

***Translator's Explanatory Note:** This article is unabashed advocacy for China's sea power by one of China's leading national security experts closely tied to the People's Liberation Army. Sea power, argues the author, is vital to China's economic and political survival because (1) the Mahanian Sea Power theory still is applicable to China; (2) due to the existence of the United States, our world is still predominantly ruled by Hobbesian Law whereby the strong bully the weak; and (3) the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) taught China painful lessons about the importance of Sea Power. The author unambiguously argues that China needs to drastically increase its naval budget, ought to give up the romantic notion that "international cooperation" will be reliably successful in keeping China's sea lines of communication (SLOCs) open, and, finally, should not fear provoking strong reaction to its naval build-up from the United States.*

Sea Power and China's Development

Ni Lexiong

Eight years ago, while engaging in the study of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.) figure Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga) from the perspective of war and civilizations, I discovered that China's then land power tradition, which had been based upon an agriculture-oriented economy, could hardly match the sea power tradition of the West, which had been based upon a maritime trade economy. After the Western civilization became dominant in world history, as part of the Mediterranean civilization, the West has clearly demonstrated the universal understanding of a superiority of sea power to land power. Against this background, I have been frequently contemplating questions such as how China can complete the transition from its tradition of land power to that of sea power, how China's future sea power strategy should adapt to its rapid growth, and how China should deal with future potential challengers.

A recent re-reading of Alfred Mahan's classic, "The Influence of Sea Power upon History" has led me to the discovery that the rapid self-awareness of the necessity of sea power in China's society since the 1890s was remarkably similar to what happened in England and Holland in the 17th century. When a nation embarks upon a process of shifting from an "inward-leaning economy" to an "outward-leaning economy," the arena of national security concerns begins to move to the oceans. Consequently, people start to pay attention to sea power. This is a phenomenon in history that occurs so frequently that it has almost become a rule rather than an exception. Therefore, it is inevitable that such a shift is taking place in today's China.

Historical experience tells us that the ultimate drive to develop sea power is overseas trade. In a nation's economic structure, if overseas trade does not constitute a significant portion, there is no foundation for developing a strong and long-lasting sea power. As early as the 1950s, we vowed that "we must establish a powerful navy," yet the economy at the time was not "outward-leaning," our ambition for a strong navy has not been realized and our navy has been backwards. In recent decades, as the overseas trade sections in our national economy have grown bigger and bigger, the question of a "life line at sea" has become more and more important. Therefore, the need to establish strong sea power has become more and more imperative. The political factor of Taiwan's threat to declare independence has undoubtedly added to the sense of urgency for such a need.

What would happen to a nation with an "outward-leaning economy" if it were forced to engage in a war, and lost the war because of the loss of command of the sea? Holland, the 17th century's

Mistress of the Seas, provides a typical example. In the first Anglo-Dutch war (1652 to 1654), the Dutch were unable to gain the command of the English Channel and to effectively protect their own merchant ships. As a result, when the war entered the 18th month, Holland's maritime shipping became completely paralyzed, and the main sources of the nation's revenue, i.e., fishing and commerce, were almost completely exhausted. Shops were closed, factories halted operations; beggars could be found everywhere in the country, with wild grasses growing all over the streets; 1,500 apartments in the capital city of Amsterdam could not find tenants. In the end, the Dutch were forced to accept a humiliating peace treaty with the British in order to avoid the fate of the nation's complete annihilation.

This war gave a stern warning to the rising England and to other countries that would rise up later: for a nation with an "outward-leaning economy" to maintain domestic prosperity, it must first maintain power overseas. This symbiosis between a strong nation and a strong sea power appeared in history as far back as ancient Greece and Rome, making it the thematic rule in the historical evolution of the Mediterranean civilization. Today, the United States is strong and powerful, because it has an unmatched sea power. It has been pointed out that America's path to wealth and strength was revealed by Alfred Mahan over one hundred years ago. Currently, China is rising, while our nation's economic structure is completing the epic shift from an inward-leaning to an outward-leaning one, the choice of a sea power strategy has become an urgent task.

The Realistic Rationale for a Sea Power Strategy

China's choice for a future sea power strategy cannot simply be based upon Mahan's traditional sea power theory. Instead, it should be based upon the level of world civilization. The whole question for us nowadays hinges entirely upon how we judge the time we are living in, and how we judge the level of world civilization in the distant future.

