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Questioning China's Peaceful Development: A Mahanian Sea Power Analysis of Blue Water Navy Accumulation

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ABSTRAK

Republik Rakyat Tiongkok telah mengembangkan kapabilitas maritim melalui angkatan lautnya (PLAN) selama hampir 4 dekade terakhir dengan ambisi akuisisi angkatan laut perairan biru. Namun bersamaan dengan kebijakan pembangunan damai, upaya tersebut dinilai sebagai anomali yang diperkuat dengan perdebatan terkait karakteristik ekspansionis Tiongkok. Dengan mempertanyakan maksud di balik tindak tanduk Tiongkok, sejumlah akademisi telah berusaha menginterpretasinya melalui teori – teori seperti realisme ofensif dan defensif, serta teori Tirpitzian. Artikel ini hadir dengan teori Sea Power Mahan sebagai perspektif baru untuk menjawab pertanyaan akan mengapa Tiongkok mengupayakan akumulasi angkatan laut perairan biru di balik kebijakan pembangunan damainya. Melalui teori tersebut, tulisan ini berargumen bahwa akumulasi angkatan laut perairan biru oleh Tiongkok didorong oleh kepentingan untuk supremasi ekonomi. Terlebih lagi, tindakannya juga dipengaruhi oleh luas garis pantainya, populasinya yang besar, kepemilikan masyarakat dengan ketertarikan tinggi pada aktivitas maritim, dan pemimpin yang independen. Tulisan ini kemudian menyimpulkan bahwa akumulasi angkatan laut perairan biru dibutuhkan Tiongkok untuk memperluas akses pasar, menciptakan supremasi ekonomi, selain kepentingan strategis untuk mengamankan kepentingan klaim wilayah.

Kata kunci: Angkatan Laut Perairan Biru, Tiongkok, Kebijakan Pembangunan Damai, Sea Power Mahan, Angkatan Laut Tiongkok (PLAN)

ABSTRACT

China has been rapidly accumulating naval capabilities for nearly 4 decades with the ambition of pursuing blue-water-navy forces through its People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). With its peaceful development policy, the acquisition of such powers has been interpreted as an anomaly and further corresponds with the debate on China's expansionist traits. In the quest for explanations behind China's actions, multiple scholars have examined this phenomenon by utilizing offensive realism, defensive realism, and Tirpitzian non-hegemonic naval theory. Thus, this paper brings another perspective by applying the Mahanian Sea Power approach. Consequently, the analysis established that China's pursuit of blue-water-navy is driven by its interest in economic supremacy. In addition, the intention is also influenced by its wide coastline, large population, competitive nationals, and independent decisive government. The paper concludes that a blue-water-navy is a necessity for China in order to access markets, obtain command of the sea for economic purposes, and also secure the territorial interests.

Keywords: Blue-Water-Navy, China, Peaceful Development Policy, Mahanian Sea Power, PLAN (Chinese Navy).

INTRODUCTION

The People's Republic of China has experienced immense growth since its economic reforms in 1978 (World Bank, 2020). With annual GDP growth exceeding that of the United States, the World Bank reports that China presently holds the second most powerful economy worldwide. Counterproductively, the rise of Chinese power led to the establishment of the China Threat Theory which perceives the growth as a threat to international order and security (Broomfield, 2003). In correspondence, Chinese president Hu Jintao (2003-2013) and advisor Zheng Bijian responded with the Peaceful Rise/Development policy, serving as means of transparency in its pursuance of welfare whilst contributing to world peace (Ramo, 2007). Through the policy paper, China calls upon the principles of co-existence as it claims to never seek hegemony and/or pose a threat in its development (People's Daily Online, 2005). As the policy remains strongly intact within the existing regime, President Xi Jinping recurrently commits for China to 'never waver in its pursuit of peaceful development' and to 'never seek hegemony, expansion, or sphere of influence' (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Iraq, 2017). Thus, the Peaceful Development policy brands China's role as an advocator of world peace and international order.

Contradictory to the aforementioned peace-oriented policy, China is widely known to have developed its military extensively, primarily in its People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) (CGTN, 2020). Moreover, the 'mighty' military build-up acts as part of achieving the Chinese Dream which is the Great Rejuvenation of The Chinese Nation (Xi, 2020). Withstanding the aim of rejuvenating its naval golden age, China has shifted its maritime strategy into Far-Seas Protection, hence indicating ambitions of reaching Blue Water Navy capabilities (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2019). Conceptually, a Blue Water Navy is perceived as the highest form of maritime force with capabilities of long-term operations across open oceans and deep waters, allowing far projection of power (Defense Security Service, 2010). Often identified by the possession of aircraft carriers, a Blue Water Navy is then classified based on the extent of power projection into the following: (1) global; (2) limited global; (3) multi-regional; and (4) regional (Defense Security Service, 2010). Under the Blue Water Capacity, a state's navy may be categorized as a Green Water Navy with the conduct of operations strictly within coastal zones and regional seas or a Brown Water Navy limited to coastal and riverine only (Till and Bratton, 2013). Regardless of the debate on China's

current naval capacity, be it Blue or Green, China's accumulation of maritime force has inevitably shown its ambitions of becoming a Blue Water Navy (Koda, 2017).

