

CHINA'S NEW HOSPITAL SHIP BENEFITS ITS SOFT POWER

Qu,Zhao-Wei 、 Yu,Ruei-Lin

Abstract :

Since China had obtained a new hospital ship , On October 23 , 2008 , there were lots of discussions about the new ship. One topic of all deserves our attention - the “soft power” of China. The first impression on China for many countries is its “hard power” , but the soft power might become a better tool for China to go beyond its area with a sound title of “international humanitarian assistance” .

The U.S. Navy has used its hospital ships to achieve military diplomacy for many years. China is trying to catch up with the U.S. and make the same efforts. The new policy could become another tool for its “Three-Neighbor policy” from now on.

Keywords : Hospital Ship , Soft Power , International Humanitarian Assistance

I. Introduction

On April , 23 , 2009 , the PLA Fleet Review successfully finished in Qing-Dao. There were not only foreign military ships but also some new indignously-built ships of PLA navy showing in this ceremony. There was one ship which belongs to East Sea Fleet detached to Qing-Dao , the fleet headquarters , of North Sea Fleet. She did not join in the fleet review but only opened to some high ranking officers for visiting. She did not attract much attention of media. The main roles on the stage were nuclear submarines , and the “Kun Lun Shan” , Chinese Type 071 Landing Platform Dock (LPD) Ship for the first-time appearance. The silent ship , a hospital ship , itself deserves more attention than all of the above.

Following the pace of Reform and Open-up Policy , China has successfully improved both economy and the influence upon other countries. Recently , there are many scholars and media saying that the “Rising China” is correlated with its “soft power” . China's East Sea Fleet received its first 10,000-ton hospital ship on December , 2008 , named Daishandao (Ship hull number 8661). It might well indicate that China is going to be good at both hard power and soft power from now on.

After 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami , the United States Navy sent their hospital ship , USNS Mercy , to provide medical and humanitarian assistance in that region. Because of the mission , the U.S. has

earned a good reputation over there. With the same idea, when the reputation of the United States in Central and South America was lowering, the U.S. has formed the Fourth Fleet and sent their amphibious assault ships to contribute medical services. These actions have given China a huge impression, and therefore the China's hospital ship has been born.

II. The Hospital Ship VS. Military Soft Power

PLA believes that the military hard power and soft power could never be divided². The hard power and soft power can compensate each other and the goal of both is the same, which is to influence others in order to achieve objectives wanted. The soft power sometimes needs the hard power to back it up³. The major countries of the world noticed that the competition among them has shifted from hard power to culture, ideology, innovation and international mechanism. Those factors could be quantified as bases of "soft power". According to this, all major countries will not only maintain their superiority in economy, military and technology but also endeavor to build their soft power. The final goal of soft power is to defeat an enemy without fighting⁴.

China shows its national strategy after 16th National Congress of the CPC with good-neighbor foreign policy.

China will cooperate with other nations to maintain a peaceful international environment and use peaceful means to deal with political, economic and security problems⁵. This new foreign policy at least contains improving diplomatic relations with Asian countries, manipulating economic diplomacy (trade agreements, foreign aids, and investments) and participating in area organizations more actively. Nowadays, China has played an important constructive role in Asian integration and kept close relationships with some international organizations such as ASEAN⁶.

From China's point of view, the application of soft power has been emphasized undoubtedly. No matter from their scholars' researches or national leaders' speeches, the soft power in China has been emphasized in its importance and necessity while China wants to become a major player in international society⁷.

Joseph Nye believes that although the military power is within the hard power, it could still benefit soft power. When military personnel shows an outstanding performance to give people good

impressions, helps foreign countries to train, and provides humanitarian assistance after disasters, the Army has benefited its national soft power⁸. Nye says “Soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced⁹.”

After learning from Korean War and Vietnam War, the U.S. has adjusted its norms and means from hard power to soft power¹⁰. After cold war, the U.S. focused on studying how military troops increase the nation’s soft power and announced “Anti-Military Action” concepts. The content of this concept is very plentiful which includes most of military actions after cold war, especially in humanitarian assistance and disaster reliefs¹¹.

In fact, those advantages brought by soft power are conducted by many nations especially by their navies. The U.S. navy is one of them. When they visited a harbor, except those men on leave, the Public Affairs Officer, PAO, will arrange some volunteers to go to churches, orphanage, and communities. Sometimes they will send a hospital ship to some areas for medical services. When the reputation of the U.S. in Central and South America is going down, the U.S. had formed the Fourth Fleet¹². When the Fourth Fleet was established, the U.S. Navy use its Hornet class amphibious landing ships to initiate an operation, called “Operation Continuing Promise”, for humanitarian assistance¹³. Through free medical services, the U.S. earned their reputation back without a bullet.