At present, there are two opinions on this. The first group thinks China must establish a strong naval force, "without a strong Navy, there will be no great future for China." The other group believes that China should not act by following the traditional sea power theory in pursuing a strong Navy, because today's world situation is different from the time of Mahan, and that "the globalization of the world's economy has made various countries' interests interconnected, mutually dependent upon each other to a greater degree, and that if a country wants to preserve its life line at sea, the only way to do so is to go through "cooperation" rather than the traditional "solo fight;" and therefore the approach that one nation should control all international waterways has become obsolete. In fact, this second group argues, "cooperation" is China's only alternative. They further believe that if China sticks to a policy of naval build-up, it may well alert today's naval hegemon, thus making China's naval development a self-destructive play with fire, and if not careful, China will be doomed to repeat Germany's futile search for sea power that led to the nation's defeats in two World Wars.

Opinions expressed by the first group obviously inherit Mahan's traditional Sea Power Theory, which was based upon historical cases of practicing sea power. The second group argues their case according to the tendency of "economic globalization" that appeared at the turn of the last century. Regarding the first group's argument, we must answer this question: is it absolutely impossible for the process of "economic globalization" to obviate the foundation for the traditional sea power strategy? Regarding the second group's argument, we must answer another question: is it certain that past history will not repeat itself in the process of "economic globalization?" We have no answers to either of these questions now; therefore we still need

more time to mull over the rationale for the two choices of sea power strategy presented by these two groups.

However, what should be the evidence to support China's future strategy of sea power? If we study more carefully, we will discover that the traditional Sea Power Theory represented by Alfred Mahan epitomizes the sea power practice over the past two thousand years from ancient Greece and Rome to the 19th century, and has become the rule of history during a definite time and space. This rule of history resulted from the nature and level of certain civilization. To put it more succinctly, Mahan's Sea Power Theory came about as a result of the Hobbesian Law.

Thomas Hobbes, the great 17th Century English political philosopher, regarded the society without authority and restraints as a society with the natural state whereby individuals waged war against one another. Under this system, the society follows the natural law of "survival of the fittest." Although people cannot be regarded exactly as states, in a situation where there is no force bigger than that of the state with which to regulate the relationship among states, it is in essence a situation of "each individual waging war against each other." To make our discussion here easier, we call this period of human history "the Hobbesian Era," the "survival of the fittest" phenomenon the Hobbesian Law. It then becomes obvious that the emergence of "the Hobbesian Era" and the rise of Mahan's Sea Power Theory in fact share historical inevitability. The Hobbesian Law and the Mahan Theory are a symbiosis, with logical inner connections.

Therefore, the choice for China's future strategy of sea power should not be simply based upon the traditional Sea Power Theory as represented by Mahan; instead, it should be based upon the level of world civilization. Our task right now is to decide how we are going to judge the level of civilization we are currently in or the civilization we are going to embrace in a future. That is to say, we should decide whether the "Hobbesian Era" had ended already, or whether it is in the process of coming to an end. We should also decide whether the world we are in is marching toward what Emmanuel Kant called "an era of eternal peace," whether we have indeed already entered an era of perpetual peace.

By theoretical reasoning, if the world civilization has already entered an era of eternal peace, or at least it has irreversibly shifted from the Hobbesian Era to the Era of Eternal Peace, and we still insist on the traditional Sea Power Theory, then we are moving against the tide of history and what we insist on doing following the Mahan theory will be stupid and unwise. On the other hand, if the world is still ruled by the Hobbesian Law, and we instead embrace Kant's idea of an era of "eternal peace" as the basis to guide our sea power strategy, that would be equally unwise and stupid, because it is tantamount to replacing reality with idealism.

