

China's Medical Aid to Pacific Island Countries: Implementation Methods, Effectiveness Analysis and Development Paths

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ABSTRACT

The South Pacific region is an important target area for China's new era of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, and it serves as a "blue ribbon" connecting the "Belt and Road" initiative. Given that the vast majority of Pacific Island countries suffer from disadvantages such as small size and sparse population, which result in low levels of national development, poor living standards of the people, and prominent health deficits, China pays greater attention to providing development assistance, including medical aid, to these countries during the process of developing bilateral relations with them. Currently, through continuous dispatch of medical teams to the Pacific region, conducting the Mission Harmony series of tasks, and providing emergency public health assistance, China has effectively alleviated the shortage of medical resources in the Pacific island countries receiving assistance, safeguarded the life and health safety of local people, and consolidated and developed friendly relations between China and the Pacific island countries. Moreover, the medical assistance provided by China has provided case support for enhancing China's international and regional influence, promoting the wide dissemination of the one-China principle in the South Pacific region, and implementing the global security initiative and the global development initiative. In the future, China should promote its medical assistance to Pacific Island countries towards the direction of covering the entire region, intelligent healthcare, improving their medical capabilities, and international collaboration. This will be achieved through the regular dispatch of medical teams to all Pacific island countries that have diplomatic relations with China, encouraging domestic provinces and autonomous regions to provide targeted assistance to specific Pacific Island countries, strengthening medical assistance, and calling on third parties outside the region to jointly promote medical assistance to Pacific Island countries.

1. Introduction

On February 21, 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China held the Blue Hall Forum and released the The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper. It positively responded to the development demands of Pacific Island countries in areas such as global climate governance, natural disaster prevention, and public health cooperation. It was pointed out that China will consistently attach importance to the special circumstances and reasonable concerns of Pacific island countries in the fields of climate change, natural disasters, and public health, support the efforts made by Pacific island countries to

address global challenges, support the implementation of their "Blue Pacific 2050 Strategy", increase the provision of materials, funds and human resources support, and help island countries enhance their ability to deal with non-traditional security threats (People's Daily, 2023).

The South Pacific is a naturally strategic region along the "Belt and Road" initiative. In particular, establishing the China-Pacific Island Countries Blue Partnership is of great significance for China in its efforts to build an oceanic power, continuously promote the Maritime Silk Road, and actively participate in global governance (Guo and Lin, 2022). Therefore, in the context of China and Pacific Island countries accelerating the building of a

China-Pacific community with a shared future, it is worth paying attention to how to implement precise policies and provide more high-quality development assistance to Pacific Island countries, thereby promoting the in-depth development of bilateral relations between China and the Pacific island countries.

2. The Situation of China's Medical Assistance to Pacific Island Countries

In May 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China released the Fact Sheet: Cooperation Between China and Pacific Island Countries, clearly stating that China has a long history of friendly exchanges with Pacific Island countries. Since establishing diplomatic relations in the 1970s, China has continuously expanded its cooperation with the islands, covering 20-plus fields such as trade and investment, marine environment, disaster prevention and mitigation, poverty alleviation and assistance, healthcare, education, tourism, culture, sports, and local affairs. China provides economic and technical assistance to the islands without any political conditions attached, implementing over 100 aid projects, providing more than 200 batches of material assistance, and training about 10,000 personnel in various fields for the islands. China has dispatched 600 medical teams to the islands, benefiting over 260,000 people. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, China has provided nearly 600,000 doses of vaccines and over 100 tons of various anti-epidemic supplies to the islands. China and the islands have formed 22 pairs of friendly provincial (municipal) city relations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 2022). To be honest, these exchanges and cooperation efforts can be said to cover the most urgent development and governance needs of the Pacific island countries (Zhang and Yu, 2024). Given that the vast majority of Pacific Island countries are facing severe healthcare challenges, during the process of deepening China-Tonga relations, China has targeted the actual needs of the Pacific island countries and has always regarded medical assistance as an important area of cooperation. Mainly through dispatching medical teams, implementing the Mission Harmony series of medical tasks, and providing emergency public health assistance, etc., it has continuously strengthened cooperation with Pacific Island countries in the field of healthcare.

