CHINESE MILITARY STRATEGIC THINKING ENVISIONS THE FUTURE

A Dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Security Studies

By

Yifei Zhang

Washington, DC
April 15, 2011
# Table of Contents

International Security and Strategic Culture                       Page 1  
Current Approaches to Chinese Strategic Culture                   Page 3  
Purpose of Research                                                Page 10 
Military Strategic Foundations for the 21st Century                Page 13 
Revelations from *Duhai Denglu Zuozen*                            Page 20 
Overall Implications                                              Page 31  
Recommendations for Future Research                               Page 36 
Bibliography                                                      Page 38
International Security and Strategic Culture

The study of international relations has traditionally focused on variations of two major schools: one belonging to the tradition of realism, the other to the tradition of liberalism. Within the specialization of international security, realism has a particular predominance. For the most part, realism paints the world and the actors within it in rubrics of balance of power or balance of threat, hegemonic stability or hegemonic transition.\(^1\) Both liberal and realist conceptualizations ultimately assume that within their respective outlooks, states behave and think with common desires and experiences, have identical self-interests, operate with common understandings and reactions to threat and power, and arrive at similar answers.\(^2\) Yet why should we believe that two countries, even two civilizations, as different as China and the United States would perceive the world with similar rationalities given their disparate historical experiences and dissimilar traditions? Political scientists may all too readily discount the influence of culture, history, and historical experiences. Military leaders and statesmen in China and America have divergent guiding principles and approach problems differently.

Strategic culture is a theoretical approach within constructivism that stresses the influence of culture—shared values, practices, and attitudes derived from social learning with a capacity to change over time—on decision making and on perceptions of the self and the other.\(^3\) It may be especially helpful in guiding our understanding of how particular events are rationalized and perceived of differently based on a society’s unique experiences.

---

\(^1\) Balance of power realists can mostly be summarized into the classical realists of Hans Morgenthau and the neorealists of Kenneth Waltz. Balance of threat stems from the work of Stephen Walt. Dale Copeland and Abram Organski have made major contributions to the ideas of hegemonic transition. Robert Gilpin has in turn helped to define concepts of hegemonic stability theory. Overall summary can be found in Jack S. Levy, “The Causes of War and the Conditions of Peace,” Annual Review of Political Science, Vol. 1, No. 1 (June 1998), 139-162.

\(^2\) The differences come from preferences for absolute versus relative gains.

culture draws on history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and political science in attempting to relate how cultures affect the formation of strategy. It helps to redefine analytical approaches by stipulating that actors may respond to the distribution of power in the international system with dissimilar behaviors. Strategic culture theorizes that states have unique perceptions of how to use force and power.

This in turn raises numerous questions. Do all states have different strategic cultures? Are some states influenced more by their own cultures than others? Do strategic cultures, like societies, change with time? Does strategic culture override rational choice or simply adjust it? Does technological and organizational change compel change in strategic culture? Studies on strategic culture are, unsurprisingly, exceptionally difficult. They often lack rigor, and sometimes propose ideas which are difficult to falsify and occasionally tinged with tautologies. Nevertheless, in recent years, especially in relation to work done by China specialists, writings that seek to answer questions about how culture shapes strategy have produced some very thought-provoking and deeply analytical work.

Strategic culture is traditionally seen as affecting three essential questions: what is the role of war, what is the nature of adversary, and what is the efficacy of military force? Alastair Iain Johnston offers that along with these fundamentals, a second key part of strategic culture “consists of assumptions at a more operational level about what strategic options are the more efficacious for dealing with the threat environment.” This paper in turn argues that strategic culture can reveal preferences in the use of military force. Specifically, it addresses the People’s

---

4 Johnston, *Cultural Realism*.
5 This may require future empirical studies not within the scope of this paper.
6 Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, 37.
7 These presumably derive from answers of the first three contingents, efficacy of force, nature of the adversary, role of war. Ibid.
Republic of China’s (PRC) preferences on the use of its military forces, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). This paper does not attempt to determine whether Chinese strategic culture is innately disposed to either aggressive or defensive stances on the use of force, or whether it sees warfare as inevitable in humanity, or its portrayals of the adversary. Instead, it looks at values and principles within modern Chinese strategy, and how these may have changed over time. Depending on whether one interprets these principles as pacifist or expansionist, different implications apply.

Current Approaches to Strategic Culture

Writings on strategic culture became increasing popular in the 1970s and 1980s as political scientists sought to discover how American and Soviet counterparts approached the use of force in different ways. Jack L. Synder argued that Soviet and American strategists were not “culture-free, preconception free game theorists.” Their respective doctrines developed in “different organizational, historical, and political contexts” as a result of asking and answering different strategic questions. Colin Gray subsequently depicted American strategic culture as one which favored a sporadic and crusading use of force, rooted in morality, juxtaposed against a Soviet strategic culture tied to Russia’s historical authoritarianism and expansionism. In the sense that strategic culture is a description of the innate nature of a regime or a state, American

---

8 Strategic culture, or zhanlue wenhua (战略文化), is a new concept to social science in China as well. Wade-Giles and Pinyin Romanization for Chinese names and concepts appear in this paper. Contemporary Chinese authors, politicians, and military leaders will be presented in Pinyin. Names such as Sun Tzu (Sun Zi), and Mao Tse-tung (Mao Zedong) will be kept in non-Pinyin form due to their established familiarity in America. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Chinese language sources are the author’s own.


foreign policy during the Cold War considered such ideas valuable ever since George Kennan wrote his pivotal work on the nature of the Soviet regime in 1947. At the end of the Second World War, Americans sought to transform or wean Japanese society from what was then seen as a cultural tendency to fascism and aggression rooted in a bushido or samurai culture. This does not mean that such assessments of Japanese or Russian society were correct, simply that they were influential in shaping strategy.

In the 1990s, Jack Snyder, Peter Katzenstein, and Alastair Iain Johnston further developed the field of strategic culture within international relations. Katzenstein in particular valued a more comprehensive approach that looked at broader ranges of cross-national comparisons. Works in recent years include Dima Adamsky’s excellent comparison on how different cultural influences slow or quicken the pace of military innovation. Recent psychological research conducted by Richard Nisbett on how cultural traditions influence systems of thought has revealed that East Asians (Koreans, Japanese, and Chinese) appear to be highly influenced by their “holistic cultural tradition.” Some research also shows that different

---

12 Ruth Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston, Mass: Houghton Mifflin, 1946) was one of the first post war books that sought out anthropological answers to the causes of WWII and the behavior of fascist states.
14 Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010). Adamsky argues that cultural differences affected the pace that the revolution in military affairs (RMA) became accepted by Russians, Americans, and Israelis; as well as initial perspectives on the RMA’s validity.
societies can indeed share similar strategic preferences. Arguably, this means that societies can learn and internalize principles about strategy from others, or possibly arrive at similar conclusions separately in some process of convergence. Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, authors of *Zhanluexue*, or *The Science of Military Strategy*, have in the past stated that “cultural tradition, no doubt, may influence on choice of behavior in realities.”

Interpretations of Chinese strategic culture in Western scholarship have mostly been dominated by three major schools. The first and oldest presents Chinese strategic culture as defensive and pacifist. This school has drawn heavily from the fields of history and East Asian studies, and is best represented by the writings of John K. Fairbank and the sinologists of the 1950s and 1960s. The “defensive China” school, perhaps unsurprisingly, remains the principal interpretation within the PRC. However, scholarship within the People’s Republic and other Asia countries are becoming increasingly nuanced. Recent Chinese scholars of strategic culture include Li Jijun, Gong Yuzhen, and Liu Mingfu (Liu in turn stresses the aggressive nature of American culture). Feng Huiyun, an academic in the US, also supports the defensive or

---

16 Andrew Campbell’s “Iran and Deception Modalities: The Reach of *Taqiyya*, *Kitman*, *Khod’eh* and *Taarof*,” *National Observer* 70 (Spring 2006), 25–48, makes the case that Persian culture also disproportionately values the importance of deception and surprise in warfare.