The U.S. manipulates its soft power to increase international cooperation. The U.S. Navy launched a “Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Sea Power” in October, 2008, explicitly showing “Building on relationships forged in times of calm, we will continue to mitigate human suffering as the vanguard of interagency and multinational efforts, both in a deliberate, proactive fashion and in response to crises. Human suffering moves us to act, and the expeditionary character of maritime forces uniquely positions them to provide assistance. Our ability to conduct rapid and sustained non-combatant evacuation operations is critical to relieving the plight of our citizens and others when their safety is in jeopardy¹⁴.” It is also the first time for the U.S. to joint their Navy, Marine Corps, and

Coast Guard to conduct this kind of mission which could be seen that the U.S. will focus on international security cooperation, humanitarian assistance, disaster reliefs in the future. According to the "2008 National Defense strategy", published on July 31, 2008, the U.S. will switch their military power to soft power in order to fundamentally establish its reputation¹⁵. Because the international humanitarian assistance could increase nation's reputation, more and more countries, especially some western countries, have noticed that. They would like to put themselves in such a stage and improve their soft power in wanted areas¹⁶. When the war in Iraq and Afghanistan took the U.S. most resources and strengths, the Southern Combat Command used the rest of resources to contribute free medical services, education and economic supports to some poor countries. This action which is used by the U.S. to increase influence is one kind of "soft power¹⁷." If the amphibious assault ship of the U.S. Fourth Fleet could conduct this kind of mission, the professional hospital ship which could contribute better services surely performs better. It could successfully achieve its mission and develop soft power on the other hand.

III. Review 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami

Since 1999, the United States, Australia and Indonesia have struggled in East Timor's independence. Another factor makes the U.S. unpopular in Southeast Asia is religion¹⁸. Indonesia is the most Muslim population country. After the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the anti-American ideology is rising inside its country¹⁹. According to the market survey done by Pre Global Attitudes Project, it shows there are about 83% Indonesian having negative opinion against the U.S.²⁰ Although the United States declares that their enemy is terrorist but not Muslim, those Islam in Indonesia are still opposite the U.S.

On December 26, 2004, the biggest tsunami of this century occurred in Indian Ocean and those coast countries in that area were all affected. Indonesia suffered the heaviest damage ever. Under the planning by the U.S. Pacific Combat Command (PACOM), the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) conducted "Operation Unified Assistance". The U.S. troops provided clean water to those survivors in Indonesia. There were 6 supply ships dispatching from Guam to disaster areas for

providing clean water which was thought effectively stopping the expansion of malaria and other infectious disease²¹. This action was the biggest military action for the U.S. in South East Asia after Vietnam War. The U.S. government donated 350 million dollars and around \$200 million of private donations, with \$120m donated to the US branches of the Red Cross, Oxfam and Save the Children, and to Catholic Relief Services²². Post by Pew Research Center

The USNS Mercy hospital ship played a big role in this action. It is a big hospital ship equipped up to 1000 hospital bed and many medical branches such as surgery, special nursing, plastic surgery, dentist, ophthalmologist, pediatrics and obstetrician²³. According to the reference provided by PACOM, the USNS Mercy left San Diego on January 6, 2005, and then arrived in Singapore on January 29. Through April 15, it served 6559 person-time for medical services²⁴. At this moment, the USNS Mercy deploys in Pacific area for "Pacific Partnership 2008".

According to the "Operation Unified Assistance" conducted in India Ocean, the advantages of a big hospital ship in soft power could be explicated:

1. Although a hospital ship is one kind of military ship, but the white painting with a red cross on it could bring friendship(peaceful)images²⁵.
2. A new giant hospital ship has mature equipments, enough space, advance facilities, and a helicopter deck which could transport patients by air in a short time.
3. Because of its big size, the new giant hospital ship could conduct long distance operations and meanwhile it could also protect its own staffs from being affected in disaster area.
4. A big hospital ship could deploy for a long time from abroad which benefit the rescue mission.

According to those points above, it is understood that China needs a big military hospital ship for gaining both hard and soft power. After a deep thought, China decided to build a big hospital ship. After this ship being on active duty, it will open a new era for China to expand its influence and provide free medical services, education, and even economic support to those wanted areas²⁶.