2.1 Foreign medical aid team

From April 12 to 24, 1985, Hu Yaobang, then General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, visited five countries: Australia, New Zealand, Samoa, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea, marking the first visit to the South Pacific region by a senior Chinese Communist Party leader. During the visit, Hu emphasized that the South Pacific belongs to the countries of the region, and China had no intention of competing with anyone for control of the area. China has always supported the South Pacific

countries in independently formulating their own domestic and foreign policies and establishing and developing friendly relations with other countries based on their own actual needs and interests. This visit sent a signal to the outside world that China values the legitimate rights and interests of Pacific Island countries, supports their reasonable demands, and is willing to cooperate with them for mutual development. It played a positive role in further deepening China's friendly relations with Pacific Island countries. To enhance bilateral relations with the Pacific Island countries and out of humanitarian considerations, China also began to gradually provide medical aid within its capacity to these countries, sending medical teams to those willing to establish diplomatic ties. Since China sent a medical team to Samoa in 1986 to carry out medical work, China has gradually strengthened its medical and health cooperation with the Pacific Island countries in need by sending foreign medical teams.

On November 22, 2014, during a collective meeting with the leaders of Pacific Island countries, President Xi Jinping delivered a keynote speech, in which he stated, "China is willing to strengthen exchanges with the island countries in various fields and continue to send medical teams to relevant island countries to carry out their work (The State Council the People's Republic of China, 2014). On November 16, 2018, President Xi Jinping once again held a collective meeting with the leaders of Pacific Island countries with which China has diplomatic ties. During this meeting, Xi clearly stated, "No matter how far China develops, it will always be a member of the developing world, and will always stand together with developing countries. The relationship between China and the Pacific Island countries has opened a new chapter. We are willing to work together with the island countries, strengthen our friendship with sincerity, advance cooperation through practical efforts, and jointly create a brighter future for the relationship between China and the Pacific Island countries (The State Council the People's Republic of China, 2018). Under the strong promotion of the Chinese government, the frequency of sending medical aid teams abroad, the number of covered countries, the size of the teams, and the overall volume have all shown a significant upward trend. Moreover, China attaches great importance to the subjective will of the recipient countries and does its best to meet their medical demands.

In 2018, in response to the humanitarian request made by the Samoan government for dispatching a medical assistance team, during the process of forming the second batch of China's medical assistance team to Samoa, the Second Affiliated Hospital of Jilin University specially selected six experts from the departments of cardiology, otorhinolaryngology, nephrology, pathology, dermatology and urology to participate in the composition

of the medical assistance team. Meanwhile, some provinces and autonomous regions in China have fully utilized their own advantages and actively carried out medical assistance activities. By dispatching short-term medical teams to Pacific Island countries such as Fiji for free medical check-ups and visits, they helped these island countries enhance their medical capabilities. For instance, since 2007, the Guangdong Provincial Government has coordinated experts from relevant hospitals and continuously carried out the “Medical Services to the Islands” initiative. Teams have been dispatched to countries such as the Federated States of Micronesia, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu to provide targeted medical services. Starting from 2015, Guangdong Province has, based on a thorough understanding of the actual medical and health needs of Pacific Island countries, fully exerted its initiative. It has continuously carried out the “Medical Services to the Islands” initiative, sending medical teams to Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Federated States of Micronesia, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu and other countries. A total of 22 medical teams has been dispatched, providing medical treatment for nearly 6000 patients in various fields such as ophthalmology, cardiovascular medicine and dentistry, and performing over 300 cataract removal surgeries (Xinhua Net, 2022). The continuous implementation of

these activities fully demonstrates that local governments are also actively participating in foreign affairs activities, and are contributing their due efforts to strengthening the connectivity between China and Pacific Island countries and accelerating the establishment of the China-Pacific Island Countries Community of Shared Future.

Although sending medical assistance teams to the affected countries can to some extent alleviate the shortage of medical personnel in those countries, in regions where the medical infrastructure is relatively backward, local hospitals lack the ability to treat complex and difficult cases. Therefore, on one hand, the Chinese government provides medical assistance to Pacific Island countries through donating medical equipment, building comprehensive hospitals, and providing scarce medicines, to enhance the professionalism of the medical teams and local medical staff in diagnosis and treatment. On the other hand, the Chinese medical teams also conduct training and teaching for local medical staff through academic lectures, clinical teaching, and training exchanges, aiming to improve the diagnosis and treatment capabilities of local medical personnel. According to incomplete statistics, China has dispatched 600 medical teams to these countries, conducted hundreds of medical visits and free medical services, and donated a large amount of medical equipment and medicines, serving a total of 260,000 local patients (People’s Daily, 2023).

