Application of Maritime Culture in the Culture Construction of Shipping Enterprises

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Abstract: The 21st century belongs to the maritime century. Marine power forms the core of maritime power strategy. Marine power is part and parcel of an excellent maritime culture. Being the biggest player in the global logistics arena, COSCO Shipping Group is an important force in the development of maritime economy and the construction of maritime power. In the critical period of group reorganization and integration, COSCO Shipping Group embraces the characteristics of modern time qualities and the characteristics of the industry as a whole. Together with the enterprising spirit of its corporate culture, core competitiveness is enhanced and maritime power is promoted to a higher level of greater significance.

Keywords: marine power; maritime culture; COSCO Shipping; corporate culture

Introduction

On 18th February 2016, China Ocean Shipping Group Co., Ltd. was formally established and listed. It is a merger of the original China Ocean and China Shipping, both giving this world’s largest logistics company an edge in complementary advantages of better coverage. As an important measure to reinforce and deepen the reform of state-owned enterprises and building a stronger maritime power in promoting the implementation of the strategy of “one belt, one road”. The reorganization and integration of COSCO Shipping Group carries a major national mission and social responsibility in the light of the expectations of the numerous shipping parties concerned. In the process of enterprise integration and reorganization, cultural integration is an extremely important aspect of the exercise. Steps taken to reshape the new group enterprise culture in forming a cohesive, centripetal and influential force ensures competitiveness under the enterprise's soft power push. The author analyzes the main problems faced by the corporate culture construction of the group, starting from the historical evolution and the characteristics of the industry, and has been thinking about actively absorbing the essence of the maritime culture and constructing the corporate culture of the group.

1. Main problem faced by the group corporate culture construction

COSCO Shipping Group leaders attach great importance to the construction of corporate culture, introducing at the very outset the proposed “a team, a culture, a goal, a dream” and “four one” concept in an effort to unite and lead the staff to create a “larger, more globalized, more competitive, more valuable” excellent business environment. However, in the
process, it is also encountered with a series of problems.

1.1 Corporate cultural differences arising from the merger of the two major shipping enterprises

COSCO Group and Zhonghai Group both have a long history of state-owned large scale shipping enterprises. Corporate culture were centered on virtues of patriotism, innovation, integrity and other common ideas, playing an important role in the new group’s integration process effectively contributing to a unified thinking and the role of convergence forces. At the same time, due to the diversities in historical, geographical, personnel composition, development model and other factors of the two groups of corporate culture concerned, there remains inherent big differences coupled with the large number of employees involved giving it even greater challenges ahead.

1.2 The systematic construction of enterprise culture needs to be strengthened

The construction of the new group’s corporate culture is not only facing the differences of the corporate culture of the original two groups, but also facing the challenges of the group’s corporate culture at all levels. At present, the group has more than 1,700 individual corporate enterprises at all levels, each enterprise has its own corporate culture system, part of which is consistent with the corporate culture of the parent enterprise of the Group Corporation, part of which fully embodies their “own characteristics”. On the whole, the corporate culture system is not strong.

1.3 The level of individual enterprise’s corporate culture varies

Understanding of corporate culture construction of the individual enterprise differs across the board and the level of work performance is also uneven. Some enterprises in the group is equipped with a strong workforce with a more effective way of working methods, thus achieved good results. Nevertheless, there are some enterprises do not attach importance to leadership, staff is not in place, lacking creativity, lacking motivations and other issues, leading to slogan, stylized corporate culture formalization not conducive to the development of enterprises in the lead towards enhancing the collective initiative.

2. The development of maritime culture and the core content of the process

Maritime culture is a symbol of a country, a nation, or a group of people involved in maritime practices having the common symbol, values, norms and material forms. It encompasses the maritime symbol, the form of maritime material and other technical elements, including also the norms of navigation, maritime values and other human elements. It is also a complete set of distinctive cultural characteristics of the industry, its core being the maritime values. The navigational culture described in this article is also focused on the field of values.