18 Pivotal works by Fairbank include *East Asia: The Great Tradition* (co-authored with Edwin O. Reischauer) (Boston, Mass: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, first edition) and *A History of East Asian civilization*, co-authored with Edwin O. Reischauer and Albert M. Craig (London, England: George Allen & Unwin, 1965). Fairbank also edited major portions of *The Cambridge History of China* series of 15 books with Denis C. Twitchett before his death (first publication by Cambridge University Press, 1979). All books are considered major contributions to sinology and were used to some extent in training Foreign Service personnel during the Cold War. Fairbank’s major arguments equated the Communist revolution of Mao Tse-tung which defeated the Nationalist Party of Chiang Kai-shek as essentially a patriotic movement.

19 Recent criticism of Johnston from China includes Zhu Zhongbo (朱中博) and Zhou Yunheng (周云亨), China’s Strategic Culture of Peace: A Reassessment of Cultural Realism (中国战略文化的和平性: “文化现实主义”再反思)
pacifist China camp.²⁰ China’s defensive and peaceful strategic posture is likewise supported by public statements and official documents given by government departments and officials of the PRC.²¹ The alternative to this group essentially pictures Chinese strategic culture as offensive, aggressive and expansionist. This “aggressive China” school is largely dominated by military analysts, but includes many of diverse backgrounds. Examples of proponents include James Kraska and Christopher Pehrson.²²

A third approach more or less combines these two opposing interpretations, and argues that China in fact has a dualistic strategic culture with competing views on the efficacy of force. Seeing Chinese strategic culture as either defensive or offensive may be convenient theoretically, but all populations likely have a mix of both aggressive and passive traditions. The conception of dualism in Chinese strategic culture was originally offered by Alastair Johnston, who proposed that Chinese strategic thinking was really dominated by a non-unique realpolitik veiled

---


in Confucian pacifism.\textsuperscript{23} Johnston believed that there was a historical tendency in China to act more coercively against enemies as relative capabilities became more favorable. This is essentially a \textit{realpolitik} “opportunity model.”\textsuperscript{24} Johnston concluded that fewer differences existed between Chinese and Western strategic cultures than originally thought. Ironically, while Johnston is best known among political scientists for his work on strategic culture and China, his conclusions reinforced arguments about the objective rationalities of classical realism and diminished the idea that there were unique cultural influences on strategic preferences.

Even so, the popularity of the “self-conflicted” or “dualism” school has grown, and other authors have continued to expound on the significance of such conceptualizations. Robert Ross has suggested that while Chinese strategy in the past may have been self-limiting and defensive (and may be best served by being so), growing nationalism pushes it toward expansionist tendencies.\textsuperscript{25} Andrew Scobell has argued that dualism essentially allows the Chinese to exist within a “Cult of Defense,” using misconceptions (some naturally forming, some specifically supported by government) about history and tradition to perpetuate a tendency to offensive action.\textsuperscript{26} The results of Scobell’s research lie somewhere closer to the “aggressive China” school, but presuppose cultural duality. Yuan-Kang Wang likewise uses the study of Confucian strategic culture’s effects on Song and Ming Dynasties to support Johnston’s view of \textit{realpolitik} sensibilities in Chinese tradition.\textsuperscript{27} Thomas Mahnken’s new work on Chinese strategic culture

\textsuperscript{23} Johnston, \textit{Cultural Realism}. The dualism of \textit{realpolitik} and Confucian pacifism presented by Alastair Johnston may be new to political science, but sinologists have long recognized the influence of different schools that value force and moral leadership in traditional Chinese philosophy. These competing traditions in national strategic culture, known respectively as Legalism and Confucianism, have guided elite decision making in the civil bureaucracy throughout Chinese history for countless generations.
\textsuperscript{24} Johnston, \textit{Cultural Realism}, Preface, x.
\textsuperscript{26} Andrew Scobell, \textit{China and Strategic Culture} (U.S. Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute, 2002).
\textsuperscript{27}
also supports the idea of dualism in Chinese strategic culture, but in turn offers that separate strategic cultures may exist for the nation and the public (including politicians and academics) than for the military. In *Understanding Dominant Features of Chinese Strategic Culture* (2011), Thomas Mahnken separated national and military strategic cultures, highlighting potentially different principles which apply to the use of force and governance. This differentiation is useful in allowing us evaluate what is perceived as important marco-level political, economic, and diplomatic development strategies for an entire nation apart from preferred military strategies for violent conflict.

Early constructivists recognized that identities and interests shift with time and experience. It is therefore conceivable that strategic preferences change with time as well. In his pivotal contribution to constructivism, Alexander Wendt drew upon the works of Joseph Nye, Robert Jervis, and Robert Keohane on the subject of identity and evolution. Wendt argued that states underwent social processes with one another which created norms and interests. The concept of anarchy within the international system was therefore subjective, and could shift as processes for socialization changed as well.

---

28 Thomas G. Mahnken, *Understanding Dominant Features of Chinese Strategic Culture* (Alexandria, Virginia: Institute for Defense Analysis, 2010). China is unlikely to be alone in having conflicting strategic influences from culture. Such conlications can be found in America as well. One element of American identity leans toward expansionism tinged with morality, derived from a frontier culture and seen from examples such as beliefs in Manifest Destiny and a mission to spread democracy; another looks to being an isolationist example of peace and prosperity, a beacon rather than a torch for liberalism, the city on the hill.

29 Thomas G. Mahnken, *Understanding Dominant Features of Chinese Strategic Culture*.


A major problem with the current approach of security scholars towards applying strategic culture to China is a continued penchant to draw upon ancient traditions, some thousands of years old, to drive analysis on modern Chinese strategic thinking. Change and alternation in strategic culture needs to be accounted for. Although some traditions undoubtedly remain influential, and may even remain unchanging, discounting that strategic thinking adjusts with time means that societies may be perceived as incapable of learning from history; for good or bad, or that they are stubborn and rigid. Worse still, analysis may presuppose one society (our own) to be “progressive” and capable of learning and developing new strategic concepts, but discount the ability of the other to do the same. In the context of Chinese strategic culture, this perpetuates the myth that Chinese culture has been largely resistant to change or external influences. The findings of Alastair Johnston and others, based on research of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE) and even older periods, may not necessarily be influential upon contemporary China. Johnston has likewise been criticized for selecting rarer historical texts over more established philosophies as a foundation for his arguments.

---

31 Johnston, Cultural Realism, 29, 40-49. New work by Yuan-Kang Wang uses research on Confucian strategic culture in the Song (960-1279 CE) and Ming Dynasties to support Johnston’s view of realpolitik sensibilities in Chinese tradition. It also predicts Chinese strategic behavior under an era of U.S. unipolarity. However, it does not fully account for how Confucian influences on Chinese politics and culture has waned in the 20th century, nor how it has so far failed to become a dominant social philosophy of the 21st. While Wang focuses on a key source of Chinese strategy that Johnston may have overlooked (Confucianism), other philosophies such as Chinese Legalism may have been likewise been overlooked by Wang. See Wang, Yuan-Kang, Harmony and War: Contemporary Asia in the World (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 181.