Table 1. Situation of China’s Dispatch of Medical Teams to Pacific Island Countries with Diplomatic Relations

Country	Date of Establishment of Diplomatic Relations	The Date for Restoring Diplomatic Relations	The Date When the Medical Team was First Dispatched
Fiji	1975		
Samoa	1975		1986
Papua New Guinea	1976		2002
Vanuatu	1982		1987
Micronesia	1989		2009
Cook Islands	1997		
Tonga	1998		2010
Niue	2007	2019	
Solomon Islands	2019	2024	2022

Source: Author’s compilation based on Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (2022), People’s Daily (2018), and official records of Chinese medical assistance to Pacific Island Countries

2.2. Carry out the Mission Harmony Series of Tasks

Generally speaking, the main participants in diplomatic and foreign affairs activities are the governments of sovereign states at all levels. However, this does not rule out the involvement of other actors in foreign affairs. Apart from the Chinese government coordinating and organizing the dispatch of medical aid teams for overseas assistance, based on the humanitarian concern of saving lives and treating the sick, the Chinese government has also actively coordinated various forces to participate in medical assistance to Pacific Island countries. The most typical example is that the Chinese Peace Ship Hospital has been sent to Pacific Island countries multiple times to

carry out medical service tasks.

Since October 2008, after undergoing a series of inspections and deliveries of the ship’s hull and onboard medical equipment to the naval forces, PLAN Hospital Ship Ark Peace has mainly been engaged in major tasks such as treating and transporting wounded personnel at sea, emergency rescue in major disasters, and providing international humanitarian medical services. As of 2024, PLAN Hospital Ship Ark Peace has carried out 10 Mission Harmony series of tasks abroad and has visited the South Pacific region multiple times. While conducting friendly visits, it has also brought medical services to the local area.

In August 2014, after completing the Rim of the Pacific-

2014 exercise, the PLAN Hospital Ship Ark Peace transferred to carry out the Mission Harmony-2014. It immediately set off for the four South Pacific countries of Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea to conduct friendly visits and medical services. During the nearly two-month mission period, the PLAN Hospital Ship Ark Peace covered a total distance of 9207 nautical miles, provided 22211 outpatient consultations, admitted 110 patients for hospitalization, and performed 212 surgeries. At the same time, the PLAN Hospital Ship Ark Peace also invited medical staff from the four countries to board the ship to participate in the entire medical treatment process of joint triage, consultation, and surgery. Through practical methods, it imparted practical medical skills and relevant experience to the participants (People's Daily Online, 2014).

Following its first medical mission to four South Pacific countries from June to November 2018, the PLAN Hospital Ship Ark Peace once again participated in major diplomatic activities of the country and carried out friendly visits and medical services in some South Pacific island countries and some Latin American countries. During this mission, the PLAN Hospital Ship Ark Peace set up 18 clinical departments and 5 auxiliary diagnostic departments, with a total of 120 medical staff, and carried a 1-shipboard ambulance helicopter. The average daily number of patients seen at the outpatient clinic exceeded 800 (Xu et. al, 2021). On November 14, 2018, on the eve of his state visit to the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, his meeting with the leaders of Pacific Island countries with which China has diplomatic relations, and his attendance at the 26th APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, President Xi Jinping published assigned article in Papua New Guinea's Post-Courier and The National. In the article, he noted that "the Chinese naval hospital ship Peace Ark visited Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu, providing humanitarian medical services to more than 20000 people in the island countries (The State Council the People's Republic of China, 2018).

During the mission in the four South Pacific countries, the PLAN Hospital Ship Ark Peace conducted a total of 143 surgeries and operations. Only one patient experienced postoperative nausea and vomiting, and no patient had an extended hospital stay that prevented them from being discharged in time (Wang et. al, 2018). It is

clearly evident that when the PLAN Hospital Ship Ark Peace visited the South Pacific island countries, it not only brought medical care to the local people but also once again demonstrated China's emphasis on developing friendly relations with the Pacific island countries, and its willingness to contribute its due efforts to the development of public health in these countries.