China's intensive economic reforms, which began in 1978, have led to the emergence of the China Threat Theory indicating the rise as threatening towards international and/or regional peace and order (Wu, 2007). In order to shift popular views of the development, China established the peaceful rise policy (heping jueqi) constructed by Zheng Bijian (Ramo, 2007). As issues rise concerning the ambiguity of the 'jue (崛)' character sounding like propaganda, China revised the policy into peaceful development (heping fazhan) in late 2003, to better portray the non-threatening growth of the country (Embassy of The People's Republic of China in The Republic of India, 2020).

The peaceful development policy is considered as one of China's foremost foreign policy strategies as it modernizes capabilities and improve welfare whilst contributing peace efforts to the international community. Corresponding to the first policy white paper published in 2005, China vows to unswervingly walk the road of peaceful development which is to contribute to the attainment of open and peaceful relationship with other countries as well as harmoniously build the international society within sustainable peace (People's Daily Online, 2005). As China also requires a stable and peaceful international environment for its development, the document highlights the importance of promoting world peace (Information Office of the State Council of The People's Republic of China, 2009). Following the trend of globalization, China intends to cooperate with others in order to achieve mutual developmental advantages and build collective welfare for a harmonious world. Nonetheless, China commits to not seek hegemony and/or pose a threat towards any entity in its development as it also opposes the achievement of security at the expense of the security of others (People's Daily Online, 2005). Conclusively, the policy highlights the principles of co-existence and becomes China's unwavering policy, principle, and pursuit (Law of The People's Republic of China on National Defence, n.d.).

The State Council Information Office renewed China's white paper on peaceful development policy in 2011 and reiterated the country's commitment to follow the policy (Information Office of the State Council, 2011). An exceedingly emphasized point from the renewed version is the central aim of China's diplomacy namely to create a peaceful and stable international environment. Accordingly, aggression and/or expansion are never options in China's foreign policy as it would never pose a military threat towards other states (Bian, 2014). Leaping into the contemporary administration, president Xi Jinping

delivered similar remarks during a UN conference in Geneva on 2017, claiming that China will never waver in pursuing the peaceful development path (Xi, 2017). Furthermore, Xi also reiterated the following, “China will never seek hegemony, expansion or sphere of influence.”

The contrasting phenomenon between China’s policy endeavours has resulted in an anomaly as well as confusion amongst policy-makers and scholars. The anomaly is then developed as some argue that the accumulation of Blue Water Navy corresponds to China’s expansionist objectives. Further directly contradicting the Peaceful Development policy, China’s expansionist traits have been often linked to the East and South China Sea conflicts as well as the Taiwan dispute (Rachman, 1996). Therefore, this research questions why China is accumulating a blue water navy amidst its commitment to the Peaceful Development Policy.

Many scholars have attempted to answer this question through the theory of neo-realism and the work of Alfred Von Tirpitz, a German admiral often compared with Mahan’s perspectives. Daniel Connolly (2017) utilized the Tirpitzian Non-Hegemonic Naval Theory to argue China’s naval development as a form of increasing alliance value and ensuring market access in an attempt to diminish hegemonic influence from the United States. Whereas Yves-Heng Lim (2016) offered an Offensive Realism perspective arguing for China’s pursuit of East Asian hegemony through the means of dominating its seas, resulting in the need for a largely superior navy. On the other hand, a view of defensive realism by James Douglas (2012) interprets China’s PLAN growth as an attempt to safeguard its assets, primarily territorial sovereignty, as it reacts to the status quo of the international system. Despite proposing valid results and theories, the three pieces of literature neglect to analyse China’s internal interests and scientific factors that would contribute to this building of maritime power. Therefore, this paper brings a Mahanian Sea Power perspective to the equation as it inclusively takes into account scientific elements of naval development. This research argues the accumulation of China’s Blue Water Navy as driven by strategic geopolitical position, high population levels, and characters of its people and government, with the purpose of market expansion, economic supremacy, as well as securing territorial claims. The peaceful development policy is perceived as a mask of its expansionist traits, thus would only result in a Mahanian analysis of securing a room for trade and labour to further increase state wealth, thus, maximizing the economy for the welfare of the state.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Through the book titled “The Influence of Sea Power upon History,” Mahan established the presently well-known Sea Power Theory (Mahan, 1890). The so-called ‘Clausewitz of The Sea’ proposes two power classes namely those who are communicatively dependent on land and those on the sea. Based on England’s massive maritime power in the 19th century, Mahan interprets political and economic supremacy to derive from control at sea. Furthermore, Mahan claims that the primary function of a navy is to control the seas, mainly what he calls choke points. The following purpose of sea control is to ensure market access which requires a navy to possess a fleet of warships to go to war, a fleet of merchants to conduct trade, as well as a network of bases to replenish and repair. In the circumstance of a state with non-aggressive characteristics, Mahan (1890, 14) mainly argues that a state’s powerful navy maintains economic dominance with extensive room for trade, more jobs for its people, along with increasing wealth. Nevertheless, Mahan’s theory also accommodates states with expansionist traits which would maximize their economic capacity.