32 Arthur Waldron. Review: Alastair Iain Johnston, Cultural Realism (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), The China Quarterly, No. 147 (Sep., 1996), 962-964, “More broadly, Johnston never really comes to grips with why, if its fundamental approach was ‘realist,’ traditional Chinese civilization threw up such a vast, misleading and far better-known literature taking the opposite view. True, many Chinese could quote Sun Zi on deception, but the core curriculum of Chinese civilization - surely its ‘ideational’ base - was Confucius and Mencius and Zhu Xi, and they stressed the importance of virtue and rites and condemned all violent methods, on both moral and practical grounds. Johnston’s argument on this point, suggested more than developed, is in effect that Confucian ideas served as ‘an habitual discourse designed, in part, to justify behavior in culturally acceptable terms,’ a view buttressed by reference to modern theories, such as Bourdieu’s of ‘official language.’ But can these really explain why, repeatedly over the millennia, Chinese culture has so insistently - and confidently - placed Confucian values absolutely at the core?” Feng and Mahnken’s writings likewise draw on analysis of ancient Chinese texts to make predictions or arguments about the behaviors of Chinese statesmen or military leaders today.
Purpose of Research

Do traditions and strategic foundations from centuries past still dominate strategic thinking in contemporary China? One must consider how Chinese strategic thinking has shifted over time, just as Chinese society itself has witnessed numerous dramatic changes in culture, economics, and politics. The scope of this paper will predominantly focus on modern military strategic culture in the People’s Republic of China. This paper hopes to answer questions about intentions rather than capabilities. Studying capabilities alone is an imperfect solution to determining how military assets will be used. Only by analyzing actual Chinese sources from government and academics can intentions be more accurately revealed.

This paper will focus on a survey of military historical case studies conducted in conjunction between the PLA National Defense University (NDU) and the Nanjing Military Region: Duhai Denglu Zuozhan: Zhongwai Denglu Zuozhan Qishilu (hereafter shortened as Duhai Denglu Zuozhan), or translated, Crossing and Landing Operations: Revelations from the Study of Chinese and Foreign Landing Operations (2001). This paper will also draw on major works of recent scholarship and cross-analysis with historical texts and the secondary literature.

33 Simply looking at changes in contemporary China since the end of the Cold War and the economic opening of China since the late 1970s should give us pause.
34 Paul H. B. Godwin, “The Cradle of Generals: Strategists, Commanders, and the PLA-National Defense University,” The “People” in the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China’s Military, Roy Kamphausen, Andrew Scobell, and Travis Tanner eds., (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), 317-351. This is an excellent overview of the changes and reforms within the premier educational institution of the PLA.
36 The author wishes to thank and acknowledge Dr. Edward C. O’Dowd, Colonel (Ret.) U.S. Marine Corps, Director of East Asian Studies at the United States Marine War College, for providing the specific resource as well as much of the intellectual inspiration and close consultancy that drove many of the ideas of this paper. Dr. O’Dowd and the author are currently cooperating on further in-depth and comprehensive analysis and translation of the text. This paper is in part meant to supplement and support that future work. Liang Guanglie (梁光烈), ed., Duhai Denglu Zuozhan: Zhongwai denglu zuozhan qishilu (Sea Crossing and Landing Operations: A Record of Revelations from Chinese and Foreign Landing Operations) (Beijing, China: The National Defense University Press, 2001).
Arguments and interpretations will use Chinese and American primary and secondary sources as well as strategic literature.

Why study the PLA’s survey of amphibious operations in order to understand strategic thinking in China? First, *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan* study gives strategic recommendations. It envisions amphibious warfare as a critical (perhaps the critical) military conflict of the future and seeks to highlight strategic principles to prepare for that future: “researching landing operations is an important component to strengthening preparations for military struggle under new conditions.” The study seeks to transmit strategic lessons from the past to assess how to achieve success on the modern battlefield of the 21st century.

Second, the source is novel. It hopes to create “new breakthroughs in military theory.” It presents foreign military history and experiences as sources for inspiration. New strategic lessons may arise as a result of learning from foreign experiences. *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan* is one of the few publically available sources from the PLA that exhibits how new strategies and ideas about new forms of war are being conceived. It focuses upon subjects of military affairs that are unfamiliar and challenging to the PLA.

Third, it is an authoritative study. *Duhai Dengly Zuozhan* is noteworthy for being one of the few publically available contemporary studies on military strategy in the PRC. This was a work pursued by a team of scholars under the auspices of cooperation between the premier

---

37 Liang Guanglie (梁光烈), ed., *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan: Zhongwai denglu zuozhan qishilu* (Sea Crossing and Landing Operations: A Record of Revelations from Chinese and Foreign Landing Operations 渡海登陆作战: 中外登陆作战启示录), 4. Also, on page 1: “two-thirds of the world is ocean, if there is a war, here will be a landing operation on the ‘world island;’”
38 Ibid, 2.
39 Ibid, 1.
40 How lessons being drawn from these studies differ from historical lessons drawn in the West may also reveal different strategic priorities.
national military academic institution and a major regional military command. *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan* was edited by General Liang Guanglie.\(^{41}\) At the time of its publication, Liang was the chief commander of the Nanjing Military Region, a year later he became the PLA’s Chief of Staff and in 2008 he became the PRC’s Minister of National Defense.\(^{42}\) Although he did not author the piece, it is almost certainly the case that he sanctioned and approved of its content.\(^{43}\) Although *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan* is 10 years old (from 2001), publicly available government literature on military strategy from subsequent years has not equaled it in terms of scope or impact.\(^{44}\) Finally, although a significant source, the piece has not yet been the target of major review or research in the West.\(^{45}\) Studies which touch upon lessons from Western history are increasingly popular in China, and further scholarship on how China is taking lessons from the experiences of others or using them to illustrate new concepts are likely to reveal distinctively Chinese approaches to geopolitics and security.

---

41 Liang Guanglie (梁光烈) was the chief editor, Zhu Wenquan (朱文泉) and Wang Wenrong (王文荣) served as junior editors. The editorial board includes 14 other members.

42 Liang also serves on the Communist Party of China Central Military Commission (chaired by Hu Jintao), the party organ that controls and directs the PLA. The Ministry of National Defense is the government ministry in charge of recruitment, equipment, and research for the PLA. It does not exercise direct control over the PLA as the Department of Defense PLA does over the U.S. military. The PLA is controlled by the party CMC rather than the state. See China Internet Information Center, “Who’s Who in China’s Leadership,” [http://china.org.cn/archive/2004-02/23/content_1048919.htm](http://china.org.cn/archive/2004-02/23/content_1048919.htm).

43 A great deal of justification for the piece also draws from appeals by Mao Tsetung, Deng Xiaoping, and Jiang Zemin, to make research and study in amphibious warfare a key target in the future. Liang Guanglie (梁光烈), ed., *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan: Zhongwai denglu zuozhan qishilu* (Sea Crossing and Landing Operations: A Record of Revelations from Chinese and Foreign Landing Operations 渡海登陆作战: 中外登陆作战启示录), 3-4.

44 Some will point to *Unrestricted Warfare* (1999) or *China Dream* (2010) as comparable or more influential pieces, but this is not a correct assessment. Liu Mingfu’s *China Dream* and Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui’s *Unrestricted Warfare* have no doubt been influential, (they created and are creating shock value within the U.S. military community) but are comparatively less authoritative than *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan*. Unlike *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan*, these two works were not produced through research missions between military regions and military academic institutions, but independently authored. See, Liu Mingfu, *China Dream* (Beijing: China Friendship Publishing, 2010) and Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, February 1999). Peng and Yao’s *Zhanluexue* (*The Science of Military Strategy*) is quite influential, but has already been the target of numerous analysis and review by others. Unlike *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan*, *Zhanluexue* comes from the Academy of Military Sciences, not the NDU and Nanjing Military Region. It was edited by two major generals that advise top party and military leaders, rather than a direct member of the top military leadership.

