guanli* [Strategy and management], Issue 5 (1999).

³⁴ Li Xiaojun, "Lun Haiquan dui zhongguo shiyou anquan de yingxiang" [The effects of sea power on China's oil security], *International Forum*, No. 7 (2004).

China's security will be easily threatened. Its national objective of being a "medium-developed country" will become an empty dream, unless it can be supported adequately by its domestic resources. Therefore, it is imperative that China becomes a part of the world resource allocation system.³⁵

Then, how does China view the relationships between its sea power and its national development? To bring in the internal and external ramifications of this concern, on March 14, 2004, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao declared that China's rising will be based on "its own conditions; it stands on its own feet, insists on self-reliance, counts on broad domestic market, abundant labor resource and rich funds, as well as the innovative mechanisms brought about through reform." As for the relationship between China's rising and the world, he pointed out that China will develop its economic and trade relations with any friendly country abiding by the principles of equality and reciprocity.³⁶ In 2005 the Chinese government issued its white paper *China's Peaceful Road to Development* focusing on the transparency of Chinese policies and aimed at relieving the concerns of the international community over China's rising. According to the white paper, "to keep world peace and to enhance mutual development have become the national will of China...keep in tune with the time of globalization, endeavor to achieve mutual benefit and development." By saying that its development needs a peaceful environment, China is telling the world that it does not endorse the historical cases that realized the dream of becoming prosperous and strong through war.

The main problems China is facing are the inconsistency between underdeveloped economy and people's increasing requirements on material and cultural issues, between social and economic development and the pressure from demography, resource and environment issues. Historical experience indicates that self-reliance is the fundamental way to resolve China's development issues. This is not only a responsibility for the Chinese people, but also for peoples of the world. This is one major principle which guarantees the peaceful road to development for China. China will not transfer its

³⁵ Zhang Wenmu, "Jingji Quanqiu hua yu zhongguo haiquan" [Economic globalization and China's sea power], *Strategy and Management*, No. 1 (2003).

³⁶ "Wen Jiabao zongli zai shijie quanguo renda erci huiyi jizhe zhaodai huishang dazhong waiji zhewen" [Answers by Prime Minister Wen Jiabao at a press conference at the Second Session of the 10th National People's Congress], Xinhua net, March 31, 2004.

problems and difficulties to other countries, not to mention develop China by exploiting other countries.³⁷

This declaration by the Chinese government indicates that China will not tread the way of the West. China will not colonize other countries and peoples, will not occupy the territories, markets and investments of others by force. China believes that the source of national prosperity are industrialization internally, and global free trade under fair rules externally.

The PLA shares this view about globalization and China's security policy. In an article published in 2006, General Zhang Qinsheng, the Deputy Chief of General Staff (then the commander of the Guangzhou military region), pointed out that "China really needs a lasting, stable and peaceful environment, and to concentrate on its economic construction. It is hardly feasible for China to invest huge resources on unnecessary arsenals beyond China's basic security needs." Although peace and development are still the theme of the time, non-traditional security issues including regional conflicts, piracy and terrorism have become new sources of instability, while the traditional security issues are still unresolved. General Zhang believes that the effective approach to keep peace in the new security environment would be "to maintain global strategic balance" and "to enhance international military cooperation" which is "a common obligation" of the world. For the sake of this, China will bear the obligation as a great power, which in turn will require it to build certain military capabilities.³⁸

Regarding the newly achieved capacities of the PLAN, General Zhang pointed out that China has a tradition of using its force peacefully:

The capacity of one nation does not indicate what it will use, but only what it has. Whether one nation uses its force to expand, to threaten other nations or not will be determined by its cultural tradition, its idea of government, its foreign policy and military strategy.

For example, Zheng He's fleet in the Ming Dynasty was the most powerful fleet in the world when it conducted its seven expeditions. This fleet

³⁷ News Office of the National Council of the PRC, *Zhongguo de heping fazhan daolu* [China's peaceful road to development], Xinhua net, December 22, 2005.

³⁸ Zhang Qinsheng, "Zhongguo de heping fazhan daolu yu guofang xiandaihua" [China's peaceful road to development and the modernization of national defense], *Study Times*, No. 361 (November 2006).

increased friendly exchange and communication between different civilizations to more than 30 Asian and African countries instead of militarily conquering countries.³⁹

A recently published book in China, *National Maritime Security*, reveals China's official view on the relations between sea power and national prosperity. The authors are from the Institute of Naval Military Academic Studies, the College of Naval Command, and the foreign affairs office of CPC Central Committee and the book represents, to a certain degree, the consensus among the PLAN and the CPC. The authors contend:

Although Mahan's theory still has its "reasonable value," the high interdependence of global economy prevents any country from using its force at its will. The times when a one country achieves maritime security through war and hegemony has gone forever.⁴⁰

They also point out:

The total war of occupying and conquering another nation which prevailed in the era of imperialism times has gone. Any nation who wants to take this risky path will pay a big price. Resolving international disputes by peaceful means is possible and will be well received by developing countries.⁴¹

The authors believe that modern nations should calculate interest, capacity and cost reasonably. By acting in this way, they can pursue national maritime security by means different than the West in the past.

In summary, there is a consensus among the Chinese government and PLA leaders as well as the think tanks of the PLAN and the CPC, that China does not regard aggressive sea power as an effective means to pursue national development. The nature of China's sea power remains defensive.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Zhang Wei and Feng Liang, eds., *Guojia haishang anquan* [National maritime security] (Beijing: Haichao chubanshe, 2008), p. 506.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 19–20.

Concluding Remarks

The above analysis has revealed three differences between China's sea power and that of Western countries. The first one is the different origins. China was awakened to the modern concept of sea power due to the strong stimulation of "deep hurts" caused by the invasion from the sea by Western countries. The driving force behind the growth of China's sea power is its passive response to foreign invasion instead of active pursuit for external expansion. The second one is the different background. The rapid growth of Western sea power took place at a time of imperialism and colonialism, when a zero-sum game was the rule. China's sea power has grown in an age of globalization, when China realized that any country in the current age can only use its sea power to create a peaceful environment for its national development rather than to rob resources from other countries in order to increase its wealth. The third one is the different roles. Western sea power played an important role for establishing and maintaining the current international system, within which China's sea power has developed. As a weak new participant in the modern era, China relies for its maritime security more on international laws and harbors expectations for the rule of law instead of the rule of the jungle. Therefore, there are good reasons for foreseeing that China's sea power, which is defensive in nature, will play a positive role in the existing international system instead of seeking to overthrow it and establish a new one.

There are clear differences between China's perception of sea power and that of Western countries. However, these differences do not constitute an easy promise that China will not use its sea power under any circumstances. In terms of technology and tactics, the use of China's sea power to pursue the success of a maritime war is the same as the Western countries. However, China will not repeat the Western countries' experience at the strategic level in deciding whether or not to employ its sea power, and it is this which makes the study of China's sea power concept relevant.

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