Mahan (1890) emphasizes the importance of the sea as an instrument of commerce as he argues that the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) determine the course of trade. Thus, power is needed to secure these communications and interrupt the capacity and actions of adversaries if necessary. The significance of SLOC, which Mahan identifies as the ‘highways of the world,’ was demonstrated through the Caribbean Sea for the United States, the Suez route for the Mediterranean states, along with the British channel for England. Said highways are expected to bring widespan interests of nations in proximity. The extent of influence and control of these SLOCs are closely dependent on Mahan’s first of six elements of sea power, the geographical position. With the aforementioned demonstrations, Mahan sees those states with minimal distance towards the SLOCs. Marking closer geographical position, these states have nearer permanent bases compared to others, thus having stronger and more resilient power outposts in the case of battle and trade security. Generally, the geographical location refers to the setting of the state (ports, bases, etc) in which it is pressured to safeguard its sovereignty by sea as it is unattainable by land. This element heavily influences how states concentrate their forces and resources as it is a strategic benefit towards maritime commerce and hostile actions against potential adversaries. Throughout historical events, Mahan highlighted the vitality of the geographic situation of the state towards the course of war and victories.

Physical conformation, however, elaborates on the seaboard and access of its coasts as well as the entirety of a state's physical situation. Mahan elaborated that the physical situations such as land or climate of the state drive society to and from the sea resulting in maritime commerce to a certain extent or even none at all. Exemplified by European states, he compared England and France prior to the Napoleonic war where England was heavily driven towards the sea, whilst France received an abundance of resources and sufficiently produced within. Although navigated sea currents could be an advantage for trade purposes, coastal areas must be protected by robust ports as it becomes a vulnerability during the war. The physical conformation factor further involves the coastal terrain of the state, for the flatter it is, the more vulnerable it becomes (Popescu, 2017).

Another factor is the extent of territory which refers to the coastline length in need of protection. Nonetheless, whether the extent is considered a strength or weakness corresponds to the size of the population as it requires a proportionate garrison in defence. The size of the population as Mahan's next element is the number of people available to be involved in naval fleets and employment as well as ship production. As such, Mahan also takes into account the reserve forces of a state. The element of people's character observes the peoples' drive for sea-based trade as it would require a maritime trade route and resources. Mahan focuses on national merchant shipping in measuring said element. Lastly is the character of government which may generate two possibilities. First is the intelligent government with instructions that imbue its people's passion in alignment with the need for naval development. Second is the intelligent government which liberates itself from the influence of its people and utilizes its power to accumulate its naval capacity based on individual deliberation. With the Sea Power theory and its six elements, this paper aims to elaborate on each Mahanian element in China's Blue Water Navy accumulation along with its purpose.

RESEARCH METHOD

In conducting the analysis, the research utilizes a qualitative and descriptive approach. Through a qualitative method, the authors propose an interpretation of social interaction, i.e. China's actions of accumulating its naval capabilities amidst its commitment to the peaceful development policy. Analysing interactive relation patterns, the method endeavours to illustrate a complex reality throughout the research process. Furthermore, the research aims to describe the characteristics of the phenomenon. That said, the

descriptive approach analyses the interaction of the peaceful development policy concept against China's blue water navy build-up.

Methodologically, the research utilizes secondary data collected from existing research, scientific publications, institutional reports, as well as legitimate news media. In addition, the analysis also pays close attention to official government websites and speech acts by relevant political elites in justifying China's policies.

DISCUSSION

China's Accumulation of Blue Water Navy

China began the modernization of its navy in 1982 as it promoted Liu Huaqing as the commander of the PLAN (Gill and Kim, 1995). Nevertheless, the indication of advanced development into blue water navy classification was firstly identified in 2008 when China conducted its first replenishment at sea (RAS) operation. With the 2008 defence white paper emphasizing on the PLAN to become a 'strong navy', by improving its entire capabilities, it is perceived that China places high significance of securing national waters, sea-based trade, coastal economy, and maritime resources (Erickson, 2009). During the 2000s, China reiterated its interests in maritime economic growth as illustrated by the table below.

Table 1. The size of China's maritime economy for the period of 2002 to 2017

Year	Production Value in Billion RMB			
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Total
2002	82.5	461.1	524.1	1067.7
2003	90.7	539.2	574.5	1204.4
2004	93.7	645.8	690.2	1429.7
2005	103.3	852.2	847.1	1802.6
2006	110.5	985.8	999.5	2095.8
2007	127.4	1150.3	1215.2	2492.9
2008	160.8	1402.6	1402.8	2966.2
2009	187.9	1506.2	1502.3	3196.4
2010	206.7	1811.4	1825.8	3843.9
2011	232.7	2183.5	2140.8	4557.0
2012	268.3	2298.2	2442.2	5008.7
2013	291.8	2490.8	2648.7	5431.3
2014	322.6	2704.9	2966.1	5993.6
2015	329.2	2749.2	3388.5	6466.9

2016	356.6	2848.8	3845.3	7050.7
2017	360.0	3009.2	4391.9	7761.1

Source: China's Maritime Economic Development: A Review, The Future Trend, and Sustainability Implication, 2018

Under leading commander Huaqing and his ambitions of developing the PLAN into a global maritime power, China gradually aims to possess a naval capacity capable of operating within the first island chain by 2010 and project power within the second island chain by 2020 (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2019). Exceedingly, China's objective is to become a Blue Water Navy by 2040. Thus, in 2010, China expresses intentions of increasing the number of operations within 'distant waters' (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2021a). Moreover, the 2013 defence white paper further shows that China is accelerating the growth of its PLAN into the conduct of 'comprehensive offshore operations' (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2021b). Moving on to 2015, China's white paper shows another shift in its naval strategy into the integration of 'offshore waters defence' and 'open seas protection' (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2021b). Contemporarily, the 2019 defence white paper expressed the arrangement of the naval strategy into 'near seas defence and far seas protection', further indicating the ability for global power projection (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2019).