45 As far as a review of literature has exposed to date.
Military Strategic Foundations for the 21st Century

Carl von Clausewitz’s *On War* has had no small amount of influence on how strategy and military conflict became conceptualized in the West. In the East, one finds that Sun Tzu’s *Art of War* is the dominant voice on strategy and is perhaps influential to a degree comparatively greater than *On War*. Sun Tzu is the primary component to a group of literary writings on military strategy that established the fundamentals of what can be called traditional military strategic culture in China. These other works include *Sun Bin's Art of War* and the *Thirty-Six Stratagems*, which continue to be popular in China today. Ancient works on strategy which are largely untaught today but which were influential in the past also include *Taigong's Six Secret Teachings, The Methods of the Si Ma, The Wu Zi Art of War, The Wei Liao Zi, The Three Strategies of Huang Shigong, and Questions and Replies between Tang Taizong and Li Weigong*. It is no small thing that these writings have been read avidly by strategists, military

---

48 English translations: Sun Bin, *Sun Pin Military Methods*, Ralph D. Sawyer trans. (Oxford: Westview Press, 1995). The authorship and date of the *Thirty-Six Stratagems* are unclear and has been variously attributed to Sun Tzu, Sun Bin, the strategist Zhu Geliang of the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280 CE), and to oral traditions.
49 Together with Sun Tzu’s *Art of War* these are considered the Seven Military Classics of Ancient China. In original Chinese they are: the *Taigong Liutao* (太公六韬), written at some point during the Warring States Period 475-221 BCE, *Sima Fa* (司马法), written at some point around 300 BCE, *Wuzi Bingfa* (吴子兵法), written sometime between 440-381 BCE, the *Weiliaozi* (尉缭子), written at some point during the Warring States, the *Huangshigong Sanhue* (黄石公三略), written at some point between 221-218 BCE, and the *Tangtaizong Liweigong wendui* (唐太宗李韦公文对), written either in the late Tang or early Song Dynasties between 960–1127 CE. If there is a hierarchy of influence (and popularity), Sun Tzu’s *Art of War* is at the top, followed by *Sun Bin’s Art of...*
elites, and political leaders in East Asia since at least the Warring States Period (475 to 221 BCE); certainly since the end of the Han Dynasty in the 3rd century CE. Works of tradition, especially Sun Tzu’s *Art of War*, continue to be core components of how military education is shaped in mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, the Koreas, and Vietnam. Outside of East Asia, such works receive increasing attention from Western militaries as well.

The major components of war as known to Eastern tradition (these are not strategies, but elements) were explained by Sun Tzu, much as how the trinity (human innovation and genius, emotion, and calculated objectives) was described by Clausewitz. These elements include:

1) *Shi*: tendency, advantage, energy or force.

2) *Ji*: turning points, and opportunity.

3) *Mou*: stratagem, tricks, innovation, or plans.

To win conflicts (violent or otherwise), one must conceive of a means to shift *shi* to oneself, which requires one to take advantage of opportunity, *ji*. The best way to do this is to conceive of an appropriate *mou*, a trick or plan, and to spoil the *mou* of the enemy.

---


50 Chinese general and warlord Cao Cao (155-220 CE) was one of the earliest commentators on Sun Tzu and eagerly supported the application of his principles in War. *The Art of War* was one of the few traditional works of ancient China not banned to the public during the Cultural Revolution. See Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, translated and with introduction by Samuel B. Griffith, 13.


53 A stratagem is trick or scheme that allows one party to gain advantage over the other.

54 Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Griffith, trans., 77: “what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy’s strategy.”
Traditional strategic thinking in China holds deception as the core of conflict and values ways to fool the enemy as the centrality of war. Sun Tzu appealed to “schemes (guidao or the “way of guile and deceit”).” Superior parties, by using superior stratagems, can easily defeat stronger opponents; one can potentially achieve victories far greater than their capabilities alone allow. Additionally, Sun Tzu specifically considers termination of conflict a prerequisite to war planning, and considers political solutions superior to actual fighting. Traditional military strategic culture in China can be simplified into three main principles:

1) Creating deception and surprise through stratagem; this includes preferences for unconventional forces (qi: irregular, strange) over conventional ones (zheng: normal, regular).

2) Creating psychological and not necessarily physical defeat (Clausewitz and Jomini are proponents for physical annihilation). War centers on the equilibrium between keeping order in one’s own forces and instilling panic and disorder in the enemy, and preventing the enemy’s own efforts to do the same.

3) Avoiding attrition or exhaustion. Sun Tzu’s Art of War warns against bloody, exhausting, and risky confrontations; something that Clausewitz considers necessary and unavoidable. Sun Tzu tells leaders to beware of attrition, civil exhaustion and political risk, and to win without fighting: “the worst policy is to attack cities,” “those adept in waging war do

---

55 Junzhe guidao ye (军者诡道也). Or in Sun Tzu, The Art of War, Griffith, trans., 41: “All Warfare is based on deception. A skilled general must be master of the complementary arts of simulation and dissimulation.”

56 Ibid, 91.

57 Ibid, 78.
not require a second levy of conscripts nor more than one provisioning,”58 and “to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.”59

Of course, many calculations go into creating conditions for victory, but different people may prioritize different things. The main point is not that American strategic thinking does not hold surprise and deception important (they do), but to what degree. 60 For Western strategic tradition, deception may not be given first consideration; it may be considered unachievable in many circumstances. Clausewitz warns his readers:

“However much one longs to see opposing generals vie with one another in craft, cleverness, and cunning, the fact remains that these qualities do not feature prominently in the history of war. Plans and orders issued for appearances only, false reports designed to confuse the enemy, etc. – have as a rule so little strategic value that they are used only if a ready made-made opportunity presents itself. They should not be considered as a significant independent field of action at the disposal of the commander.” 61

Chinese strategic tradition on the other hand, says that deception and surprise must always be achieved, and when it cannot be achieved, one must avoid fighting. Although the focus on deception may be uniquely Sun Tzu, the aversion to long war and casualties is certainly far from being simply Chinese. Early 20th century European leaders did not relish the idea of attritional war: “Before 1914, military writers and planners had long assumed that if a European conflict

59 Ibid, 79.
60 See “Appendix A: Principles of War and Operations,” in *U.S. Army Field Manual 3-0* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2008). The nine principles listed to affect strategy, operations, and tactics include appeals to prevent the enemy from acquiring unexpected advantage (under principle “Security”) and to strike when the enemy is unprepared (under principle “Surprise”) but does not appeal for the U.S. Army itself to use deception against the enemy or strike his plans.
61 Clausewitz in fact, dedicates a specific section to discounting it. *On War*, Chapter Ten, Book Three, 202-203.
could not be brought to a quick solution, war would turn into a monster, devouring ever larger masses of people, ever more resources, and, in due course, the military leaders as well.”

In terms of military strategic culture, criticism abounds for the utility of Sun Tzu and other traditional works beyond theory and intellectualism. While Sun Tzu undoubtedly affected ancient Chinese thinking about war and the use of force, valuing his teachings has not prevented China from actively engaging in brutal attritional conflicts at many points throughout its history. Within the 20th century, the Second World War (the “War of Resistance Against Japan” in Chinese vernacular), the Chinese Civil War (“War of Liberation” in PRC vernacular), and the Korean War (or “The War to Resist America and Support Korea” in PRC vernacular) were all incredibly destructive conflicts filled with grueling battles of physical annihilation. In these conflicts, Chinese leaders often adopted strategies that favored attrition and extended timelines as a route to victory.

---

62 See Peter Paret, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 530. There was a belief that war was either going to be short or apocalyptic. The later proved to be closer to the truth, page 531.

Looking at the twentieth century, it is impossible to ignore the immense influence that Marxist theories about struggle and revolution exerted on Chinese thinking about war. Theoretical developments of Marxism applied to war within the Chinese context created new and innovative approaches to strategy. These new strategic theories on war, best known from Mao Tse-tung’s writings on guerrilla warfare and People’s War, created another component of strategic culture in China that differed from earlier traditional concepts. The influence of Maoist theories on war, although much of it linked to concepts from Sun Tzu and tradition, shows features that are arguably distinct or contradictory. Mao’s writings on People’s War propose prolonged conflict (termed “protracted war”) in which burdens are shifted to the entire populace, urging for ways to engage civilians more closely in the war effort. These are different from Sun Tzu’s preferences for short war, wariness to shift heavy costs onto citizens, and to fight only when conditions were advantageous. People’s War vehemently argued that materially weaker forces had the capacity to overcome better armed adversaries through motivation and willpower (as opposed to the Sun Tzu argument of defeating stronger adversaries through cunning). Mao’s writings on war continue to be a strong influence on all soldiers of all services in the PLA today. As central principles, People’s War proposes that:

1) War is a political, psychological, and economic struggle as well as a militarily struggle.