From July to September 2023, in accordance with the consensus reached between China and the five countries of Kiribati, Tonga, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and East Timor, immediately after China's official COVID-19 prevention and control policies returned to "Category B infectious diseases under Category B management", the Chinese government dispatched the PLAN Hospital Ship Ark Peace for the third time to the South Pacific region to carry out the Mission Harmony series of tasks. During the two-month mission period, the total voyage of the PLAN Hospital Ship Ark Peace exceeded 12,000 nautical miles, the total number of medical services provided exceeded 40,000, the number of individual station diagnoses exceeded 10000, and 192 surgeries were performed on the main platform of the hospital ship. In the Solomon Islands alone, the PLAN Hospital Ship Ark Peace treated 10310 local patients and conducted 5825 auxiliary examinations. The then Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, Manasseh Sogavare, even said when he boarded the PLAN Hospital Ship Ark Peace to visit the medical staff, "The Peace Ark Hospital Ship carries profound meanings of promoting world peace, saving lives, helping the injured, and having boundless love." (Li and Li, 2023) Evidently, while the PLAN hospital ship Ark Peace delivered high-quality medical services to local communities in the four South Pacific countries, it also helped expand the popular foundation for further consolidating the China-Pacific Island Countries community with a shared future and provided strong support for this vision.

It is worth noting that the PLAN Hospital Ship Ark Peace also conducted detailed research on the climatic conditions and lifestyle of the people in the South Pacific region. This has largely ensured that the hospital ship can continuously provide high-quality medical care, enhance diagnostic accuracy, and guarantee the quality and safety of surgeries (Yang et. al, 2024).

Table 2. Object countries and regions covered by each Mission Harmony of PLAN Hospital Ship Ark Peace

Year	Mission Name	Target Countries and Regions
2010	Mission Harmony -2010	The waters of the Gulf of Aden and Djibouti, Kenya, Tanzania, Seychelles, and Bangladesh
2011	Mission Harmony -2011	Cuba, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Costa Rica
2013	Mission Harmony -2013	The waters of the Gulf of Aden and the countries of Maldives, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Brunei, Cambodia, and Indonesia
2014	Mission Harmony -2014	Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea
2015	Mission Harmony -2015	Australia, French Polynesia, the United States, Mexico, Barbados, Grenada, Peru
2017	Mission Harmony -2017	Djibouti, Sierra Leone, Gabon, Congo (Brazzaville), Angola, Mozambique, Tanzania and Timor-Leste, with stops in Sri

		Lanka and Spain
2018	Mission Harmony -2018	Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, Venezuela, Grenada, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Ecuador
2022	Mission Harmony -2022	Indonesia
2023	Mission Harmony -2023	Kiribati, Tonga, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and East Timor

Source: Author's compilation based on Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China (2023, 2024) and official Mission Harmony records.

2.3 Provide Emergency Public Health Assistance

Based on the current situation of public health, the healthcare systems in most Pacific island countries are relatively weak, and medical supplies are scarce. Masks and other epidemic prevention supplies are mostly dependent on external imports and international aid. The rapid outbreak and rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide have further highlighted the health deficits in the South Pacific region. Some Pacific Island countries have even been forced to declare a state of emergency or implement quarantine and lockdown measures to deal with the COVID-19 epidemic. Out of humanitarian considerations, after achieving a certain degree of success in its own epidemic prevention, China promptly provided support to the Pacific island countries within its capacity.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of 2019 and its rapid spread worldwide severely disrupted the overall stability of global public health. Against this backdrop, it is imperative to carry out international multilateral cooperation, exchange prevention and control experiences, and jointly promote the stabilization of global public health governance. Therefore, China has fully leveraged its comparative advantages and actively provided public health assistance. When the overall situation of epidemic prevention and control in Wuhan, Hubei Province was stabilizing, China promptly held a video conference of health experts from China and Pacific Island countries to share China's epidemic development situation and prevention and treatment experiences with ten Pacific island countries that have diplomatic relations with China. They also conducted in-depth exchanges and discussions on aspects such as prevention measures, diagnosis screening, and laboratory testing with the Pacific island countries. Eventually, based on the understanding and absorption of the epidemic prevention-related experiences provided by Chinese medical staff, each Pacific island country also adopted various measures and plans from China in the subsequent epidemic prevention and control efforts. Based on the successful holding of video conferences among health experts, on May 13th and November 30th, 2020, China also held two special deputy foreign minister-level meetings with ten Pacific island countries that have diplomatic relations. At the official level, they fully discussed and reached a broad consensus on issues such as how to better carry out anti-epidemic cooperation, jointly oppose politicizing, stigmatizing, and labelling the

epidemic, and strive to promote the forward development of practical cooperation in various fields in the "post-pandemic era".