From 2008 to 2021, China's defence budget has risen significantly, mainly within its PLAN allocation having increased thrice the size of its 2008 value (Jane's Information Group, 2020). According to Jane's Defense Budget, China's 2021 PLAN budget reached 44.435 million USD from merely 14.382 million USD 8 years prior. Details of the budget can be found as follows,

Table 2. China's General Defense Budget and PLAN Budget

Year	Defense Budget (US\$ M)	Defense Budget (% GDP)	Total PLAN Budget (US\$ M)	Total PLAN Budget (% GDP)	Total PLAN Budget (% Defense Budget)	PLAN Budget Growth (US\$ M)
2008	104.447	1.67%	14.382	0.23%	13.77%	1.491
2009	124.014	1.81%	17.161	0.25%	13.84%	2.779
2010	125.260	1.66%	17.589	0.23%	14.04%	428

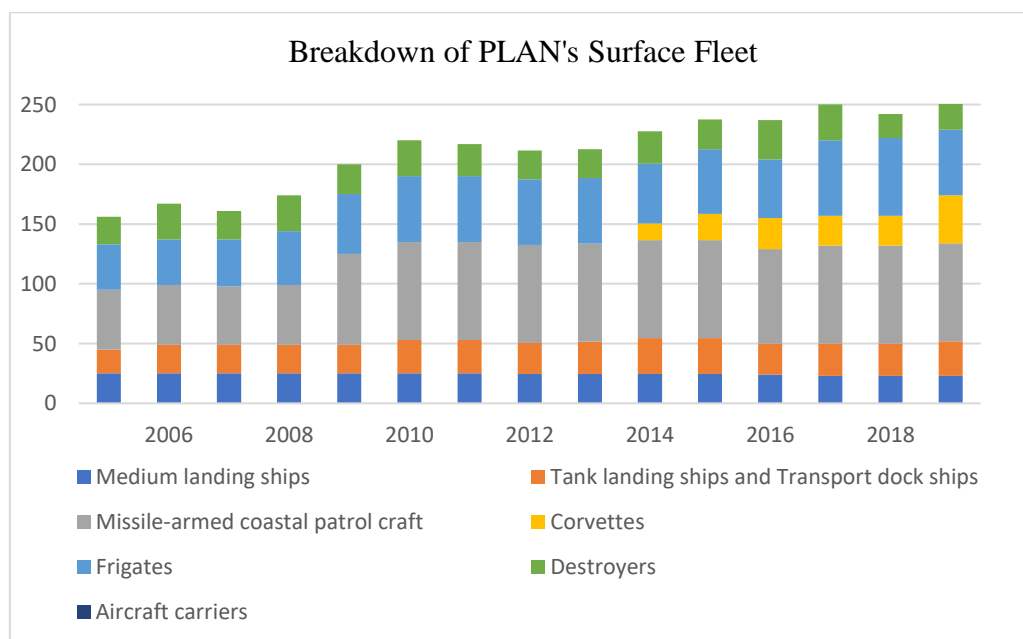
2011	128.608	1.55%	18.605	0.22%	14.47%	1.016
2012	137.908	1.54%	21.096	0.24%	15.30%	2.491
2013	147.492	1.53%	23.624	0.25%	16.02%	2.528
2014	163.891	1.59%	26.802	0.26%	16.35%	3.178
2015	179.851	1.63%	30.370	0.27%	16.89%	3.568
2016	191.469	1.62%	32.978	0.28%	17.22%	2.608
2017	197.673	1.57%	33.183	0.26%	16.79%	205
2018	203.395	1.52%	34.870	0.26%	17.14%	1.687
2019	218.352	1.53%	39.603	0.28%	18.14%	4.733
2020	230.830	1.53%	41.464	0.28%	17.96%	1.862
2021	244.947	1.54%	44.435	0.28%	18.14%	2.970

Source: Jane's Information Group, 2020

A rather advantageous position for China is the fact that it holds the number one shipbuilding capacity as it contributes 43.9% of the global ship supply by 2018 (UNCTAD, 2020). Therefore, China has very low import levels of ships and less reliance on other states for its naval size (Office of the Secretary Defense, 2020).

All in all, the development of China's naval surface fleet size is illustrated below, beginning in 2006 to 2018.

Figure 1. People's Liberation Army Navy Surface Fleet, 2006-2018



Source: CSIS China Power Project, 2018

The rising dynamic shown above indicates China's ambitions in acquiring a Blue Water Navy. Aside from developing its surface fleet, China also modernized its underwater warfare capacity into possessing 66 submarines by 2020, including 4 nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarine, 7 nuclear-powered attack submarine, and 55 non-nuclear attack submarines (O'Rourke, 2020). That said, the US Pentagon has reported that China presently owns the largest naval battle-force in the world (U.S. Office of The Security of Defense, 2020). By tonnage, China is second to United States possessing the capability of hosting 2.115.000 tons (Pike, 2020). Further comparison of the Chinese and US navy can be found in the table below.

