

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 07-05-2021	2. REPORT TYPE Master of Military Studies (MMS) thesis	3. DATES COVERED (From - To) AY 2020-2021
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4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE TOWARD ADVANCING CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING IN THE UNITED STATES PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION CURRICULA: PEERING INSIDE THE ' CHINESE BOX '	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER N/A
	5b. GRANT NUMBER N/A
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER N/A

6. AUTHOR(S) Wilburn, Jr Ronnie (Major)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER N/A
	5e. TASK NUMBER N/A
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER N/A

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) USMC Command and Staff College Marine Corps University 2076 South Street Quantico, VA 22134-5068	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER N/A
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9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) N/A

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release, distribution unlimited.

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
One of the goals of PME is to expand critical thinking skills that can be applied in complex situations. To expand critical thinking, officers must be exposed to other military theories in their designated courses to formulate solutions for future conflict in the event of War. The issue is that officer PME is constrained by a consuming focus on Western military theory, such as Carl Von Clausewitz, while non-Western theory is not being studied at a similar, laborious depth as Western/European war theorists.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
Professional Military Education (PME), Sun Tzu, Critical Thinking, Chinese Box

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			USMC Command and Staff College
Unclass	Unclass	Unclass	UU	33	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code) (703) 784-3330 (Admin Office)

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:

TOWARD ADVANCING CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING IN THE
UNITED STATES PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION CURRICULA:
PEERING INSIDE THE 'CHINESE BOX.'


SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: Toward Advancing Critical and Creative Thinking in United States Professional Military Education (PME) curricula: Peering Inside the ‘Chinese Box.’

Author: Major Ronnie Wilburn Jr, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: By analyzing Chinese strategic thought PME students will not only gain significant insights into the thinking of a major U.S. strategic rival but also advance their critical and creative thinking skills.

Discussion: In today’s United States (U.S.) military, officers receive Professional Military Education (PME) on advanced teachings in leadership, military tactics, and military history. One of the goals of PME is to expand critical thinking skills that can be applied in complex situations. To expand critical thinking, officers must be exposed to other military theories in their designated courses to formulate solutions for future conflict in the event of War. The issue is that officer PME is constrained by a consuming focus on Western military theory, such as Carl Von Clausewitz, while non-Western theory is not being studied at a similar, laborious depth as Western/European war theorists. If PME is designed to expand critical and creative thinking skills and enhance knowledge and understanding of an adversary’s strategic thought then officers will not only gain insight into a future enemy's military theory but also improve their readiness to solve complex problems.

Conclusion: Professional Military Education for Military Officers are oversaturated with Western strategic thought compared to non-Western strategic thought. This exposes a barrier to officers developing critical and creative thinking skills.

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Preface

The basis for this research began with my passion for solving problems. I welcomed the challenges of solving fiscal problems in a legal fashion. In my primary profession as a Financial Manager, my daily job consists of solving fiscal problems for Commanders to fund their requirements needed to accomplish their mission. When their requirements exceeded their allotted funds, I was the one who had to find new and creative ways to pursue additional funds or adjust the existing funds by maneuvering money through several accounts. In my profession, if I do not solve their money problems the mission can be negatively affected. I carried this same mindset when searching for my research topic. When I arrive at Command and Staff College at the United States Marine Corps University, “Great Power Competition (GPC)” and “near-peer threats” were the topics of discussion regarding a potential future conflict with China. During the course I noticed that we were heavily studying Western War theorists such as Clausewitz, Jomini, Napoleon, Mahan and Moltke in a depth that covered the war theorist’s classical time period, their culture and the etymology of their war theory. We were applying these methods (which is codified in military doctrine) to the Chinese problem, which was contradicting to me. Therefore, I decided to pursue an analysis of Chinese strategic thought to stimulate critical and creative thinking in a PME environment.

I would like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Andrew Scobell of Command and Staff College at the United States Marine Corps University. He has allowed this paper to be my own work and provided constructive feedback to relay my thoughts in an academic manner. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Anne-Louise Antonoff of Command and Staff College as the second reader of this thesis. I am grateful she took the time to provide her expertise and mentorship on this thesis project.

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I would like to thank the Marine Corps for selecting me to attend such a prestigious course filled with academic professionals that bestowed their knowledge and experience with the students.