What kind of era are we living in then? If we observe the world since the end of the Cold War, we will see that the Kosovo War, the war on international terrorism, the war in Afghanistan, and the U.S.-Iraqi war have come one after another. Let us also look at the situation in our own neighborhood; we will see many ominous developments as well--the Taiwan unification issue, the rampant surge of Taiwan's independence forces, the dispute over the Nansha (Spratly) islands, the dispute over Diaoyu Island (Senkaku), especially the development in Japan whereby some opposition party members recently suggested to the Japanese government that force be used to preserve the so-called energy rights in the Eastern Sea, and finally the latest "U.S.-Japan Security Agreement" which clarifies its intention to interfere with the situation in the Taiwan Strait. All this indicates to us that in all the disputes involving great national interests, when political and peaceful means are exhausted, the ultimate solution to use force to settle disputes cannot be

excluded. Of course we do not deny there are cases in which peaceful compromises have been made, but without any question, the Hobbesian Law is far from fading away from the historical stage, and the Hobbesian Era is far from being over. Kant's "era of eternal peace" is far from becoming a reality! Only when the Hobbesian Law recedes out of sight will we see the disappearance of the traditional Sea Power theory. Since today and in a long time in the future our world is governed by the Hobbesian Law, China should never ignore historical experience and the traditional Sea Power concepts. It is not only required by reality and the future for China to build a strong Navy, it is also required by logical reasoning.

Perhaps someone may point out that if every nation handles its national defense by the Hobbesian Law, all nations will fall into the vicious cycle of a "security dilemma," then when will mankind get out of the spell of the Hobbesian Law? When will we enter the "era of eternal peace?" To this question, our answer is this: first, is there any country in history that is willing to sacrifice its future national security, or to risk their children and grandchildren's lives to reach Kant's eternal peace? Secondly, can our generation alone accomplish what several of our next generations will hardly be able to accomplish? In addition, all kinds of peace in history have been supported by force. Without blunt force, there is never any peace. Who can imagine Kant's eternal peace without being supported by blunt force?

At present, we can only conclude that the world has not stepped out of the Hobbesian Era. But we cannot know whether the world has irreversibly been marching toward an eternal peace. Although we wish there was such a march, in reality such a movement does not exist. Those who believe we don't need a strong navy because "international cooperation" is the only choice we have to guarantee our life line at sea are misguided in imagining a false premise, i.e., the world has irreversibly been marching toward an eternal peace. This is to use wishful thinking to replace "uncertainty." China's considerations for sea power strategy should not be based upon our wishful thinking, but on a realistically established sense of "uncertainty."

Based upon this understanding of our future's uncertainty, and upon the premise that the Hobbesian Law still rules the world, it is China's necessary choice to build up a strong sea power. China's sea power strategy should be constructed in such a fashion so that we can simultaneously deal with these two possibilities: first, we will be able to deal with the threats posed to our "outward-leaning economy" by some strong nations in the Hobbesian era; second, we will be able to deal with the contingency that should a Kantian "Multinational Alliance" or a "World Republic" emerge, we can become a part of the world Navy under such world republic. But during the transition from the Hobbesian Era to the "Era of Eternal Peace," China's strong Navy, guided by the principle of peace and development, will play an active role.

In sum, we can now conclude that China must establish a strong Navy. But this conclusion is not based upon the simple narratives of history, but upon the assessment of the level of world civilization in our time.

History Lessons from the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895)

Lack of an expenditure of 7.5 million taels of silver on defense before the war cost China 600 million taels of silver after the war. This is one of the most important historical lessons of the First Sino-Japanese War. Monetary loss alone was 80 times the amount that would have been

wisely spent on the military before the war. In addition, China had to give away Taiwan to Japan and suffered from various kinds of economic and non-economic losses as a result of the persistent internal instability and foreign wars.

One point of view holds that a buildup for a strong navy is enormously costly. In addition, during peacetime, without wars to fight, we will have to spend a huge sum to maintain the navy. Furthermore, with constant advancement in science and technology, military technology and weapons equipment require constant updating and replacement as well. This will cost too much and add further financial burden to the country. This is very dangerous thinking. Whoever talks this way does not remember the bitter lessons from the First Sino-Japanese War! As we all know, the defeat in the war caused severe chaos and backwardness in our nation that lasted more than half a century, seriously impeding our nation's pace of modernization. The key to winning that war was to gain the command of the sea. After studying two thousand years of history of naval warfare, Alfred Mahan believed that whoever could control the sea would win the war and change history; that command of the sea is achieved through decisive naval battles on the seas; that the outcome of decisive naval battles is determined by the strength of fire power on each side of the engagement.