Table 3. Comparison of Ship Amount between US and China

Year of DOD Report	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Ballistic Missile Submarines	1	1	1	1	2	2
Nuclear-powered Attack Submarines	6	5	5	5	6	6
Diesel Attack Submarines	51	50	53	54	54	54
Aircraft Carriers	0	0	0	0	0	0
Destroyers	21	25	25	29	27	25
Frigates	43	45	47	45	48	49
Corvettes	0	0	0	0	0	0
Missile-armed coastal patrol craft	51	45	41	45	70	85
Amphibious ships: LSTs and LPDs	20	25	25	26	27	27
Amphibious ships: LSMs	23	25	25	28	28	28
Total of types above (not incl. other support/aux. ships)	216	221	222	233	262	276
China Coast Guard Ships	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total US Navy battle force ships (incl. support/aux. ships. Excl. patrol crafts)	291	282	281	279	282	285
US Navy figure compared to above total for certain Chinese ship types	+75	+61	+59	+46	+20	+9

Year of DOD Report	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Ballistic Missile Submarines	2	2	3	3	4
Nuclear-powered Attack Submarines	5	5	5	5	5
Diesel Attack Submarines	49	48	49	51	53
Aircraft Carriers	0	0	1	1	1
Destroyers	26	26	23	24	21
Frigates	53	53	52	49	52
Corvettes	0	0	0	8	15
Missile-armed coastal patrol craft	86	86	85	85	86
Amphibious ships: LSTs and LPDs	27	28	29	29	29

Amphibious ships: LSMs	28	23	26	28	28
Total of types above (not incl. other support/aux. ships)	276	271	273	283	294
China Coast Guard Ships	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total US Navy battle force ships (incl. support/aux. ships. Excl. patrol crafts)	288	284	287	285	289
US Navy figure compared to above total for certain Chinese ship types	+12	+13	+14	+2	-5

Year of DOD Report	2016	2017	2018	2019	Acc.
Ballistic Missile Submarines	4	4	4	4	+3
Nuclear-powered Attack Submarines	5	5	5	6	0
Diesel Attack Submarines	57	54	47	50	-1
Aircraft Carriers	1	1	1	1	+1
Destroyers	23	31	28	33	+12
Frigates	52	56	51	54	+11
Corvettes	23	23	28	42	+42
Missile-armed coastal patrol craft	86	88	86	86	+35
Amphibious ships: LSTs and LPDs	30	34	33	37	+17
Amphibious ships: LSMs	22	21	23	22	-1
Total of types above (not incl. other support/aux. ships)	303	317	306	335	+119
China Coast Guard Ships	n/a	185	240	248	n/a
Total US Navy battle force ships (incl. support/aux. ships. Excl. patrol crafts)	271	275	279	286	-5
US Navy figure compared to above total for certain Chinese ship types	-32	-42	-27	-49	-124

Source: Congressional Research Service, 2020

Conclusively, the elaborated data intends to illustrate the relentless development of the PLAN into a Blue Water Navy, exceeding the United States and others. The extensively modernized navy has also developed by the capacity of its missions exemplified by 5 recorded unilateral exercises conducted in areas of the Indian and Western Pacific Ocean from 2016 to 2020. Following the aforementioned anomaly, the development of China's PLAN has resulted in doubts of its commitment towards the principles of peaceful development path. The next section adopts the Alfred Thayer Mahan's Sea Power theory in analysing the grounds behind this contradiction.

Mahanian Sea Power Analysis

The concept of Sea Power analysis by Mahan resulted from his judgments towards the world's greatest naval power in history such as Roman, England, and Spain. For instance, based on his view of Roman victory against Carthage, Mahan concluded that the former has an upper hand in the naval power especially controlling the main ports in the

Mediterranean Sea compared to the later (Mahan, 1890). He concluded that those great powers developed their so-called “sea-power” mainly to protect their trades and seaborne communications routes. He argued that the commerce, shipping, and a navy to guard them, are vital for the existence of a great nation. Specifically, he underlined the importance of naval power to nourished the national prosperity and influential power globally.

Mahan (1890) highlighted several main tasks for the navy of a great power: (a). the establishment of depots of coal and supplies; (b). the maintenance of communications between these depots and the home base; (c). the military value of commerce—destroying as a decisive or a secondary operation of war; (d) the system upon which commerce—destroying can be most efficiently conducted, whether by scattered cruisers or by holding in force some vital centre through which commercial shipping must pass. We can see that Mahan put an emphasis on the importance of commerce supply, routes, and logistics networks as part of maintaining the superiority of a great power.

Mahan has a clear insight regarding the purpose of the sea lines as trade routes, both politically and economically. He argued that the sea is a “highway” or better, perhaps, of a wide common, over which men may pass in all directions, but on which some well—worn paths show that controlling reasons have led them to choose certain lines of travel rather than others (Mahan, 1890).