Finally, I must express my very profound gratitude to my children for providing me with the inspiration and motivation that was needed to accomplish my project. Dad will always love you Sage and Wesley.

Major Ronnie Wilburn Jr

"To the extent that we are unconscious of the difference between our own fundamental assumptions and those that have shaped the emergence of classical Chinese thought, we are sure to impose upon China our own presuppositions about the nature of the world, making what is exotic familiar and what is distant near."

- Roger Ames

Introduction

In today's United States (U.S.) military, officers receive Professional Military Education (PME) on advanced teachings in leadership, military tactics, and military history. One of the goals of PME is to expand critical and creative thinking skills that can be applied in complex situations. Officers in the U.S. are regularly admonished to "think outside the box": to contemplate critically and adopt creative approaches to address the thorny challenges and complex problems they routinely face over the course of their careers. But as the late National War College professor and expert on the Chinese military expert Paul H.B. Godwin was fond of saying: "Before you can think outside the box you first need to know what is inside the box."¹ In the third decade of the twenty-first century, there are at least two important "boxes" for Marines: a "U.S. box" and a "Chinese box." In this paper the term "box" refers to a country's corpus of military theory: strategic tomes and tactical handbooks read, absorbed, and applied by military professionals during their careers in the professional of arms. At PMEs in the United States students acquire considerable knowledge and insight about that the contents of the U.S. box but far less about the contents of the Chinese box.

A Model for Examining Critical and Creative Thinking.

One thing the military is sure about the future is that it is uncertain. Because of this uncertainty, critical and creative thinking are essential for U.S. military officers to solve complex issues in future conflicts. However, we must first understand what critical thinking is before we

apply problem-sets to achieve the appropriate answers. Critical thinking, according to Dr.

Richard Paul and Dr. Linda Elder, is defined as:

- (1) Disciplined, self-directed thinking that exemplifies the perfections of thinking appropriate to a specific mode or domain of thinking;
- (2) thinking that displays mastery of intellectual skills and abilities;
- (3) the art of thinking about one's thinking while thinking, to make one's thinking better: more precise, more accurate, or more defensible;
- (4) thinking that is fully aware of and continually guards against the natural human tendency to self-deceive and rationalize to get what it wants selfishly.²

Now that we have a shared understanding of critical thinking, the next step is to identify the key elements of critical thinking so we can hone in on the core skills that must be acquired.

According to Colonel Guillot's study, *Critical Thinking for the Military Professional*, the Paul Model is the most comprehensive guide to learn and develop critical thinking skills.³

The Elements of Thought

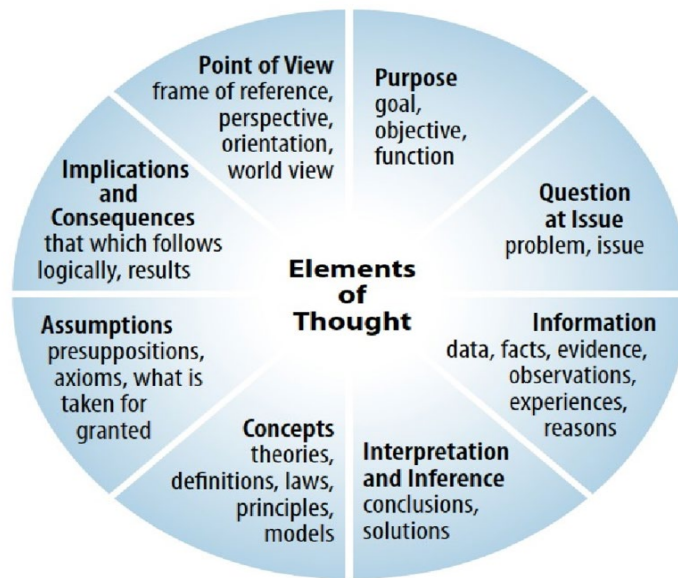


Figure 1: Dr. Richard Paul Model to Critical Thinking (Elements of Thought)

The Paul model is designed for the future critical thinker and educator to make it simpler to learn, study and practice any problem set in efforts of mastering thinking capabilities.⁴ The eight elements of reasoning (or thought) can be used in a non-linear/non-sequential order; each element is mutually supportive that has its unique standards for assessing critical thoughts.⁵ The model explores the gaps that are overlooked when assessing complex problems; Paul's model thoroughly assesses motives, purposes, objectives; stresses the importance of accurate information gathering and investigates alternative methods applied to previous concepts; promotes mental flexibility and remaining discipline to eliminate bias viewpoints.⁶ This paper considers four elements of this model to illustrate how peering inside the "Chinese box" can help U.S. military leaders to think critically and conceive of creative ways to solve thorny problems. These four elements are: information, interpretation, and assumptions, and concepts.