During the First Sino-Japanese War, the firepower of the Japanese combined fleet was four to six times bigger than that of the Chinese fleet. The Japanese adopted single line formation, firing guns from broadsides to attack. This formation had the unique feature of concentrating the maximum firepower during the engagement at the expense of maximum exposure to the enemy's firepower. Due to the mismatched fire power gap, the Chinese Northern Fleet was afraid to use the single line formation as the Japanese did, and instead utilized a Flying Geese formation with the bows of the ships heading straight toward the targets. Such formation greatly reduced the firepower of the fleet because only the guns in the front of a ship could fire directly at the target. This was done in order to minimize the hull's exposure to enemy's fire. As a result, it is no surprise that the Chinese Northern Fleet lost 5 war ships while the Japanese lost none.

Incidentally, the formation adopted by the Chinese Northern Fleet was the only choice available to the Chinese commanders. Anyone who knows a modicum of naval affairs understands that when two fleets engage each other, the best and worst formations can be illustrated by the letter T. The fleet situated at the horizontal top line of the T is in a winning position because it can best use the fire power from the guns in the front, hulls and back portions of the ship. While the fleet situated in the vertical line of the T is in a worst position because only the guns in the front portion (bow) of the ship can fire effectively while all other guns have no sufficient angle to target the enemy, often forfeiting the fire power from the back deck. During the naval engagement between the Chinese and Japanese fleets, the Japanese ships were always in excellent formation, attacking the Chinese Northern Fleet in circle, forcing the Chinese fleet always into the vertical line of the T. But even if the Chinese changed their formation and adopted the same line as the Japanese fleet did, the Chinese fleet would have suffered 4-6 hits for very one hit they would deliver to the Japanese. In this scenario, the Chinese damage would have been much bigger, not just the loss of five war ships. Therefore, the formation by the Chinese Northern Fleet was the best possible choice under the circumstance at the time. There has been a popular view among scholars at home and abroad that states the command errors committed by Admiral Ding Ruchang, and the wrong formation led to China's defeat in the epic battle. Those who hold such a view do not know much about military affairs, and their view as such cannot be taken seriously.

Why did the Japanese Combined Fleet have firepower four to six times bigger than China's? That is because the Japanese Navy had completed weapons upgrading before the war, and was equipped with the latest rapid firing guns, totaling 173 in various sizes. The Chinese Northern Fleet, ten years after its founding, had not added any new weapons to its arsenal, with only 12 rapid firing guns which were copycat versions of British Armstrong guns manufactured at the Nanyang Arsenal. The rest of the weapons were all obsolete slow firing guns. Three years before the war, the Northern Fleet visited Japan, the Right Flank Commander Liu Buzhan, with his professional acumen, sensed the glaring gap in firepower between the Chinese Navy and the Japanese Navy. Admiral Ding Ruchang thus urgently appealed to Li Hongchang, who was the man in charge of the fleet in Beijing, for a quick addition of ships to the fleet and a rapid upgrading of firepower.

But the powers that be, both inside and outside the Imperial Court, failed to have foresight, all believing it was too expensive to keep a navy. The Ministry of Revenue under Weng Tonglu ignored the warnings from the Navy, and went on to stop naval spending for two years. Even worse, it appropriated 7.5 million taels of silver out of the naval budget to spend on renovating the Summer Palace for Empress Dowager's birthday celebration. The 7.5 million taels that had been misused could have been used to upgrade the navy's weapons system and bought 280 of the most advanced rapid firing guns. Let us not even mention the other 10 million taels of silver the Ministry of Revenue misappropriated for the wasteful "Sanhai Project." Just before the war, the Northern Fleet planned to spend three hundred and twenty thousand taels of silver to purchase 12 rapid firing guns, but failed to come up with this meager amount of funds. The saddest thing is that the Japanese cruiser, Yoshino, that sank several Chinese ships including Admiral Deng Shichang's flag ship, Zhiyuan, was the British made, fastest cruiser with the most powerful rapid firing guns. The cruiser was supposed to be purchased by China. But because of the shortage of funding, the Japanese bought it instead, making it the curse of the Chinese navy, taking Admiral Deng Shichang, along with his ships, to the bottom of the Yellow Sea.