2.1 The development of maritime culture

Seven thousand years of mankind sailing development process, not only brought about navigation equipment upgrades, improving the norms of navigation, but also accumulated a rich maritime culture. Long history in seafaring adventures such as the development of the Silk Road of the sea, the Emperor Wu of the sea, the Eastern Jin Dynasty, the Tang Dynasty Kam Zhen crossing the sea to promote the Dharma and other maritime practice contains the spirit of the maritime culture, all highlighting the glorious history of maritime civilization and the Chinese people's unique maritime values. Zheng He’s seven Western sea-faring feats also created a history of human sailing unique record, showing to the
world that the Chinese nation is not afraid of danger but full of courage and pioneering spirit with admirable mindset. In modern times, Western countries attach great importance to the development of maritime industry. With the formation of a distinctive maritime culture, maritime powers such as Britain, the United States, Japan, Russia and others have been able to play a major role in the world shipping industry with wide ranging impacts worldwide.

2.2 The core content of maritime culture

Maritime activity is a global, open industry. Based on the practice of navigation sailing culture, its common concept has become the common spirit of the global sailors and recognized code of conduct, with a global attribute. Meantime, due to the historical, regional and traditional cultural influences, maritime culture in development process in China has taken on a rather unique feature.

2.3 The common spirit of global maritime culture

2.3.1 Open and Inclusive

The vastness of the ocean is boundless and all-encompassing. Despite this ever-changing world, the ocean remains open and selfless to both nature and mankind by its various rich provident. Although rough and stormy it may appear on the surface, beneath the depth is calmness and serene quietness. The seafarers inherited a mindset of the openness and calmness of the ocean, and were trained to be steadfast, cheerful and courageous in the face of adversities. At the same time, human navigational routes extend and spread in all directions with navigational activities both rich and varied. The interaction of the various cultures and the subsequent assimilation and integration, the social development and economic progress as a result of competition and cooperation were attributable to the maritime culture aspect of tolerance and fusion/assimilation characteristics.

2.3.2 Adventure

Adventure is innovation. The vagaries of the ocean, the natural and mysterious nature of the ocean of esteem and fear also aroused mankind’s curiosity, yearning and exploration. Through numerous great sailing expeditions, mankind has promoted the great discovery of geography, wide openness, great cultural integration, great political and economic development, and a strong will to create a magnificent history of navigation.

2.3.3 Difficult To Tackle Toughness

In the face of the vast sea, mankind appears so small, but for thousands of years, mankind in a dauntless spirit of perseverance over a stormy sea achieved fruitful results. All kinds of sailing as the theme of literature, film and television works are soul-stirring and the story of the struggle with the sea as its core content, navigation has become a recognized career for the brave.

2.3.4 Help Each Other

The seafarer’s life is confined to such a tiny, cramped space in the shipping vessel with limited material conditions, lacking of cultural activities in the environment that to prohibit, unity and cooperation became the team’s magical weapon to improve the effectiveness of all naval personnel towards a common mission, a common goal, and a concerted action in the wake of the psychological call and will-power to reach a consensus.
2.4 The unique spirit of Chinese maritime culture

Patriotic Dedication. Somewhat different from the modern Western maritime powers’ land grabbing/seizures and blatant exploitation to serve their self-interest, maritime missions in the 5,000 years of Chinese civilization started off on a much different footing;

Chinese seafarers uphold patriotic dedication and their historical missions adhere to and promote peaceful development with its foreign counterparts. 600 years ago, Zheng He’s fearless fleet set sail to the world with the purpose of promoting the national prestige. Along the way, instead of looting, burning and killing, the Chinese made friendly, in-depth economic and cultural exchanges with the locals, thus formed the Zheng He’s spirit of “courage to open up, peace and friendship”. On 19th September 1949, on the eve of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the former Kuomintang Merchants Bureau “Hai Liao” vessel took the lead in the uprising and broke through the blockade. After eight days and nine nights, it returned from Hong Kong to the motherland for the new China’s shipping business. On 18th April 1979, COSCO Shanghai company “Liulinhai” vessel arrived in the United States Seattle Port. The successful completion of China’s cargo ship maiden voyage to the United States opened up the Sino-US maritime trade channel heralding a new era of Sino-US economic and trade cooperation. In spite of countless encounters with the stormy sea, the Chinese sailors continue to uphold patriotic dedication throughout the practice of navigation, and gradually form a unique aspect of China’s maritime culture for this ancient, cosmopolitan culture.

3. The application of maritime culture in the corporate culture construction of the group

Corporate culture determines the corporate members’ way of thinking and behavioral patterns in order to achieve and to ensure the strategic objectives of the enterprise. It is not only the inheritance and development of the essence of our traditional maritime culture, but also the absorption and reference of the advanced ideas of foreign maritime culture, which is conducive to promoting the healthy, coordinated and sustainable development of our maritime industry. In addition, it is helpful to the formation of outstanding characteristics of the main shipping business core competitiveness.