2) Victory requires the mobilization of the masses (the entire society) and conflicts must be determined by civilian as well as military means.

---


65 “On protracted war,” (May 1938) in Mao Tse-tung, Selected Military Writings of Mao Tsetung (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1972), 187-261. Sun Tzu, on the other hand, warns against such conflicts, “For there has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited.” Griffith, trans. Sun Tzu, The Art of War, 73.

66 On issues related to “man’s dynamic role in war,” “war and politics,” and “political mobilization for the war of resistance,” and “the army and the people are the foundation of victory,” see pages 225-226, 228-229, 257-262.
3) Morale and indoctrination are central to victory.

People’s War however, does not influence the PLA today to the extent it did during the Cold War. Since the 1990s, the realities of new technological developments and its effect on military forces became increasing attractive and impossible for PLA strategists to ignore. The astonishing performance of American forces in the First Gulf War was a strong impetus for adopting U.S. military practices as a major source for inspiration and a driver for change.\(^{67}\) The modern PLA’s focus on asymmetric war shows an increasing preference to rely on novel technologies to augment strategy, as well as upon civilian capabilities to augment military ones. Military education in China increasingly draws upon Western strategic literature, such as those from Clausewitz and Mahan, and Western military history.\(^{68}\) Contemporary operational thinking, best represented by concepts such as “hi-tech war under local conditions,” are significant in guiding modern forces with cyber, electronic, and joint operations capabilities.\(^{69}\) New military philosophies and novel learning may be a response to the desire or necessity to fight in new and challenging environments, such as the high seas, littoral zones, amphibious operations, and conditions created by the revolution in military affairs.\(^{70}\) These developments, taken together, effectively constitute the emergence of a set of new principles different from tradition or

---


\(^{68}\) Readings of Mahan are becoming increasingly popular. The study of Western historical examples in *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan* could be indications of efforts to seek out inspiration from foreign sources because of a dissatisfaction or implicit acknowledgement of limitation with domestic ones. If the PLA is actually learning from Western historical examples, and the process of learning presupposes acquisition or internalization of new information, then they may arrive at new strategies and recommendations on how to use force. For Mahan’s influence on China, see Toshi Toshihara and James Holmes, “China’s ‘Caribbean’ in the South China Sea.” *SAIS Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Winter-Spring 2006), and *Red Star Over the Pacific – China’s Rise and Challenge to US Maritime Strategy.* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010). Mahan, Alfred T. *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, in David Jablonsky, ed., *Roots of Strategy: Book 4.* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1999).


People’s War –what will here be termed “new strategic concepts.” These new principles propose that victory on the future battlefield requires:

1) Defeating the enemy by controlling the battlefield environment; achieved through dominance of the information and electronic (including cyber), air, and naval environments (and conceivably outer space as well).

2) Defeating the enemy by bringing superior forces to an isolated geographic space.

This new strategic thinking demonstrates preference for the continued development of joint operations between varied military services, the desire to wage a limited conflict (geographically and in duration), and a desire for technological superiority.

Essentially, there have been significant changes to Chinese military strategic culture throughout history. China before the mid-19th century and the arrival of the Europeans held the principles of Sun Tzu and the Seven Military Classics to be paramount. However, by the mid-20th century, traditional and Maoist military principles sat atop the hierarchy of strategic culture together. In the present, three categorizations of military strategic thinking exist. *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan* will reveal how these different strategic principles interact or compete with one another as a new strategic culture.

**Revelations from Duhai Denglu Zuozhan**

The PLA is generally inexperienced in amphibious or joint operations, and has little history of conducting large scale assaults against fortified island positions (as would be
necessary against Taiwan).\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Duhai Denglu Zuozhan} recognizes the difficulty and level of sophistication of such operations, hinged on the necessity to create strong capabilities and cooperation across multiple services. However, it envisions amphibious operations as the critical mission of the future PLA and a dominant form of warfare in the future. The PLA of the past, largely built and tested through the 1930s and 1940s and for most of the Cold War, primarily focused upon large scale maneuvers and operations on land.\textsuperscript{72} It fought significant conflicts with adversaries on land -against the National Revolutionary Army of the Chinese Nationalists, the US Army, the Soviet Army, the Indian Army, and the Vietnamese Army- but few sizable maritime or naval engagements. The new focus on amphibious operations (in this case termed “crossing and landing operations”) is almost certainly inspired by strategic planning against Taiwan.\textsuperscript{73} However, \textit{Duhai Denglu Zuozhan} includes much broader recommendations than a focus on Taiwan alone suggests.

\textit{Duhai Denglu Zuozhan} surveys 16 major crossing and landing operations from predominately American and some Chinese historical case studies. Why study operations for revelations on strategy? Operations reveal how strategy would be implemented and are ways to realize strategic goals.\textsuperscript{74} Of the study’s 16 historical examples, 11 are examples from American or Allied amphibious operations. 14 are examples from the 20\textsuperscript{th} century after 1939. Two cases deal specifically with Taiwan and are the only cases not from the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. \textit{Duhai Denglu

\textsuperscript{71} In fact, very few countries really do have this capability.
\textsuperscript{72} The Three Campaigns of the Chinese Civil War are foremost components of military education PLA officers and continue to be a major academic focus in China. These operations include the Liaoshen Campaign of Manchuria, the Huaihai Campaign of Central-Eastern China, and the Pingjin Campaign around the northern cities of Beijing and Tianjin. Thirteen books were published on the campaigns in 2009, in 2008 at least 35 books and journal articles.
\textsuperscript{73} The crossing and landing most likely refers to the crossing of the Taiwan Strait and landing on one of the coastlines of the island.
\textsuperscript{74} However, operational changes likely occur before strategic ones, and operations can sometimes be conflated for strategy.
### Summary of Key Concepts for *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan* (Sea Crossing and Landing Operations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Chapters</th>
<th>Main Concepts for Study and Causes for Victory</th>
<th>Source of Conclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Normandy</td>
<td>Deception</td>
<td>Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Inchon</td>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Falklands</td>
<td>Isolation of the Operational Area</td>
<td>New Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Grenada</td>
<td>Innovative tactics, techniques and procedures</td>
<td>New Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Okinawa</td>
<td>Isolation of the Operational Area</td>
<td>New Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Guadalcanal</td>
<td>Active defense</td>
<td>People’s War, New Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Iwo Jima</td>
<td>Troop morale</td>
<td>People’s War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Sicily</td>
<td>Maneuver</td>
<td>People’s War, Tradition,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Anzio</td>
<td>Quick battles of quick decision; avoid stalemate</td>
<td>Tradition,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Yijiangshan</td>
<td>Unified joint command and control</td>
<td>New Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Hainan</td>
<td>Political work (mobilize the masses)</td>
<td>People’s War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Zhudao</td>
<td>Systematic attrition of enemy forces</td>
<td>People’s War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The Philippines</td>
<td>Shorten conflict with focus on enemy centers of gravity (main objectives)</td>
<td>Tradition, New Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Taiwan 1661</td>
<td>Employ stratagems</td>
<td>Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. North Africa</td>
<td>The primacy of psychological operations</td>
<td>People’s War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Taiwan 1683</td>
<td>The unification of military and diplomacy</td>
<td>New Concepts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Zuozhan* reveals that traditional concepts, primarily those on deception, surprise, and psychological victory are coupled and evaluated together with People’s War and new concepts which value information dominance and isolation of hostilities (geographically and in duration).
Deception and Surprise Adapted for the Future

_Duhai Denglu Zuozhan_ argues that a number of famed American landing operations, particularly Normandy and Inchon, were victories because attackers followed plans that leveraged tenants of traditional Chinese military strategy. Deception and surprise are seen by _Duhai Denglu Zuozhan_ as the major causes for victory in both operations.75 However, the study aptly recognizes that these traditions require reassessment and adaptation to modern conditions.