IV. Deficient Equipments Downgrade Power Image

After the Cold War, China uses its multilateral relationships to hold back the influence of the United States globally²⁷. During the Cold War, China had made the Middle-South Peninsula its strategic back yards. Although it intentionally leverages the U.S. influence in this area in order to keep everything under its control²⁸, the soft power of the U.S. has neutralized its efforts. In consideration of soft power, China who doesn't have it enough, were watching the U.S. using its soft power to regain its reputation in Asia after the War in Iraq. It was a perfect movement of military public relations done by the U.S.

In this disaster relief operation, China unveiled its deficiency of rescuing equipments. One of the personnel dispatched in the Aceh of Indonesia wrote an article after coming back. The article said those rescue equipments of China was deficient at that time. If China owned helicopters, it could hang one or few vehicles to the disaster area which could expand its rescuing mobility. Meanwhile, the logistics was a problem and even the food supply wasn't good enough. The administration and communication of China rescue team was comparably unsatisfied. Those are deficiency of rescue mission of China²⁹. According to that article, the rescue team of China didn't meet international standard yet that could not manifest it as a major power. If it owns a big hospital ship or some advanced rescue equipments, the staring facilities could be reported by the international press in propaganda. After India Ocean Tsunami, many nations sent their amphibious ships to transport aid resources to those victim countries but China was absent because of lack of capabilities.

The Asia Pacific Zone where China was sited owns 60 percent population of the world. It is also the widest area facing natural disasters. According to UN's statistics, since 1900, there were about 80 percent natural disasters happened in this area and about 90 percent death caused by natural disasters in this region³⁰. Although it is undeniable that the traditional conflicts is still in the presence, countries are interrelated in economic, political and cultural field in a globalization era, especially a natural disaster could not be divided anymore. None of countries could put itself out of this³¹.

International humanitarianism rescue also affects international

relations. In the globalization era, the international humanitarian rescue has become an international cooperation which could improve friendship between nations³².

V. Conclusion

The mission of USS hospital ship is to provide logistic support to combat forces, especially to amphibious strike groups, quick response troops, expedition combat troops and all services³³. The maintenance budget of a hospital ship is quite expensive which would spend 14 million dollars annually. The huge expense could not be burdened by all governments; therefore many hospital ships have been designed to multifunctional platform which could be used to other mission besides medical support³⁴. It will be more efficiency and acceptable for a smaller economic country³⁵.

No matter in what motivation, the PLA Navy has owned its new hospital ships which could conduct humanitarian assistance mission for increasing its soft power. Certainly, it may not catch up the United States yet, but it is a beginning. It is a beginning to manipulate China's soft power.

1 Ta Kung Pao, "The sea training of China's first 10,000-ton hospital ship", Dec, 23, 2008, [http:](http://www.takungpao.com/news/09/03/23/junshi01-1053572.htm)

[//www.takungpao.com/news/09/03/23/junshi01-1053572.htm](http://www.takungpao.com/news/09/03/23/junshi01-1053572.htm)

2 Wang, Xing-Sheng, Wu, Zhi-Zhong, "The Introductions to Military Soft Power", PLA news, Beijing, Jun, 6, 2007, Page 6.

3 Liu Zhao, "What Joseph Nye's soft power theory brings to China Rising?", Truths and Facts Shanxi, the 3rd edition, Page 14.

4 Liu Yu, "Explore the Soft Power of Globalization and China", Lanzhou Study Journal, the 3rd edition, Page 25

5 Zhang, Zi-Li, "The Thread of Thought of China's Strategy", Global Strategy Observation, National Defense University, November, 2008, Page 25

6 Ellen L. Frost, James J. Przystup, and Phillip C. Saunders, "China's Rising Influence in Asia: Implications for U.S. Policy," Strategic Forum, (Washington, DC: National Defense University), No.231, April 2008, Page 1

7 Pang, Zhong-Ying, "Soft Power Revolution: The strategy development of China's soft power", "Strategy and Explore(1)", Beijing, World Knowledge Publisher, Jun, 2008, Page 86