To expand critical thinking, officers must be exposed to other military theories in their designated courses to formulate solutions for future conflict in the event of War. The issue is that officer PME is constrained to Western military theory, notably considerable attention to Carl Von Clausewitz, while non-Western theory is not being studied in similar depth. If PME is designed to expand critical thinking skills then students should be exposed to different ways of thinking about war and peace. Studying an adversary's strategic thought is an especially valuable exercise. Studying an adversary or potential adversary is not only a useful way to familiarize an officer with their anticipated enemy so as to better prepare to face them in battle space but it can also be an important exercise to enhance creative and critical thinking.

Since China has been clearly identified as the United States' most potent and capable long-term rival, a better understanding of Chinese strategic thought is a worthy undertaking that should be embraced as an integral part of U.S. PME curricula. This paper analyzes Chinese

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military thought with particular attention to Sun Tzu's *Art of War*. This analysis is not only useful for military professionals who may conceivably confront China's armed forces in the future but also valuable preparation for military officers to think critically and creatively as they handle the complex problems they will inevitably confront in their careers.

This paper proceeds as follows: a literature review of Sun Tzu translations, then a brief overview of the 'U.S. box' followed by a more extensive examination of the contents of the 'Chinese box.'

Literature Review

Sun Tzu's *Art of War* was written in the 5th century in Chinese and since then have since been several publications of the *Art of War* translated into English.

The purpose of including the different types of Sun Tzu translations is for the reader to understand how Sun Tzu and the *Art of War* was perceived throughout the course of thousands of years. Perceptions of Sun Tzu's work can be relative based on a time period and how a military leader interprets his teachings. Exploring the commonalities of the *Art of War* from a multitude of sources assists in narrowing down an understanding of how the reader can interpret Sun Tzu's work. Additionally, translating Sun Tzu impacts how the U.S. military should be thinking about classical Chinese military thought. The U.S. military translating Sun Tzu demonstrates how the U.S. perceives China. Interpreting their ancient strategic concepts ultimately justifies and validates the perception of China's strategic character.

I want to focus on four primary references when understanding Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, particularly in waging War and planning the offensive (stratagem). They are Lionel Giles' "The *Art of War* By Sun Tzu: English Translation," Ralph D Sawyer's "Sun Tzu: The *Art of War*," and Derek M.C. Yuen's article "Deciphering Sun Tzu."

In Lionel Giles English translation of "The Art of War By Sun Tzu," a quarter of his book translates the Art of War in Chinese characters directly to the English language. The majority of his book is also translated to English but with commentary from the author. However, his commentary is unique from the other references. Giles' translation comprises 11 various Chinese commentators that range from General to Emperor and writers that span six dynasties over a millennium of pontifications of Sun Tzu.⁷ Giles' work offers keen insight into not only Sun Tzu's concept of War but the Chinese history/culture and how General's perceived Sun Tzu's philosophy through each dynasty.⁸ Among the 11 commentators, Sun Tzu's philosophy was adopted by generals during war campaigns to define the Art of War.⁹ The central concept is to defeat the enemy without fighting; however, if provoked to War, victory cannot be achieved by military force alone; you have to seize cities, attack resources, and supplies to impoverish the enemy's people, and ultimately conquer the enemy's will to fight.¹⁰ This is relevant because, throughout a millennium covered by Giles' commentators, most generals used Sun Tzu's tactics during their dynasties. Though Giles' most recent commentator was in the 11th century, this shows similarities in how the General's defined the Art of War and its influence on conquering the enemy.