_Duhai Denglu Zuozhan’s_ assessment of Operation Overlord and the Normandy landings opens with the following: “The unexpected nature of a campaign is a key to opening the door to victory. In the face of increasing transparency on the modern battlefield, where all is illuminated, how is surprise to be achieved?”76 In assessing major features of the D-Day landings made by the Allies into France in 1944, Chinese authors pay special attention to _qi_, or irregular forces. _Duhai Denglu Zuozhan_ explains that through deception and surprise, the Allies were able to attack point of weakness. The use of cunning stratagems supported by new technologies and tactics (air assault) kept German forces confused and uncoordinated (imposing psychological disorder and shock). The German preoccupation with Calais as the supposed main Allied landing area was supported by Allied subterfuge, disinformation, rudimentary electronic

---

75 A number of different influences on Normandy are highlighted as factors for success in military teachings in the United States. The tradition of scholarship in military history in the West has generally left the question of Normandy open for interpretation and debate. In the United States, military historical analysis usually tells a story. Many answers are given and the question is left open for interpretation and a greater degree of freedom in academia means that the existence of many viable answers can be debated upon. These include the successful implementation of air and sea superiority, well coordinated air assault, concealment of operations, excellent pre-combat training, extensive logistical preparations, and the resilience of attackers. See: A Brief History of the U.S. Army in World War II (Washington: Center of Military History, 1992) and John E. Jessup, Jr. and Robert W. Coakley, eds., A Guide to the study and use of military history (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army: 1979).

76 Liang Guanglie (梁光烈), ed., _Duhai Denglu Zuozhan_, 7.
warfare, and pre-landing operations. This slowed and constrained the Axis response. Normandy is presented as essentially an attack against the enemy’s mou (stratagem or war plans), rather than a direct attack on his forces. The authors summarize the main findings of their review of Normandy: “In the history of war, regardless of battles large and small, pre-battle disguise and deceive (deceit) are largely held to be important in order to confuse the enemy, and to hide your own battle plans.”

In reference to landings at Inchon during the Korean War, Duhai Denglu Zuozhan states: “To catch the enemy unaware and unprepared, this is a principle that has lead to many miracles on the battlefield and in modern crossing and landing operations, this continues to be appealing.” Lessons from Inchon stress that the attacker must pick the correct locale, at the best time, during advantageous natural and climatic conditions. Duhai Denglu Zuozhan’s assessment of Inchon argues that the achievement of surprise can overcome dire situations by creating new opportunities, or ji. The landings at Inchon created a turn of events for the entire war situation (until the PLA entered the war). The study asserts that surprise relies upon and works in tandem with deception, and that these strategic principles must not be underestimated or undervalued.

While both examples highlight the importance of China’s own strategic traditions, recommendations for the future describe deception, surprise, and information war as
complimentary. Modern high-technologies make forces on the battlefield more vulnerable through provision of greater intelligence gathering and communication capacities: “To totally deny your enemy any detection of your war plans is considered impossible.”

However, modern technologies can also provide more opportunities at deception and surprise. Information dominance gives more options for deception: “Under modern conditions, imitation technologies (moni jishu) provide more options.” The ability to gather greater amounts of information with advancements in communications and surveillance is also coupled with new means to fool and defeat such advancements: “In the future, options are more sophisticated and electronic war will become an important part of war.” Deception can still be implemented on the battlefield by both attacking and making use of advanced technologies. Duhai Denglu Zuozhan recommends defeating the enemy’s optics, radar, electronics, acoustic and other sensory capabilities with hi-tech camouflage, concealment, dispersion, and noise dampening. The enemy could also be fooled by false targets presenting false electromagnetic, acoustic, and communication signals. The use of stealth, simulation, and disinformation dissemination technologies are also envisioned. The element of surprise must remain an integral component to war planning for the modern battlefield. Connections between deception, surprise, and technology will determine victors in future wars.

---

85 Liang Guanglie (梁光烈), ed., Duhai Denglu Zuozhan, 48.
86 Ibid, 25-26: refers to holding down superior enemy forces with modern technologies, offering examples from Kosovo and disruptions from net war.
87 Ibid, 32: electronic interference and info trickery at Normandy (radar, electronic interference, fake signals).
88 Ibid, 49.
89 Ibid, 48-50.
People’s War Adapted for the Future

Switching from some of the largest amphibious assaults of American history to the largest amphibious operation of Chinese history, we find that Chinese scholars of *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan* also switch from valuing Sun Tzu to valuing Mao. During March to May of 1950, the PLA attacked and captured Hainan Island from Nationalist forces that retreated there from the continent in one of the last major engagements of the Chinese Civil War.\(^90\) Hainan is a large island off the coast of Southern China laying directly to the east of the Gulf of Tonkin. Today it is a major tourist destination for PRC nationals who live on the mainland and also serves as a naval hub for Chinese submarines and warships operating in the South China Sea.\(^91\) Throughout the Cold War, the PLA converted lessons learned from their Hainan operations into concepts for potential attacks on Taiwan. Today, Hainan is still considered a major case study in discussions on any possible future operations against Taiwan.

*Duhai Denglu Zuozhan* asserts that the success of the PLA on Hainan did not rest primarily on military efforts, but on political and psychological preparations before battle. Hainan is considered a major example of successful People’s War. There are three main lessons from the Hainan case study:

\(^90\) Recent authorship on the Battle of Hainan in China includes the excellent work of Shui Ruo (水若), *Hainan denglu zhan (The Hainan Landings)*, Guogong shengsi dajuezhan (Great Decisive Battles Between Nationalist and Communist for Life and Death), Gui Hengbin (桂恒彬), ed. (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2007).

1) Political preparation (propaganda and indoctrination) drives morale.  

2) Establishing confidence and a sense of sense of self sacrifice is the major prerequisite. 

3) Mobilization of civilian support augments and strengthens conventional capabilities. 

Psychological preparation through propaganda is predicted to remain pivotal in achieving victory in the future. This mental preparation of forces must emphasize the “just cause” of any potential war, the determination to overcome superior forces with inferior ones, and the spirit of self-sacrifice for the country as individuals. In terms of mobilization of the masses during the historical assault on Hainan, Duhai Denglu Zuozhan states that the appropriation of civilian ships and boats played a key role in frontline fighting and logistical support. 

Allied North African Landings in 1943 (Operation Torch) are considered another example of the importance of psychological and political struggles to military victory in Duhai Denglu Zuozhan. It likewise supports major teachings from People’s War. Unlike Hainan, North African Landings demonstrate the importance of political and psychological work on the enemy, instead of on one’s own forces. Friendly forces must destroy the enemy’s morale, leading to capitulation, integration of the enemy, or victory with low casualties. The primary way in which one achieves this is to demoralize the enemy by destroying his resolve and dedication to the fight. Americans gained a low-cost victory by appealing to the sense of French defenders in North Africa to resist German aggression and fascism. The appeal to a just political

---

92 Liang Guanglie (梁光烈), ed., Duhai Denglu Zuozhan, 221-223. 
93 Ibid, 223-225. 
94 Ibid, 225-228. 
95 Ibid, 222-223.
war is also considered for Taiwan. Conflict against the island must be presented as a just war “not to take land, resources, or to seek hegemony, but with a basic goal to protect national unity.” While the Hainan case study focuses on implementation of People’s War strategy to one’s own forces, the North African example focuses on how it would be applied to an opponent.