3.1 The applicability of maritime culture to group corporate culture construction

3.1.1 The historical heritage of culture

One of the characteristics of culture is its historical heritage, so is the case with Chinese maritime culture of endless inheritance and development, both being viewed as valuable assets to the Chinese civilization and the maritime industry. As the world’s largest shipping company, heritage of this valuable cultural resources are our pride, it is our responsibility to capitalize on it. Throughout history, the development of China’s maritime business encountered sea hegemony in order to maintain the feudal ruling territory, show of force through sea patrol in order to establish the imperial power’s dominant position, suppressing of the resistance pertaining to civil maritime trading forces, expanding international sphere of influence in its various stages of development. In this new era, China’s maritime industry upholds the concept of scientific development and guided the overall development of China’s shipping industry in the direction that upholds values of peace, friendship, fairness, impartiality, openness and cooperation. We strive to realize the strategic transformation from a big navigational power to a powerful maritime power that exhibits traits of a strong, vibrant and sustainable entity.
3.1.2 Industry of relevance to maritime industry

The core idea of the maritime culture is the enrichment derived from China’s maritime history, embracing to a high degree experiences covering the sphere of market, economics and trading activities. It integrates maritime thought achievements covering various aspects of material, human and financial resource management. After the establishment of COSCO Shipping Group, the “6 + 1” industrial cluster of “Internet +” related business namely, shipping, logistics, finance, equipment manufacturing, shipping service, socialization industry and innovation based on business model, is proposed. All the above elements were proposed and vigorously promoted to create the world’s leading integrated logistics supply chain service provider in the group’s corporate culture system, in line with the group’s overall industrial layout needs.

3.1.3 Cultural homogeneity

Recalling the past and the source is important to true character and the future. It is the correct mindset to adopt in moving forward. Both COSCO Group and Zhonghai Group have well established corporate culture. In the course of reorganization and integration of the two groups, it is important to sort out the original culture and seek common ground while reserving differences and form consensus. The original maritime culture of the two major groups before the merger adopted different forms of expression, whether it is the original COSCO Group’s “helping each other” spirit of enterprise, or the original China Shipping Group’s “integrity of the sea, the pursuit of excellence”, both were constructive and point towards the pioneering and innovative, solidarity and cooperation, courage and integrity spirit of the maritime culture. The new group corporate culture in its vigorous push and promotion of the maritime culture lays the ground conducive to improving staff acceptance and recognition.

3.1.4 Enterprise Brand Cultivation

Corporate culture is the soul of the enterprise. After reorganization and consolidation, the new group ranked first in the world in terms of comprehensive capacity. In terms of revenue, it ranked inside the world’s top 500 and is aiming for a place in the branded category of the world’s top 500 by vigorously promoting the maritime culture in an effort to give it a strong boost. On the one hand, it is a valuable resource to have a unique culture that is consistent with its own main business and is self-contained and mature and has a deep historical accumulation. On the other hand, the proactive behavior of the enterprise is not only a matter of maritime Cultural reinforcement and promotion, it more effectively helps to establish a good corporate social image, enhancing the industry influence and voice as a whole.

3.2 The specific application of maritime culture in group corporate culture system

3.2.1 Strategic conceptual steps – Inclusivity open mindset

A nation’s self-confidence comes from the complementarity of multiculturalism. The growth of an industry comes from a high degree of integration of the economic and social realms. In order for COSCO Shipping Group to maintain its world leader status, it must have an international perspective whilst standing on a high vantage point of global thinking. This calls for the need to inculcate open-minded tolerance. After the establishment of the new group, adoption of an open attitude to actively strengthen cooperation on international and domestic levels is imperative as is embodied in this
concept of inclusivity. At the same time, this spirit is also in line with the national “one belt, one road” strategy of peace, communication, understanding, tolerance, cooperation and win-win overall requirements.