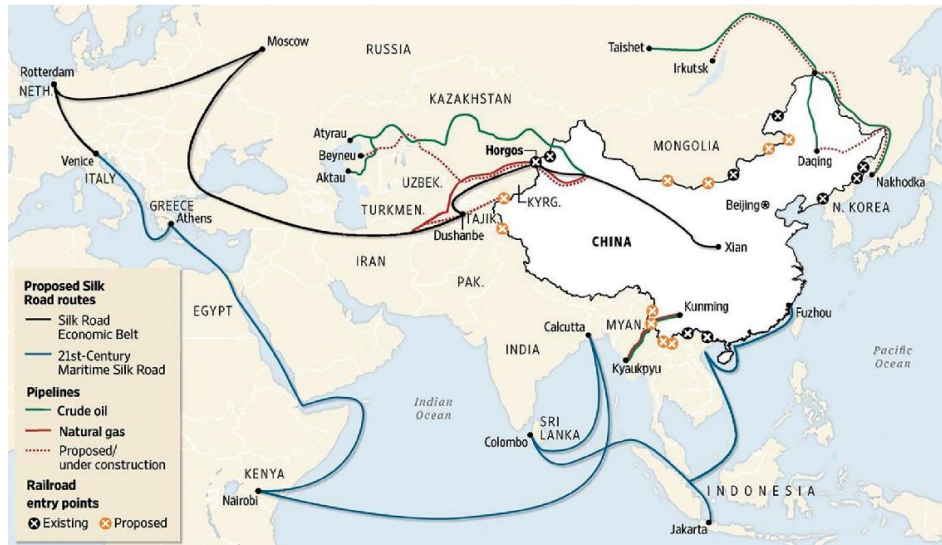
Based on the aforementioned analyses, we can highlights the China’s contemporary condition as an emerging great power. First, the geographical position of China shows that she has a particularly long coastline over her area. For this kind of sea-bordering nation, Mahan (1890) stated that the needs for a safe trade routes is non-negotiable. Since China founded her power emergence on economic development that build on top of the trades and commerce, China must guarantee the security of the passages. Since China is bordering with a great but troubled sea “highways” such as the South China Sea, she must have a proper naval power to secure this area. For instance, China build her Blue Water Navy project as part of this cause. We cannot separate the China’s Blue Water Navy project with the needs to secure the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI). As Mahan (1890) already concluded, the development of trade is based on the ability of the nations to secure “...the ships that thus sail to and from must have secure ports to which to return, and must, as far as possible, be followed by the protection of their country throughout the voyage.”

Learning China's rapid Blue Water Navy accumulation, it becomes a rising importance of understanding its underlying grounds as it contradicts the peaceful development policy. Through Mahan's six elements, the elaboration below analyses the influential factors of China's sea power.

(1) Geographical position.

The People's Republic of China cannot be identified as entirely exposed to the seas as it borders 14 other countries (Columbia University, n.d.). Nevertheless, China also borders the East China Sea, South China Sea, Bohai Sea, Yellow Sea, and Gulf of Tonkin (Kästle, n.d.). Although bordering 4 seas and a strait, China is not exposed to the open seas with states such as South Korea, Japan, Philippines, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, and so on, located across. In alignment with Mahan's Sea Power theory, the influence of geographical position has limited influence on China's Blue Water Navy accumulation due to the fact of no exposure to open seas.

Recalling Mahan's emphasis on the role of SLOCs and their proximity, it is closely observed that the direct exposition to the East and South China Sea provides China with the grounds and privilege to strengthen its maritime bases and power. The East China Sea becomes a highway towards the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean, whereas the South China Sea towards the Middle Eastern region and the Indian Ocean (Guoxing, 2000). As exemplified by the Maritime Silk Road of the Belt and Road Initiative, China's interest in the South China Sea as a crucial trade route is thoroughly visible, shown in the image below.

Figure 2. China's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative)

Source: The Maritime Silk Road and China's Belt and Road Initiative, 2018

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) reports the global trade value transported through the SCS, or as Mahan calls it the 'great commerce', amounting to 3.37 trillion US dollars in 2016 alone (China Power Project, 2021). Furthermore, with its increasing consumption of energy as well as other commodities necessary for its rapid development, China is expected to become highly dependent on imports conveyed mainly through the SCS (Venkateswaran, 2020). Thus, as Chinese strategists argue the vitality of the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico for the US, the South China Sea becomes one of the most prominent domains of the nation's vital interest and therefore requires dominance of sea influence and control (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2006) (Li, 2019).

(2) Physical Conformation

Referring to China's coastal access, the observation of bordering waters such as South China Sea, Gulf of Tonkin, and partially East China Sea reveals that the terrains are of high altitude ranging from 305-1500 meters. With less flat plains, the terrain becomes beneficial for protection and decreases the vulnerability towards threats. Taking into account the conditions of land, China generally possesses fertile soils, primarily in the Northeastern region with its black soil (Wen & Liang, 2001). Chinese agriculture development has soared since the nineteenth century reaching up to 70% of land cultivation per 2001 from China's entire territory (Wen & Liang, 2001).

Nonetheless, Mahan notes that the influence of the physical conformation factor diminishes as all states are contemporarily driven towards the sea despite internal sufficiency. In the case of China, the growth from industrialization beginning in 1978 led to the economic transition from farmland to coastal (Gass, 2014). Corresponding to the Sea Power theory, this factor is analysed to be less significant towards China's Blue Water Navy accumulation.

(3) Extent of Territory

Mahan's territorial extent factor is considered to be impactful on China's Blue Water Navy development due to its position as the 12th country with the largest coastline (China Internet Information Center, n.d.). According to China's official website, the coastline of PRC mainland extends for approximately 18.000 kilometres stretching upon the Bohai Sea up to the Gulf of Tonkin. With almost 7.000 islands, the entire Chinese coastline exceeds 30.000 kilometres. Hence, China requires robust ports as proven by the existing Qingdao Base, Ningbo Base, and Zhanjiang base, along with 31 other major and minor supporting bases.