_Duhai Denglu Zuozhan_ recommends a People’s War for the future. As in the past, future applications would continue to emphasize the participation of the masses -civilians and the public- in both military and non-military arenas as well as the importance of propaganda. There are however, important new considerations. The study promotes the idea that present opportunities for propaganda exist on a broader scope (within politics, economics, military, and cultural means). The influence of new media as well as old (radio, television, news, print, internet) is a critical element to shifting psychologies. It also sees the nature of future conflict as conducive to long duration infiltration. While psychological struggle remains focused on intimidation of the enemy, it should also seek to promote a sense of commonality (common nationality) and to increase exchanges. Conditions for easy victory therefore emerge over time as one promotes advantageous political views in the enemy.

In comparing future civilian mobilization to the past, _Duhai Denglu Zuozhan_ argues that civilian strengths and capabilities must become more sophisticated and complex. Civilian capabilities in communications, healthcare, transportation, construction, optics, electronics, and computing can and should be leveraged to support the military during conflicts. The study envisions complex logistics systems that would not only preserve and leverage regional strengths,

---

96 Liang Guanglie (梁光烈), ed., _Duhai Denglu Zuozhan_, 298-299.
97 Ibid, 303-304.
98 Ibid.
but also face complex tasks in relation to resource and information collection. Civilians would play a key role in what is broadly defined as air defense. They would also play an increasing role in the use of non-military means to “gather information about strategic objectives, military plans, communications, and technologies from the enemy.”

New Strategic Concepts Further Developed for the Future

_Duhai Denglu Zuozhan_ looks to other examples from America’s WWII experiences as well. Chinese scholars have rightly recognized American experiences in WWII as heavily dominated by amphibious war. At the end of island hopping across the Pacific, the last major battles fought by America during the Second World War culminated in costly assaults against the Japanese strongholds of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. While different lessons about Pacific island hopping are taught and argued, it is generally agreed that the sheer brutality of hostilities and the high level of casualties from island assaults intensified U.S. desperation to seek an early end to the war.

_Duhai Denglu Zuozhan_ applies new strategic principles to Okinawa. Isolating the operational area and joint air and naval superiority are seen as primary contributors to American victory at Okinawa. Chinese lessons give particular attention to the operation from land and sea

---

100 Liang Guanglie (梁光烈), ed., _Duhai Denglu Zuozhan_ , 225-226.
101 This would include cyber and electronic capabilities to defend against bombing.
102 Liang Guanglie (梁光烈), ed., _Duhai Denglu Zuozhan_ , 228.
103 It was Major Earl Hancock Ellis’s (USA) “Operation Plan 7-12-H: Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia” for Intelligence Section Division of Operations and Training, U.S. Marine Corps (1921) which first conceived of island hopping operations in the Pacific and first conceived of how Marines and Navy would be cooperate (documents now held by the Marine Corps Research Center at Quantico, VA).
rather than actual fighting on the ground. Air cover and naval blockade are seen as essential to gaining the ability to direct the flow of operations, as well as to prevent the arrival of Japanese reinforcements. American air superiority and air defense guaranteed victory. This was only possible through annihilation of Japan’s air forces by American air forces, assured by concentrating overwhelming firepower and numerical quantity from multiple geographic points.\textsuperscript{105} In offering recommendations for the future, \textit{Duhai Denglu Zuozhan} favors isolation and dominance of the battle environment by striking at key enemy infrastructure and communications nodes electronically and physically. A grouping of conventional forces, including air and missile assets, along with special operations and innovative tactics (irregular operations) are sought to create “unrelenting pressure during attack.”\textsuperscript{106} Achieving comprehensive electromagnetic dominance in multiple arenas (land, air, and space) is a prerequisite for victory. \textit{Duhai Denglu Zuozhan} argues for the creation of capabilities in jamming across the electromagnetic spectrum to be disseminated across multiple assets.\textsuperscript{107}

Chinese scholars draw similar lessons from Okinawa and the Falklands. Major lessons from the Falklands presented in the West highlight the difficulty of long distance logistics and the general superiority of air power over naval power.\textsuperscript{108} Particular attention is paid to the challenge the British navy faced in transporting forces to the extremities of the Southern Hemisphere across the Atlantic and the general effectiveness of airship missiles against warships. \textit{Duhai Denglu Zuozhan} acknowledges these to be important lessons from the conflict as well, but offers further strategic recommendations. In comparing British performance against the

\textsuperscript{105} Liang Guanglie (梁光烈), ed., \textit{Duhai Denglu Zuozhan}, 105.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid, 105.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, 107.
Argentines, the study gives particular attention to the importance of air superiority, the impact of electronic warfare technologies, and the necessity to be flexible and responsive in the use of the latter.\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Duhai Denglu Zuozhan} evaluates British success as ultimately deriving from effective implementation of naval and air blockade.\textsuperscript{110}

**Overall Implications**

Taiwan and Beyond

\textit{Duhai Denglu Zuozhan} is undeniably focused on applying lessons and strategies toward a successful takeover of Taiwan.\textsuperscript{111} The study gives various strategies, including non-military ones, for creating the right conditions to unify the island with the mainland. Recommendations on defeating more powerful and better armed opponents using stratagem and willpower, along with efforts to isolate battle-space, likely refer to the United States’ involvement within a Taiwan conflict or how to prevent such an involvement. Many of the case study recommendations, specifically on which capabilities to develop and modernize, have become a major focus of the PLA in recent years.

The newly released 2011 government white paper on national defense continues to emphasize growth and development of the PLA along lines stipulated by \textit{Duhai Denglu Zuozhan}.\textsuperscript{112} Specifically, the new white paper’s reference to continued and strengthening

\textsuperscript{109} Liang Guanglie (梁光烈), ed., \textit{Duhai Denglu Zuozhan}, 67-68.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 51-52, 63-64.
\textsuperscript{111} Strategic principles from tradition, People’s War, and new concepts are comprehensively applied to Taiwan in two key chapters on historical invasions of Taiwan during the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. See Ibid, 269-287, 305-322.
preparations for “military struggle” may imply continued preparations for the unification of Taiwan. This supports the idea that national unification remains the central strategic question within China’s military forces.\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Duhai Denglu Zuozhan} reaffirms that Taiwan remains the major target of strategic and operational planning for the PLA in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. It is important then that the PRC’s strategies for unifying Taiwan with the mainland should remain a major consideration of analysts of East Asian security.

Yet \textit{Duhai Denglu Zuozhan} is about more than just Taiwan or amphibious operations. Its recommendations suggest other potentially influential future developments. These historical lessons or illustrations, while inspired by motivations to capture Taiwan, in fact result in new ideas about warfare and strategy that can be applied to numerous other scenarios. The Taiwan impetus has spurred something larger than itself. \textit{Duhai Denglu Zuozhan} holds not only strategic prescriptions for amphibious war, but also for how to fight a war of the future. It provides revelations of how the PLA envisions the utilization of land, sea, air, and information forces in unison.

Understanding the development of amphibious and joint operations in China within a larger context of how ideas on modern warfare are developing, and how important the status of such operations are becoming for the PLA, is as important if not more so than assessing how many carriers it will have in the future, or whether or not it would really be able to use an effective anti-ship ballistic missile. While writings on how the PLA may be internalizing and learning from Mahan are now all the rage, these have predominantly focused on the naval, but not the amphibious component. Considering China’s geographic vicinity and the requirements

for a blue water navy, assessing China’s amphibious capabilities should be an important step towards understanding its ability to expand beyond its periphery and project power. In order to expand into and freely operate in the Western Pacific or Indian Ocean, criteria that would make the PLA Navy a truly blue water force, it would need to escape or confront the confines of a series of island chains that enclose its peripheral waters. Taiwan is only one part of these enclosing island systems. The Korean Peninsula, the four main islands of Japan, the Okinawa or Ryukyu island chain, the Philippines, and the archipelagic masses of South East Asia all enclose China. China’s peripheral waters are surrounded and enclosed by multiple sets of islands. All blue water navies need to establish island bases far from their home shores for refueling and basing, or they must at least have a rudimentary capability to capture and establish such islands or to take such locations from the enemy.

A New Military Strategic Culture?