In addition, China has established the China-Pacific Island Countries Anti-Epidemic Cooperation Fund. In March 2020, after the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Papua New Guinea, the Chinese government used the China-Pacific Island Countries Anti-Epidemic Cooperation Fund to donate to Papua New Guinea. On November 25, 2021, China also provided epidemic prevention assistance to Micronesia in the form of additional investment in the China-Pacific Island Countries Anti-Epidemic Cooperation Fund. The emergence of this series of actions fully demonstrates that China adheres to the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, attaches great importance to developing relations with Pacific island countries, and is willing to join hands with these countries in fighting the epidemic and overcoming difficulties together.

On June 24, 2021, President Xi Jinping held a phone conversation with then Prime Minister of Fiji, Frank Bainimarama. Their discussion focused on jointly combating the COVID-19 pandemic and strengthening medical and health assistance. Xi noted that China is willing to continue providing support to Fiji in its fight against the pandemic, including vaccines. China will establish a China-Pacific Island Countries emergency supplies reserve to help island countries such as Fiji enhance their capacity to respond to major public health emergencies and natural disasters (The State Council the People's Republic of China, 2021). This initiative received a positive response from Fiji and other Pacific Island countries. During the first China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers' Meeting held on October 21st, the participating parties specifically discussed issues related to strengthening cooperation in combating the pandemic and building a health community as well as establishing a contingency reserve warehouse for emergency supplies between China and Pacific Island countries in the field of public health. They also detailed the relevant cooperation consensus and included it in the Joint Statement of the China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers' Meeting released after the meeting (People's Daily, 2021).

It should be noted that the establishment of the emergency material reserve warehouse has not only provided the Pacific island countries with relatively sufficient material support when they are facing the COVID-19 pandemic, but also enables them to receive

assistance materials from the emergency material reserve warehouse when other disaster-stricken countries in the region need it. This fully demonstrates that China will take the opportunity of jointly combating the COVID-19 pandemic to gradually increase its financial and material assistance to the Pacific island countries in healthcare, in order to promote the development of public health in the Pacific island countries.

3. The Effectiveness of China's Medical Assistance to Pacific Island Countries

The main reasons for the poverty of high-poverty countries are usually the combined and compounded effects of various factors such as the lack of human capital, insufficient social governance, resource constraints, backward connectivity, and lagging financial development (Xu, Zhao and Sun2024). The relatively backward development situation of the Pacific island countries has led to their long-term need for the necessary assistance from the international community.

Since the "Belt and Road" Initiative was officially proposed in 2013, China has gradually increased its health assistance to the countries along the "Belt and Road", which has led to an increase in the financial investment of China in health assistance to Pacific Island countries (Yang and Cao, 2023). At present, the "Belt and Road" cooperation between China and Pacific Island countries has covered all aspects of the "five connectivity" goals. Particularly, cooperation in terms of infrastructure connectivity and people-to-people connectivity has achieved more prominent results. In the field of people-to-people connectivity, educational and medical exchange and cooperation are the key areas of cooperation between the two sides. China has dispatched medical teams to 8 Pacific island countries that have diplomatic relations with China, assisting within its capacity to improve the relatively backward medical and health conditions in those regions (Lyu, 2022). Based on the basic facts of China's medical assistance to Pacific Island countries, it is easy to observe that China's medical assistance to these countries has played the following positive roles.

First, China has fulfilled the international responsibilities expected of a responsible major country and provided high-quality public health products. China's diplomacy has always emphasized the importance of common development, prosperity and coexistence for all humanity. Therefore, while pursuing its own development, China attaches great importance to the reasonable concerns of other countries. Due to the constraints of subjective and objective factors such as the size of the country, the level of economic and social development, and the governance capacity, most Pacific island countries are facing a relatively severe threat of health deficits. Introducing international aid has become the main means for these

countries to alleviate the crisis. Against this backdrop, China's decades-long medical assistance has, to a large extent, alleviated the relatively prominent health deficits in the recipient Pacific island countries, effectively safeguarding the lives and health safety of the local people, and thus fully demonstrating that China has fulfilled its due international responsibilities and powerfully refuted the groundless accusations against China's diplomacy from the outside.