(4) Size of Population.

China possesses the largest number of populations amongst other countries reaching 1,4 billion people in 2020 with immense annual growth. According to national census, the rise of China's population are as follows.

Table 4. The Growth of China's Population

Year	PRC Estimated Population	SAR Estimated Population	
		Hongkong Population	Macau Population
2008	-	-	543,100
2009	-	-	533,300
2010	-	7,052,100	540,600
2011	1,349,160,000	7,109,500	557,400
2012	1,359,220,000	7,171,000	582,000
2013	1,367,260,000	7,210,900	607,500
2014	1,376,460,000	7,252,900	636,200
2015	1,383,260,000	7,309,700	646,800
2016	1,392,320,000	7,377,100	644,900
2017	1,400,110,000	7,413,100	653,100
2018	1,405,410,000	7,486,400	667,400

2019	1,410,080,000	7,520,800	679,600
2020	1,412,120,000	7,428,300	683,100

Source: HKSAR Government Press Release, 2021

Accordingly, China also operates a large amount of naval forces up to 250.000 personnel with 199.000 allocated for surface, submarine, and coastal defence fleets, 26.000 assigned for naval aviation, and 25.000 acting as marines (The Military Balance, 2020). In conclusion, Mahan's population size factor becomes significant in promoting China's blue water navy accumulation as it has the largest capacity to accommodate its naval development.

(5) Character of The People

In measuring the people's desire to conduct sea-based trade, one must observe that China possesses the third largest merchant fleet according to its number of ships along with the fact that Hongkong alone holds the fourth position in merchant deadweight tonnage (DWT) (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development n.d.). Furthermore, China's merchant fleet size experiences a steady growth indicating high desire from its people for sea-based trade. The table below illustrates the PRC's merchant fleet as well as its growth within 6 years.

Table 5. PRC Merchant Fleet and Growth

Year	Total Merchant Fleet of the PRC			
	Total Fleet		Oil Tanker	
	Number of Ships	Deadweight Tonnage (thou)	Number of Ships	Deadweight Tonnage (thou)
2015	6,933	233,823.16	807	41,565.19
2016	7,056	246,152.71	818	45,984.23
2017	7,398	257,625.86	856	51,405.11
2018	8,825	277,848.20	1,297	55,318.81
2019	9,392	303,701.34	1,400	58,432.65
2020	9,578	310,761.28	1,432	58,218.89
2021	9,810	319,877.51	1,482	63,773.82

Year	General Cargo		Container Ship	
	Number of Ships	Deadweight Tonnage (thou)	Number of Ships	Deadweight Tonnage (thou)

2015	966	7,560.73	659	33,722.04
2016	979	7,935.89	696	37,684.34
2017	1,023	8,414.32	710	38,898.08
2018	1,133	9,068.39	809	42,947.81
2019	1,241	9,507.13	884	49,522.99
2020	1,209	9,247.33	926	51,682.46
2021	1,198	9,132.45	948	52,450.81

Year	Bulk Carrier		Other	
	Number of Ships	Deadweight Tonnage (thou)	Number of Ships	Deadweight Tonnage (thou)
2015	351	5,038.34	462	26,923.89
2016	357	5,223.11	503	30,913.70
2017	354	4,541.12	511	31,917.48
2018	368	4,725.37	541	34,164.06
2019	400	5,845.42	587	39,734.16
2020	420	6,781.24	600	41,308.99
2021	430	7,138.41	607	41,671.88

Source: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development Statistics, 2020

As it has been established that the Chinese population holds high interest and desire for sea-based trade, China requires to construct a highly effective maritime trade route and secure its trade value. Therefore, the people-character factor is considered to be impactful in China's Blue Water Navy accumulation.

(6) Character of The Government

The Chinese government operates an authoritarian regime with individualistic power concentration on President Xi Jinping. In Mahan's terms, China's governmental characteristic is the *intelligent* government that opts to liberate itself from the people's influence and tends to deliberate naval development decisions independently. This is supported by the fact that President Xi leads the position of Central Military Commission Chairman of the CCP and the PRC, the PRC National Security Committee, Heading the Leading Group for Deepening Reform of National Defense and Military, also finally the Commander in Chief of the PLA Joint Operations Command Center (Gueorguiev, 2018).

Military functions also rest on Xi's decision-making as Article 19 of the Law of National Defense claims that the armed forces are subject to the leadership of the CCP, with Xi acting as Chairman yet again (Database of Law and Regulations, n.d.). In conclusion, the theory aligns with the argument that China's Blue Water Navy

accumulation is the result of Xi Jinping's decision-making with disregard for the people's influence (Xi, 2020).

Alongside the influence of the elements above, the Sea Power theory identifies that China's Blue Water Navy accumulation desires control of the sea in order to achieve economic supremacy (Diez, Bode and Costa, 2010). Taking a look at the status quo, China is presently second to the United States economy from a GDP perspective. One of China's means of improving the economy is through the maritime silk road which would tie many stakeholders into the trade route (Chatzky and McBride, 2020). Consequently, the silk road also requires a significant amount of protection and network bases further needing an advanced and strong naval capability. With the recent establishment of China's naval base in Djibouti, experts expect many more in the upcoming times to fulfil the silk road, called the String of Pearls, mainly involving Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Somalia, and many more (Marantidou, 2014).