Traditional concepts reinforce new strategic thinking. A continued preference for political and psychological warfare, inherited from the mid 20th century, reveals that the PLA is unwilling to relinquish the belief that motivation can overcome technology. The attention to new strategic concepts, including limited battle space, information dominance, and joint operations reveals that high priority is given to adaptations for modern warfare. The attention to psychology and maintenance of order that defined tradition complements People’s War priorities on indoctrination, cohesion, and high morale (establishing these for oneself and attacking those of the enemy). Sun Tzu’s attention to limited war complements preferences for isolated battle-space. The tradition of attacking plans and enemy stratagems requires knowledge and
intelligence on the enemy, and foiling the enemy’s information networks. These in turn reinforce the high prioritization of controlling information and electronic environments.

*Duhai Denglu Zuozhan* reveals that Chinese military thinkers are merging tradition, Maoist, and new interpretations of war as they predict what conflicts will look like in the future. How seemingly contradictory approaches within these three influences on China’s modern strategic culture become reconciled remains to be seen. It appears that the merger of different ideas into a complex strategic culture has not resulted in the dismissal or rejection of older principles. There is no sense of obsolescence or redundancy.

However, the combination of ancient, recent, and contemporary principles of Chinese military strategic culture may hold contradictions. Sun Tzu’s teachings propose victory by deception guaranteed by an attack on the enemy’s plans rather than his forces. Yet, overconfidence in one’s own plans may lead leaders to calculate that their inferior forces with supposedly superior stratagems hold advantages underappreciated in simple assessments of capabilities. This may result in an overestimation of one’s own chances for victory. However, it does not necessarily imply a tendency to aggression and may actually dampen the security dilemma. It is one explanation for China’s preference for low numbers of nuclear deterrent and a small secure second strike capability.

A focus on political warfare and propaganda may lead to miscalculation of one’s own morale and the ability of the enemy to resist. A preference for protracted or prolonged conflict may result in missed opportunities in creating conditions for friendly relations with an adversary. On the other hand, it may lead leaders to more closely assess the morale of enemy troops and dissuade them from engaging psychologically well prepared and loyal forces. Over-confidence
in capabilities to limit the operational space of conflict and in one’s access to information may lead leaders to calculate that conflicts can be ended quickly and access denial can be pursued more easily. Alternatively, the difficulty of joint operations and limiting battle space, especially within the current international environment of high economic interdependence (including with potential adversaries) may result in greater hesitancy and concern with high costs.

Even if military strategies appear offensive, they do not readily imply that the country is itself aggressive or expansionist in nature. By their nature, military strategic planning often needs to be offensive. All countries, including the United States, adopt such plans, but this does not imply that they are now or will in the future become aggressor states. Countries may adopt offensive strategic postures without ever acting on those postures.

Overall, the blending of tradition, Mao, and new strategic concepts demonstrates that Chinese military strategists are willing to augment, change, and adapt. In giving strategic lessons for future conflicts, *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan* sees a central role for concepts like deception and surprise from tradition, propaganda and political warfare from People’s War, and joint operations, information warfare, and battlefield isolation from new strategic principles as equally important components to strategic thinking. A military strategic culture reveals preferences for how to use military forces. Ideas on war and military strategy have experienced important changes in China. It is no longer sufficient to say that China’s preferences on the use of force are dominated by one major influence alone, but a group of influences from ancient, recent, and contemporary times. These different approaches provide for a more complex view of Chinese strategic culture.
Recommendations for Future Research

There are three sets questions that this paper has been unable to answer conclusively:

1) Is *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan* the result of scholars starting off with preconceived ideas and simply using historical examples to illustrate already constructed biases?

2) Alternatively, are they actually arriving at these answers from objective historical review? Did these studies produce independent answers and then transmit ideas to be accepted and criticized/reviewed by elites; that is actual feedback loops?

3) Are these studies simply the result of preconceived ideas passed down from the ruling elites? Meaning that these studies simply demonstrate efforts at self reaffirmation; in other words top down linear processes.

This author’s own view is *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan* is part of a style of historical writing in China that is not born of truly objective scholarship. Its very approval and sanction by the government means that it cannot realistically be separated from political processes and pressures to produce truly independent findings. Its content, while diverse, is poorly sourced (as are many writings on history in China). The nature of how historical questions are closely tied to political questions in China implies that controversial historical interpretations, especially with effects on “grand questions” of national or military strategy, are unlikely to be officially condoned by the government (at least in the foreseeable future). Most likely, new theories on war needed to be contextualized and linked to history and tradition to appear legitimate. However subjective, they remain important and illuminating because they nevertheless reveal strategic thinking within China.
Military strategic culture is of course, only half of the picture. Future research is also needed on national strategic culture, which may hold elements that are contradictory or complimentary to military strategic culture. While military strategic culture may answer questions about preferences for the use of force, national strategic culture may in turn answer questions about how countries select development strategies for becoming great powers. Following the same justifications for studying *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan*, other publically available sources in China should be assessed based on how recent, authoritative, novel, or impactful they are.

In the future, such research would hopefully focus on pieces like *Daguo Jueqi* or *The Rise of Great Powers* (2006) for national strategic culture.\(^\text{114}\) *Daguo Jueqi* is the culmination of a long-running historical, economic, and political study on the nature of great powers, why they rise, and how they sustain their power. *Daguo Jueqi* has also been made into a popular televised documentary mini-series. This adds significance since it has become important for understanding how average Chinese already think about major geopolitical issues, and in turn how they are being educated (told to think) about these issues.

---

\(^{114}\) Tang Jin (唐晋), ed., *Daguo Jueqi* (The Rise of Great Powers 大国崛起), (Beijing, China: The People’s Press, 2006). *Daguo Jueqi* is study on global history focusing on the rise of great powers since the 15\(^{th}\) Century. It was originally conceived in November 2003 during the 9\(^{th}\) Group Study Session of the Central Politburo of the Communist Party of China (composed of the 24 most powerful executives of the Chinese government) when President Hu Jintao requested that lessons from history should be used to assess China’s own future course of development. It was conducted by a number of Chinese academics, drawing on diverse sources, domestic and foreign, for a major academic mission supported by the central government. Its findings are likely to influence policymaking and perceptions for current and future PRC leadership. In one of the few major reviews of the *Daguo Jueqi* in America, made by naval security scholars Andrew Erickson and Lyle Goldstein, the study is primarily assessed for its contribution to maritime strategy, and not for broader effects on strategic thinking or national strategic culture. Erickson and Goldstein do however recognize the piece’s broader importance and implications. They suggest that *Daguo Jueqi*, due to its scope and depth, is in fact an objective study. This author’s view is that neither *Daguo Jueqi* nor *Duhai Denglu Zuozhan* are truly objective. See Andrew S. Erickson and Lyle J. Goldstein, “China Studies the Rise of Great Powers,” in *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, Andrew Erickson, Lyle Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, eds., (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 401-425.
Bibliography


Gong Yuzhen (宫玉振), Zhongguo zhanlue wenhua jieshi (Explaining China’s Strategic Culture 中国战略文化解释), Beijing: Military Science Press (军事科学出版社), 2002.


http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~johnston/SunZi.pdf


Mao Tse-tung. “Problems of War and Strategy,” (a concluding speech at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee of the Party originally given on November 8, 1938), from Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. 2 (Beijing China, the Foreign Languages Press).


Pehrson, Christopher J. “String of Pearls: Meeting the challenge of China’s rising power across the Asian littoral.” Strategic Studies Institute (July 2006).


Shang Yang, *Book of Lord Shang or Shangjun shu*,


Zhang, Xiaoming, and McClung, Sean D. (Col. USAF). “The Art of Military Discovery Chinese Air and Space Power Implications for the USAF.” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* (Spring 2010).


Zhu Zhongbo (朱中博) and Zhou Yunheng (周云亨). *China’s Strategic Culture of Peace: A
Reassessment of Cultural Realism (中国战略文化的和平性: “文化现实主义”再反思)