3.2.2 Value conceptual steps - Patriotic dedication, pioneering, innovative and sense of responsibility

Shipping industry is not only entrusted with the development of maritime economy, it is also responsible to protect the national economy energy transport system, material distribution and other duties. Where necessary, it should also stand forth as vanguards and defenders of the national core interests. Maritime culture embodies patriotic dedication and adventurous spirit, at the same time cultivating and possessing internal strength and external assertive confidence giving it vitality in its quest to portray itself as a powerful maritime nation. As a central enterprise of the nation, it bears heavy burden requiring brave courageous spirit to stand forth as vanguard. From the uprising to takeover of the original China Merchants Steamship Company followed by the subsequent making of Chinese shipping history; from vigorously promoting the international trade and transport to the implementation of the national energy reserve strategy, generations after generations of navigators will always cherish the patriotic feelings with bold spirit of exploration and the indomitable will to contribute to the construction of new China. Present day development of the global political and economic culture has taken on a somewhat different perspective. Olden day’s patriotic dedication and adventurous spirit have been given a new connotation; the older sailing adventure centers on exploring new routes, discovery of new continents, development of new trades, whilst present day maritime adventure in contrast lies in its bold innovation, the courage to practice, forging ahead, promoting world trade, interactive civilization and harmony, and through these floating vessels spread the notion and greatness of Chinese power across the five continents.

3.2.3 Implementation conceptual steps - Complementary spirit of struggle

National development is akin to a boat moving upstream. If it does not move on, it will backslide. Therefore, it is the case in business environment. COSCO Shipping Group is in a merger process of reorganization, transformation and upgrading. During this critical period, unity is deemed of paramount importance and all staffs are expected to work hand in hand together. Critical management calls for the need to practice and adhere to the maritime culture entailing clear division of labor, unity and teamwork with cooperative spirit, having a clear work description; continuing to forge forward in bravery and courage, surmounting all odds, maintaining a strong fighting consciousness in the face of adversities, prevailing over what obstacles may lay ahead; facing troubles and sufferings together in brotherly love, extending mutual help wherever necessary, come what may there is always a family love and concern transcending the whole atmosphere.

4. Various relationship issues to be dealt with in the process of group corporate culture construction.

4.1 The relationship between historical inheritance and top design

COSCO Shipping Group is a merger of two big mature enterprise groups, thus is classified under the category of a new enterprise with history. The construction of enterprise culture needs to take into consideration of both the historical inheritance and the top design aspects. On the one hand, the long history of the development of shipping industry and the relatively stable management mode of state-owned enterprises have made the traditional concept and existing
Culture having a deep foundation in the minds of employees, laying a foundation for refining the core spirit of corporate culture. On the other hand, the new group’s corporate culture should carefully tailor in such a manner that best match with the new strategic planning in order to effectively promote the new enterprise’s steady and healthy development. As such, it requires attaching great importance to both aspects by carefully integrating them in a manner that yields optimum results. Simultaneously, drawing from the two original major groups their cultural essence and refining them to be in line with the new overall strategy.

4.2 The relationship between corporate culture and rules and regulations
Culture versus rules is comparable to moral versus law. Relative to the culture of the weak value system, a proper rules and regulations system determines the strength of the strong value system. Corporate culture is invisible and flexible, as such must be supplemented by a corresponding set of rules and regulations system, so that it penetrated into the production and operation sectors, safety management, quality and efficiency of all aspects, to achieve the desired effect internally and externally. At the same time, we must also realize that rules and regulations ensures compliance with culture but can never replace the culture in stimulating the morale of employees or to explore the potential of enterprises neither will it enhance the role of the team motivation and so on. A good business enterprise must be able to skillfully combine the two aspects perfectly together.

4.3 The relationship between inner spirit cultivation and external image establishment
The cultivation of corporate culture is a process from obedience to identity, and then to internalization. To realize the dominance of its effect, it needs to be covered both internally and externally. On the basis of strengthening the inner self, we should vigorously carry out staff training, enhance staff recognition of corporate culture, and then turn them into actions. On the external aspect, there is a need to improve the quality of products and services, rules and regulations to enhance market acceptance. On the other hand, the enterprise should actively fulfill its corporate social responsibility, intensify propaganda and promotion and guidance to public opinion, enhance the brand reputation and employee pride so that corporate image stands out as the outstanding golden symbol of the enterprise.

Conclusion
The oceans have a huge potential to be continuously harnessed of its bountiful wealth by modern mankind. As a precursor to being a strong, formidable world power, maritime strength of China will be continually developed. COSCO Shipping Group, in the process of building a global leader in integrated logistics supply chain services group is actively learning from the essence of maritime culture, strengthening itself at the same time. COSCO’s corporate culture and its management structure works to form a complementary whole exhibiting uniqueness cum originality. Its high virtue of inclusivity and tolerance brings pride to the nation in it strive towards patriotic innovation and excellence.

Reference