After the defeat, China paid 230 million taels as indemnity. But China had to borrow money from the British and the French to pay for this, which, including interest, would later amount to 600 million taels of silver in total. In addition, we also lost Taiwan to Japan. If the 7.5 million taels of silver were not misused before the war, instead we used it to purchase 280 rapid firing guns, then the Northern Fleet would have outnumbered Japan's guns by 107; if we used the misused 10 million taels of silver to purchase war ships, then the Japanese cruiser Yoshino could have been a capital ship of the Chinese Northern Fleet. In such a scenario, we could have won that naval battle, or at least we could have shared the command of the sea. Mahan once said, the strength of tactical firepower determined the outcome of a decisive naval battle, which would determine who could have the command of the sea. After the battle of the Yellow Sea, most military experts in the world believed that "this naval battle is a classic case study of rapid firing power triumphing over heavy fire power."

Failure to spend 7.5 million taels of silver on defense before the war cost China 600 million taels of silver after the war. This is one of the most important historical lessons of the First Sino-Japanese War. Monetary loss alone was 80 times the amount that would have been wisely spent on the military before the war. In addition, China had to give away Taiwan to Japan and suffered from various kinds of economic and non-economic losses as a result of the persistent internal instability and foreign wars. Therefore, in building up China's future defense and strong naval forces, we should see farther, free from the bother of "enormous" naval expenditure, lest history repeat itself.

Establishing a Life Line at Sea is Not the Same as Seeking Hegemony

Building up a strong naval power is not contradictory with China's consistent principle of peace and development, the same as our development of nuclear weapons is not designed to seek hegemony. Should this arouse the fear of a hegemonic country, or should this even lead to our being preemptively struck by a hegemonic country, it would exactly prove the point that to live and survive in such a world, we must develop strong and powerful sea power.

The views that the traditional sea power theory is obsolete, that a nation's lifeline at sea cannot be sought by ourselves alone during the process of globalization, and that we must rely on "international cooperation" are not valid. First of all, "economic globalization" does not necessarily mean the end of the Hobbesian Era. Secondly, current major international affairs such as nuclear non-proliferation, peace in the Middle East, the world's oil etc are conducted with "cooperation" guided by American will and American hegemony. It is not a cooperation based upon the respect for every nation, upon a democratic principle. If the security guarantee of China's lifeline at sea were to rely upon "international cooperation," to a large degree, it would mean our reliance upon the United States. We are already checked by the U.S. on the Taiwan matter, if our lifeline at sea once again falls into the hand of the U.S., we will give the U.S. another bargaining chip over the issue of Taiwan, which will be extremely disadvantageous to us.

Another view holds that if China begins to develop a strong navy, it will alert major hegemonic countries, drawing unnecessary hostile attention, thus repeating the defeats suffered by the Germans who decided to challenge the supremacy of the British. This view is also invalid. We cannot let ourselves be the hapless victim of other predators in the areas of national defense and command of the sea where we have an absolute disparity. Any nation that wants to develop its own defense and naval powers will naturally cause changes in power balance with the existing big powers. But if others think this is a threat to them, and they would not allow us to develop, this is the logic of bandits, and reflective of their ulterior motives. We should never be bound by the logic of bandits. In addition, the United States has stressed many times that with its economic growth, the military growth of China is a natural phenomenon and the key is how to use such rising military power. Therefore it is quite clear that those who fear about America's reaction to China's military development are simply imagining things. Incidentally, before World War I, because of Otto Von Bismarck's resignation, Germany overhauled its foreign policy, embarked on a global competition with Britain for hegemony, that was why Tirpitz' plan to develop German navy caused the fear among the British. If Germany had decided not to compete with British for global hegemony, and only focused on building a strong navy of self-defense nature, the British might not have regarded the Germans as their number one nemesis. Even so, when World War I broke out, despite persistent begging from the French, the British were very reluctant to get involved in the war, until the Germans invaded Belgium to implement their Schlieffen Plan, thus violating Belgium's neutrality, then--and only then—did the British finally join the war on account of treaty obligations.

In sum, we cannot give up our efforts to build up a strong navy simply because hegemonic countries' suspicions of us. We should also not be afraid of drawing hostile attention to us, to let our future national security be impeded by outside conditions and become helpless. Building up a strong navy does not necessarily contradict with China's traditional principles of peace and development, just as our development of nuclear weapons does not aim at seeking hegemony. If our efforts to build up a strong navy cause fears among hegemonic countries, or if our efforts lead

to hegemonic countries' preemptive strike against us, it will perfectly prove that to live and survive in a world such as ours, we must develop a strong and powerful sea power.

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