Secondly, it has greatly promoted the development of a comprehensive strategic partnership of mutual respect and common development between China and the Pacific island countries. Geographically, China and the Pacific island countries are separated by vast distances, and the long-term political, economic and cultural exchanges between the two sides have been restricted by this objective factor. With the continuous improvement of China's comprehensive national strength, in response to the actual needs of the Pacific island countries, actively providing medical assistance to these countries will initially focus on the humanistic exchange level, promoting increasingly close personnel exchanges between the two sides. On this basis, there is greater cooperation space for both sides, which provides beneficial preliminary guidance for strengthening all-round exchanges and cooperation under the framework of the "Belt and Road" Initiative, and ultimately provides strong support for consolidating and developing the bilateral or multilateral relations between China and the recipient Pacific island countries.

Third, China's medical assistance to Pacific Island countries also helps the international community gain a deeper understanding of the One-China principle and shatters the illusions of Taiwan independence forces seeking so-called "international support". In order to maintain and expand its purported influence in the South Pacific, the Taiwan authorities have attempted to seek so-called "international recognition" through "checkbook diplomacy", building ethnic and cultural ties, and providing economic aid. By using medical assistance as a diplomatic entry point and carrying out comprehensive cooperation with Pacific Island countries that have established diplomatic ties with China-covering areas such as trade and investment the marine environment, disaster prevention and mitigation, poverty reduction, and public health-China has been able to convey goodwill for cooperation in the South Pacific and generate positive spillover effects. This approach also helps the international community better recognize that the One-China principle represents a just cause and the prevailing will of the international community.

Although China's medical assistance to Pacific Island countries has greatly enriched the forms of China's distinctive major-country diplomacy and has met the development needs of those countries, it has strong

vitality, appeal and centripetal force. However, it is undeniable that at present, China's medical assistance to Pacific island countries still has some problems that need to be solved, such as not yet dispatching medical teams to some Pacific island countries that have diplomatic relations with China, not yet forming a unified medical assistance system, there are certain discrepancies in the records and reports of medical assistance, and the participation of third parties from outside the region in medical assistance is relatively low.

4. Suggestions for the Future Development of China's Medical Aid to Pacific Island Countries

The World Health Organization once issued a statement indicating that providing health services to a population scattered across dozens of atolls and island groups, covering a distance of up to 5000 kilometers, with slow internet speeds, extremely high operational costs, and infrequent transportation links, poses significant challenges. Most Pacific Island countries are confronted with the inherent challenges of numerous islands, sparse and scattered populations, poor transportation, and relatively backward technological levels, resulting in high operational costs for public health services. Specialized and hospital care is limited to densely populated areas, and achieving the goal of a healthy island vision remains a long way off (World Health Organization). Even the majority of people living on Pacific Islands are unable to effectively access basic services such as clean water, sanitation, and proper waste treatment and disposal. This exposes them inevitably to diseases that could have been prevented. Therefore, it is of great urgency to provide the Pacific island countries with humanitarian assistance within their capacity from the perspective of international aid, in order to improve the relatively backward public health conditions in these regions and enhance the well-being and health of the local people.

Firstly, it is necessary to establish a regular pattern of sending medical assistance teams to all Pacific island countries that have diplomatic relations with China. Currently, due to factors such as the relatively weak willingness of some Pacific island countries to receive assistance and the significant geographical limitations, China has not sent medical assistance teams to all these countries. In addition to the traditional method of directly dispatching medical teams to the local areas and conducting medical tasks, if the infrastructure conditions permit, China can also introduce smart medical technology and conduct remote joint consultations through video conferences, thereby better mobilizing advanced domestic medical resources, improving the medical treatment level of local hospitals, and promoting the integration and sharing of medical resources. At the same time, in the short term, when the numerous islands and their small sizes make it difficult to create medium-

sized or large comprehensive hospitals, we can also break away from the existing thinking of "one medical team providing assistance to one country", and establish a mobile medical assistance team to provide basic medical services to the people on more islands and create a medical referral green channel for patients with severe conditions. Ultimately, the medical services provided by the medical assistance teams will benefit more island countries and their people.