Sawyer and Yuen have similar approaches to their study of defining the Art of War. Yuen has many references to Sawyer's book in his article. Unlike Giles, Sawyer uses the Sung dynasty to translate the Art of War.¹¹ Sawyer explores the evolution of conflict and the Sung's Seven Military Classics (which was influential in Chinese military strategy) fragmented from Sun Tzu's philosophy.¹² Sawyer's book is written for the broad Western audience to understand modern Chinese military tactics by learning Ancient Chinese military history.¹³

Similarly, Yuen's audience is the Western powers; however, he uses Clausewitz's theory of War (familiar to Western military strategists) to correlate the likes and differences to Sun Tzu's teachings and understand the Art of War.¹⁴ Compared in Yuen's article, the dichotomy between the two war strategists clearly defines the Art of War in an easily comprehensible form to the Western reader. By referencing the Shang Dynasty, Yuen illustrates how the Art of War may seem like a defensive or reactive tactic, and Sun Tzu uses several tactics to attack beyond military force.¹⁵ All three authors provide significant evidence of how the Art of War was used across centuries and offer perspectives from ancient Chinese military history that define the Art of War today.

The next topic delves deeper into Clausewitz and Sun Tzu's contrast and comparison to examine which theories are more versatile to modern-day warfare. Michael Handel's book *Sun Tzu and Clausewitz* argues that the two strategists have more common than expected; both are very similar with their philosophies, though they possess a different method of employing their concepts (intuitive vs. conceptual approaches).¹⁶ However, in the article "The Continuing Irrelevance of Clausewitz," Wm J, Olson dismisses Clausewitz's theory as unrelatable to modern-day warfare and that the military has become too myopic to strategize for tomorrow's War.¹⁷

One of the last topics to analyze is determining what the Chinese learned from Sun Tzu and what practices they are doing today that can be contributed to Sun Tzu's work. In "What the Chinese Learned from Sun Tzu," Colleen Holmes explains how Ancient Chinese tactics from Sun Tzu overlap with modern-day Chinese aggression in the South China Sea.¹⁸ Sun Tzu believed in the need to coerce foreign powers, avoid War, and achieve a strategic advantage as much as was practical.¹⁹ With spies infiltrating governments, invading sovereign territory, and

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doing just enough to avoid War without antagonizing their target to the point of conflict, this account demonstrates that China is implementing Sun Tzu's philosophy today society.²⁰

The U.S. Box

U.S. military professionals will better identify, analyze critically, and then develop creative approaches to resolve problem if they gain a fuller appreciation for what is contained inside the U.S. box and the Chinese box. First, we consider the American box.

The Department of Defense must overcome the obstacle that military doctrine is predominantly influenced by Western war theorists (i.e., Clausewitz, Mahan, Jomini, Napoleon). This method calls to mind the cliché of having one tool in the toolbox and applying that tool to every situation. By proxy, augmenting PME by incorporating other non-Western war theorists into military curricula will significantly help Military Officers understand different perspectives as well as improve critical and creative thinking skills. With hundreds of different cultures across nearly 200 countries worldwide, the U.S. military officers must be equipped with knowledge of an array of war theorists.

Studying Sun Tzu's *Art of War* is an excellent opportunity to advance an officer's critical thinking and creative problem solving. Though officer PME syllabi include some non-Western war strategists in their curriculum, the depth of the material studied is limited compared to the amount of scrutiny Western war theory receives in military academia. While U.S. PME curricula is remarkably rich, comprehensive, wide-ranging in scope and chock full of numerous strategic insights, this firehose of learning is distilled into a dozen concepts at the operational level, often with references drawn from a single source—frequently Clausewitz, with one authoritative interpretation and a core set of assumptions about military theory.

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Indeed significant elements of U.S. military strategic thought is derived from Carl Von Clausewitz's book *On War*.²¹ For example, the U.S. Marine Corps' doctrinal publication - 1 (Known as MCDP-1) is directly influenced by Clausewitz theory in which the Marine Corps adopted to develop their concept of War.²² The U.S. Army included Operational Art (another Clausewitzian theory) as their fundamental component, another Clausewitzian concept adopted by the military.²³ Clausewitz became a required study at the Naval, Army, and Air Force War Colleges and other Officer PME programs post-Vietnam era and was implemented in each services' war strategy doctrine.²⁴ From this vantage point, one can see how Clausewitz is an American military strategy codified by the Services doctrine. The Armed Services then created operational concepts from Clausewitz, which turned into tactical, battlefield actions that have been used in modern warfare.²⁵

Peering Inside the Chinese Box

A look inside the Chinese box will not only help U.S. military professionals understand how a major adversary is likely to wage war but also to better appreciate their own U.S. box and stimulate critical and creative thinking. An excellent place to start in discerning China's strategy thought is by studying China's oldest military strategy known as the *Art of War* by China's (and one of the world's best known strategists). Sun Tzu's treatise on strategy has been used for over two thousand years by numerous Chinese emperors and generals throughout the millennia and incorporated in other Far Eastern professional armies such as Korea and Japan.²⁶ This section considers four elements of critical thinking: information, concept, interpretations and assumptions.

