

The Measures and Practices to Cultivate More Competitive Seafarers

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ABSTRACT

In the recent years, China's seafarers manpower sources have been concerned by many foreign shipowners. The number of Chinese seafarers employed on the ships flying foreign flags is increasing gradually. In order to cultivate more competitive seafarers for national and international shipping industry, several macro measures and practices are to be taken in China's MET.

1. Introduction

In China, the shipping industry is becoming more and more prosperous with the development of national economy. As a developing country, China's seafarers manpower sources have been concerned by many foreign shipowners. The number of Chinese seafarers employed on the ships flying foreign flags is increasing gradually. With Chinese seafarers entering the world maritime manpower market, the seafarer's cultivating standard is changing from mainly meeting domestic shipping industry requirements to meeting the international shipping requirements. Therefore, how to cultivate more competitive seafarers is becoming the highlight of China's MET.

2. The Feasibility and Necessity of Cultivating Competitive Seafarers in China

China, the largest population country in the world, has competitive priced maritime manpower resource. Many facts are advantageous to seize the opportunities to cultivate more competitive seafarers for shipping industry, such as the falling numbers of seafarers in developed countries and the increasing in developing countries, China's accession to World Trade Organization (WTO) reaching final stage, the fast growing fleets in the Asia-Pacific region and so on.

2.1 The Falling Numbers of Seafarers in Developed Countries

As we know, there has been a long-term decline in number of seafarers in developed western European countries. The insufficient maritime manpower has already affected shipping in these countries. Even in Asia, a number of developed maritime countries such as Japan and Singapore etc are following the experience of western maritime countries. As a developing country, China should seize the opportunities to train as many as possible qualified seafarers for international shipping. Chinese seafarers began to work outside China's shipping companies in the late 1970s after the government adopted "Opening policy". Nowadays, it is feasibility to cultivate and train more

cadets at the Maritime Education and Training Institutions (METs) in China, because the international shipping can provide better incomes than the jobs on shore in China.

2.2 China's Accession to WTO Reaching Final Stage

China's enterprises have kept a clear head that if someday China enters WTO, they will face much more challenges in the world. In this case, the shipping company in China must recruit some qualified seafarers in international standards to reconstruct their seafarer teams to meet the requirements of global shipping competition.

The advantages of Chinese maritime resources are in two aspects. The employment is relatively cheaper; the officers graduated from maritime universities/colleges have higher comprehensive qualities. The disadvantage is the foreign language deficiency.

The advantages and disadvantage have told China's METs, in the prerequisite for meeting all STCW standards of training and certification, how to update the course system and teaching contents and methods to upgrade the quality of maritime education and training.

2.3 The Fast Growing Fleets in the Asia-Pacific Region

A number of countries in Asian and Pacific region have become important shipowning nations, and some of them including China have rapidly increased their shipping fleets over the last two decades and are among the largest 25 shipowners in the world. The demand for seafarers to serve the expanding national fleets and international shipping brings in good opportunity for China's METs to cultivate more competitive maritime personnel, and it is necessary for China's METs to do so if China is to become a major supplier of maritime manpower in Asia and Pacific region.

3. Many Other Maritime Representative Bodies in Asia-Pacific Region Concerning How to Cultivate More Competitive Seafarers in China's METs

China, as a potential major supplier of seafarers in the international maritime manpower market, has received keen attention for her maritime education and training from many other maritime bodies, such as the Hong Kong Shippowners Association (HKSOA), the Association of Maritime Education and Training in Asia-Pacific (AMETIAP) and Asian Shipowner Forum (ASF).

HKSOA wishes to create a nexus with China's METs for making graduates even more valuable than they are now and more readily employable.

HKSOA has visited 7 selected METs including Dalian, Shanghai, Jimei, Wuhan, Qingdao, Ningbo and Zhoushan and informally audited their education and training, staffing, equipment and facilities. The purpose is to set up a close relationship with METs and make some recommendations as to how it may be helped to upgrade the quality in English, professional working attitude, nautical and engineering skills, so that the maritime graduates will be able to not only meet STCW78/95 standards but also familiar with foreign shipping system and let the maritime graduates be more competitive on board of non-PRC vessels.

4. In Order to Cultivate More Competitive Maritime Personnel, the Measures and Practices to Be Taken in China's MET

In the current economic situation, under the leadership of Ministry of Communications, some macro measures are to be taken to ensure the cultivation of more competitive maritime personnel.

4.1 The Legislation of China's MET

Ocean-going shipping is an international business, so maritime education and training is of internationalization characteristics which are different from other higher education of engineering. Most advanced shipping countries in the world have legislated to ensure the maritime education and training development abiding by laws and regulations.

In the last two decades, under the "opening policy", China's MET has made considerable development. The number of METs and the scale of institutions have been in the first place in the world. However, up to now, there are not special laws and regulations for the maritime education and training in China, the long-term development plans of MET lack controlling under the special laws and regulations. It restricts the reasonable development of maritime education and training in some extents. In order to solve problem above mentioned, the Ministry of Communications will organize the maritime experts to do the researching about maritime legislation, and proceed to the next to complete the legislation.

Based on national and international shipping industry development situations, in the days to come, hope that the permission, qualifications, investments, and scales of METs' founding and development will be examined and approved by law.

4.2 Establishment of Comprehensive Optimized Cultivating System

Because of strictly implementing STCW78/95 convention, China has entered the "White List". On the basis of meeting the standards of STCW78/95 convention, China's MET, under the leadership of Ministry of Communications, is going to set up comprehensive optimized cultivating system above or beyond STCW78/95 for cultivating more competitive maritime personnel.

Under the new comprehensive optimized system, the following issues will be studied, such as the effective ways of sea-going practice, the possibility and necessity of setting up national sea-going practice shipping fleets, in-service seafarers training at METs, and the distributions, scales, institution levels, investment forms, management system of maritime and training institutes.

4.3 The Establishment of Maritime English Assessment System

Nowadays, Chinese maritime graduates' English communication ability is lower than that of South Eastern. This has become a major factor which weakens Chinese maritime graduates' competitive ability in the international shipping industry.

An English proficiency investigation has been made for Chinese maritime graduates. For example, at Dalian Maritime University (DMU), over 95% maritime graduates passed College English Test Band 4 (CET Band 4), and a part of them passed Band 6. Indeed, most of them have relatively good proficiency in reading and grammar, they have better English basic knowledge, but relatively poor listening and speaking ability. It is found that the

main problems lie in the English teaching methods and assessment system. CET records can reflect certain English proficiency, but it is not the effective assessment standard for maritime education and training.

The new maritime English assessment system will include reading, writing, speaking and listening assessments.

It puts stress on the speaking and listening assessments, and guides the English teaching method and material reforming to the direction of improve English communication ability effectively in the same class hours.

5. Result

Hope to take above measures and practices to further improve China's MET above or beyond STCW78/95, and realize the object of cultivating more competitive maritime personnel in a few years.