Secondly, efforts should be made to explore the possibility of domestic provinces and autonomous regions providing targeted assistance to specific Pacific Island countries. Based on the current implementation of medical assistance, the operation mode of China's overseas medical teams is mainly that the National Health Commission uniformly coordinates and determines which specific province or autonomous region will organize a medical assistance team to send to the country with needs, and carry out regular medical assistance. At the same time, some provinces have also fully utilized their initiative by using local foreign affairs channels to carry out medical assistance activities, providing short-term medical assistance to some Pacific island countries or offering opportunities for specific island country medical staff to study at designated universities and hospitals in China. Obviously, local governments have actually been deeply involved in the operation system of China's medical assistance to Pacific Island countries, and have gained certain cooperation experience. With the continuous advancement of the "Belt and Road" initiative, the connections between local governments and the outside world are also becoming increasingly strong, and their foreign aid has become an important aspect of China's foreign aid (Wang and Guo, 2023). If conditions permit, we can follow the model of targeted poverty alleviation in which eastern coastal provinces and cities in China assist in poverty-stricken areas in the west. We can organize provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities with the ability, willingness and experience to offer high-quality medical assistance to the Pacific island countries that have diplomatic relations with China. This will help better promote the construction of the cause of enhancing mutual understanding between the Chinese and Pacific island peoples.

Furthermore, efforts should be made to enhance the local medical standards. Although China's development-oriented aid has provided sufficient impetus for local development, it may prevent the recipient countries from building their own sustainable development capabilities (Zhao and Cai, 2025). Currently, China's medical assistance to Pacific Island countries mainly involves sending medical personnel to specific Pacific Island countries for short-term or medium-to-long-term medical assistance, as well as providing medical infrastructure construction, medical supplies, and other services to the

countries in need with funds contributed by China. The “self-reliance” capacity of Pacific Island countries is somewhat insufficient. Therefore, in the subsequent process of providing medical assistance to Pacific Island countries, China should gradually shift the focus of assistance to providing short-term medical training and medium-to-long-term medical education for the Pacific island countries, helping them cultivate a group of medical professionals with high levels and rich medical experience, thereby improving the local medical standards. However, it should be noted that this shift in focus does not mean that China will abandon its existing medical assistance model. China still needs to provide medical assistance, especially medical supplies and health funds, to the Pacific island countries that have needs, so that they can better cope with public health challenges. Finally, efforts should be made to jointly promote medical assistance to Pacific Island countries with external parties. The medical deficits that have emerged in these Pacific island countries will not only seriously threaten the life and health security of the island people, but also have a spill-over effect, seriously delaying the timely achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In order to effectively promote the development of Pacific island countries, China has long been committed to helping these countries break free from the vicious cycle of being underdeveloped or classified as less developed countries. Although China's unconditional assistance to Pacific Island countries has been well-received by many of the South Pacific island countries (Zhang, 2019). In the future, China can provide medical assistance to Pacific Island countries while publicly calling on and inviting other non-regional third parties to participate in these activities. Together, they can promote the development of public health in Pacific Island countries. Moreover, this approach can once again demonstrate China's active fulfillment of international obligations and effectively counter the false reports and remarks targeting China's aid from the outside world.

5. Conclusion

On February 10, 2023, President Xi Jinping, in a reply letter to the members of China's 19th medical team sent to the Central African Republic, clearly stated that foreign aid medical teams should use benevolent intentions and skilled medical practice to benefit local people, tell China's story through concrete actions, and make greater contributions to promoting the building of a global community of health for all (The State Council the People's Republic of China, 2023). The Pacific island countries are not only an important force that cannot be ignored on the international political stage, but also an important target for China to continuously improve its grand strategy for diplomacy in the surrounding regions in the new era (Shi, 2019). China has provided medical

assistance to Pacific Island countries for a relatively long period of time, with a wide coverage, diverse forms of assistance, and good results achieved. This not only effectively alleviated the health deficit pressure of the recipient Pacific island countries, but also demonstrated China's status as a responsible major country in the international community. Moreover, it has accelerated the development of the China-Pacific island countries' community of shared destiny. With the deepening and implementation of the “Belt and Road” initiative, medical cooperation between China and Pacific Island countries will become increasingly close, and it will also become an important support for promoting the development of Pacific Island countries and helping to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals on schedule.

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