Through the peaceful development policy and multilateralism efforts, China attempts to be perceived as non-aggressive. In alignment with Mahanian views, China's accumulation of maritime power acts as an effort for economic dominance instead of expansion. Thus, China develops a Blue Water Navy with the purpose to secure maritime trade routes and projecting power to deter threats. An example of China's foremost trade route is the South China Sea as elaborated in the table below which illustrates China's reliance on the sea for trade.

Table 6. China Export Trade Value

	Total Export Value Through SCS (Million USD)
2010	627
2011	753
2012	768
2013	815
2014	897
2015	901

Source: World Intergrated Trade Solutions, ChinaPower Project

During 2016, Chinese maritime trade recorded to have passed through the South China Sea reached 64% (China Power Project, 2021). Accordingly, the accumulation of

Blue Water Navy becomes of importance to ensure the continuity and secure resilience of maritime trade routes through nautical deterrence, power projection, and escort missions.

The analysis shows that China's national interests have shifted from maintaining survivability to securing stable economic growth. The economic development is highly significant due to the vulnerability of China's productive population to ignite civilian unrest (Shirk, 2008). In preserving order, access to energy and resources holds as much importance as involvement within the global market. Hence, the scarcity of resources would push China to turn to geopolitics as the main source of resources. Exemplified by China's highest resource dependency, the increasing use of crude oil has led China to import more than 50% of its oil necessity from the United States (Wenmu, 2006). Moreover, more than half of those imports are distributed by sea-based trade routes. China's limited capability of securing the entire maritime trade route resulted in high dependency on other states for its market stability and resource access. Consequently, maritime security is of extremely high fundamental for China to reduce said dependency and prevent threats such as embargo and possible barriers.

The significance of improving China's security in order to safeguard national development was stated by Xi Jinping in April 15th, 2014, as follows,

“We should pay close attention to both development and security. The former is the foundation of the latter while the latter is a precondition for the former.” (Xi, 2014).

The president also reiterated the importance of maritime security as part of China's holistic national security approach as stated below,

“China is at once a continental power and a maritime power (haiyang daguo) and it possesses broad maritime strategic interests...These achievements have laid a solid foundation for building a strong maritime power (haiyang qianguo).” (Bickford, 2016).

With relevance to both, the Center for International Maritime Security (CIMSEC) quotes China's defence white paper with the following,

“China is a major maritime as well as land country. The seas and oceans provide immense space and abundant resources for China’s sustainable development, and thus are of vital importance to the people’s wellbeing and China’s future. It is an essential national development strategy to exploit, utilize and protect the seas and oceans, and build China into a maritime power.” (Michael McDevitt, 2016).

Therefore, it is emphasized that a strong PLAN is highly needed to safeguard maritime security and promote effective economic growth. Aside from the large-scale security of maritime trade routes, Chinese sea-based trade also experiences threats within smaller scales. The Science of Military Strategy constructed by the PLA military academy reviews a non-traditional threat of piracy, mainly in areas such as the Gulf of Aden which is considered to be one of China’s trade chokepoints.

Acknowledging an extent of China’s expansionist traits involving the nine dash line claims in South China Sea and natural continental shelf prolongation claims in East China Sea, the PLAN is also used to conduct conquest strategies. One of which is the utilization of fishermen militia under the instruction of the PLAN in order to assert its claims, primarily in the Paracels and Spratly islands, Senkaku islands, Scarborough Shoals, and even Northern Natuna Seas (Satya, 2018, p.265-285). This strategy underlines the concept of traditional fishing grounds as historically used by ancestors. Mahan perceives these actions as an attempt to maximize the economy, thus needing a highly capable navy to support claims. Overall, the forming of China’s Blue Water Navy is interpreted as an instrument to expand market access and economic supremacy.

CONCLUSION

The paper has elaborated on China’s endeavours to accumulate a Blue Water Navy along with the Mahanian sea power analysis behind it. The research has yielded several important points in the question of why China is accumulating a Blue Water Navy amidst its Peaceful Development Policy. Firstly, through Mahan’s elements, China is found to be developing extensive naval capabilities due to a strong necessity to control and influence proximal geostrategic SLOCs as domains of vital interests, a vulnerable lengthy

coastline, large population size available for support, the people's strong desire in sea-based trade requiring secure trade routes, and Xi Jinping as a strategic government with independent deliberations. Furthermore, China's ambitions in reaching economic supremacy also drive naval development as means. The existence of the peaceful development policy acts as the state's attempt to proclaim non-aggressive traits, leading the Mahanian objective of naval growth as economic dominance by securing maritime trade routes and deterring threats instead of an aggressive expansion. Acknowledging existing expansionist traits, however, China is analysed to be accumulating a blue water navy with the purpose to safeguard territorial claims which align with the need for market expansion and economic supremacy.

Although the Mahanian Sea Power theory possesses strong relevance within the case of China's blue water navy accumulation, the theory still has its limitations. Mahan's approach is criticized to be neglecting other activities conducted by the state within non-maritime areas. This results in a misleading interpretation as it is unable to grasp the entire picture of China's actions. Therefore, a theoretical improvement and inclusive research considering land, air, and space capabilities and contexts would offer an exceedingly thorough result of explaining China's actions and ambitions. The research would also welcome a perspective analysis from a non-western sphere to further understand the phenomenon.

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