- 8 China Review News , “Foreign Reports PLA Equipped Hospital Ship to Invade Taiwan” , Nov. 18 , 2008 , [http :
//www.chinareviewnews.com/doc/1008/0/4/100804154_2.html?coluid=4&kindid=16&docid=100804154&madate=1118172118](http://www.chinareviewnews.com/doc/1008/0/4/100804154_2.html?coluid=4&kindid=16&docid=100804154&madate=1118172118)
- 9 Joseph Nye , Wu , Xiao-Hui (Translator) , “Soft Power : The Means to Success In World Politics” Beijing , East publisher , 2005 , Page 11
- 10 Same as notes 2
- 11 David Axe , “War is Boring : New Chinese Naval Ships a Window into Evolving Strategy ,” World Politics Review , 12 Nov 2008 , [http :
//www.worldpoliticsreview.com/Article.aspx?id=2908](http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/Article.aspx?id=2908)
- 12 Du , Chao-Ping , “The dinosaur is back : The impact of U.S. Fourth Fleet” , “Ship weapons” , Beijing , March , 2008
- 13 Liu , Yong , “Battle Ships Turn into Hospital Ships , The U.S. is fighting a soft power war in Latin America” , “Washington Observer” , Sep. 23 , 2008 , the 36th edition. [http :
//www.washingtonobserver.org/international_perspective_show.aspx?id=2682](http://www.washingtonobserver.org/international_perspective_show.aspx?id=2682)
- 14 Gary Roughead , “Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response ,” A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower , presentation at International Seapower Symposium , Newport , R.I. 17 Oct.2007.
- 15 Wu , Yu-Teng , “The new American Strategy and military considerations” , “Youth Daily News” , March 25 , 2009 , page 6
- 16 Gong , Yu-Tao , “International Assistance at The Moment” , “Wordpedia” Beijing , July , 2008 , Page 34
- 17 Same as notes 13
- 18 Xiao , Yun-Fun , “The India Ocean Tsunami has changed the world political economy” , “South-East University newspaper (social science)” , Nanjing , May 2005 , the 7th volume , 3rd edition , Page 68
- 19 Zhou Lin , “Environment Rescue implies Military Competition of Major Power” , “Green leaf” , Beijing , Jan 2005 , Page 23
- 20 “No Global Warming Alarm in the U.S. , China : 15-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey ,” Pew Research Center , 13 June , 2006 , [http : //pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/252.pdf](http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/252.pdf) , Page 1
- 21 Peng , Bi-Bo , Zheng , Jin-Cheng , “The new development of disaster medical assistance in globalization era” , “China Emergency support” , Beijing , 4th edition , 2008 , Page 44
- 22 “Tsunami aid : Who’ s giving what ,” BBC News , 27 Jan 2005
- 23 Jane A. Morse , “U.S. hospital ship dispatches toward India Ocean

to rescue victims of tsunami” , “U.S. Reference” , USIPP , [http :
//usinfo.org/mgck/usinfo.state.gov/regional/ea/mgck/archive05/0125mercy.htm](http://usinfo.org/mgck/usinfo.state.gov/regional/ea/mgck/archive05/0125mercy.htm)

24 “Overview : Operation Unified Assistance” , April 15 , 2005 , United States Pacific Command , [http :
//www.pacom.mil/special/0412asia/UnifiedAssistanceBrief.pps](http://www.pacom.mil/special/0412asia/UnifiedAssistanceBrief.pps).

25 Ji , Xiao-Dan , Chen , Liang-Wu , “Humanitarian Assistance : the White Fleet of the U.S.” , “Global military” , Beijing , 2008 7th issue , Page 42

26 Zheng , Bo-Lin , “China is building hospital ship with unknown intentions” , “Youth Daily News” , Nov 15 , 2008 , Page 4

27 Qian , Bo-Si , “May China Rise Threaten its Neighbors?” , “The Security Concern of China Rising in Asian” , Taipei , National Institute for Compilation and Translation , May 2003 , Page 64.

28 Ou , Guan-Yu , “The impression of China Rising to Southeast Asia and the United States” , “China Studies Collection” , Taipei , National Institute for Compilation and Translation , Nov 2006 , Page 182.

29 Chen-Hong , “A brief of China International Rescue Team in Indonesia” , “Advanced training School of Precaution against Natural Calamities Journal , San-he , 7th Volume , first issue , March 2005 , Page 34.

30 Ji , Xiao-Dan , Chen , Liang-Wu , “Humanitarian Assistance-the while fleet of the U.S.” , Page 42.

31 Gong , Yu-Tao , “The international Relief at Present” , Page 33

32 Ibid , Page 34

33 Shi , He-Jiang , “A Floating Hospital at Sea-Hospital Ship” , “Modern Military” , Beijing , May 2003 , Page 43

34 There were 5 levels of hospital ships which are : YH - Hospital Launches , AHL-Small Medical Support Ships , APH-Personnel Transport , Evacuation , AH - Civilian Hospital Ships and AH-Hospital Ships. USNS Mercy and China’ s 866 ship are military AH hospital ships (See World Wide Hospital Ships , “GlobalSecurity.org , [http :
//www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/hospital-ships.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/hospital-ships.htm).

35 Meng , Xian-hai , “The Development of Hospital Ships in Foreign Countries” , “Ships Manufacture Technology & Economic Information” , Beijing , 227th issue , March 2004 , Page 36