Information

Most relevant to the element of information is that in most PME curricula, the *Art of War* is assumed to be synonymous with Chinese strategic thought and Sun Tzu is presumed to personify China's strategic tradition. Yet Sun Tzu is only one of many ancient Chinese strategic thinkers. Known as the Seven War Classics, the teachings of Wu Zi (or Tzu), Wei Liao Zi, T'ai Kung, Si Ma Fa, Shigong, Li Wei Kung and of course Sun Tzu who have written classics thousands of years ago that may have an influence in today's modern China. For instance, T'ai Kung wrote the classic "The Six Secret Teachings" in the eleventh century B.C. for Kings Wen and Wu to provide them advice on strategy, tactics and even politics with warring states; T'ai Kung's and his work has been both revered in Chinese history and attributed as the first General to demonstrate an understanding in strategic studies.²⁷ T'ai Kung is a clear example that demonstrates Chinese military theory goes beyond Sun Tzu, in which should be explored to fully grasp an understanding of Chinese military strategies. Most U.S. military members are not necessarily familiar with T'ai Kung compared to Sun Tzu, even though he is arguably one of the most influential Generals that can be attributed to Chinese military strategy. Because of this familiarity, Sun Tzu and the *Art of War* was chosen for this study. While the *Art of War* is widely considered either the most important or at least of the canon of Seven Military Classics of Ancient China,²⁸ accepting that Sun Tzu typifies or encapsulates the totality of Chinese strategic thought is not prudent.

Interpretations

The challenge of studying Sun Tzu's writings in *The Art of War* is deciphering his teachings written in Chinese and produced thousands of years ago. For the past hundreds of

years, Sun Tzu's treatise has been translated by numerous scholars in several languages. In English alone there are multiple translations, and each translates the same Chinese character in a different way and Chinese phrases are translated somewhat differently. Perhaps inevitably different translations produce different interpretations. This means that a reader's interpretation of the Art of War will likely depend upon which translation they read. Two examples will illustrate the interpretation challenge. The character *shi* (or *shih*) is variously translated as 'energy', 'force' or 'potential.'²⁹ Each word conjures up different thoughts and interpretations. Another example are the paired dimensions of *zheng* and *qi*: sometimes translated as 'orthodox' and 'unorthodox,' 'direct' or as 'indirect' or as 'normal' and 'extraordinary.'³⁰

Recently there was a comparative study in 2019 on Sun Tzu's English translations to decipher the military terms of The Art of War. Dr. Robert Ames, an American comparative philosopher who is a scholar in Confucian studies, and Professor Lin Wusun is a famous scholar and translator who was the vice Director for the Translators Association of China.³¹ Both professors performed a line-by-line English translation of military terms in Sun Tzu and compared the translation from an American and a Chinese scholar perspective. The side-by-side translations of a Sun Tzu passage discussing *zheng* and *qi*, are as follows:

Dr. Ames: *It is "surprise" (qi) and "straightforward" (zheng) operations that enable one's Army to withstand the full assault of the enemy force and remain undefeated.*³²

Professor Lin: *Thanks to the combined use of qi (奇) and zheng (正) tactics, the Army can withstand the enemy forces' onslaught.*³³

Though the differences are subtle, the result is a difference in interpretation: Dr. Ames has more of a straightforward translation offering more details, and Professor Lin's is more direct and

salient to someone having a background in Chinese. See the ‘Assumptions’ section below for more analysis of these two key dimensions.

One of the most notable English translations is by Lionel Giles (who uses commentary from each Chinese classical age to interpret their perspective of the *Art of War*).³⁴ In Lionel Giles's special edition of *The Art of War*, he translates Sun Tzu's maxim into two parts: Part I – Chinese into English Translation and Part II – English Translation with Commentary. The Commentators are Chinese military critics in dynasties that range from 155 A.D. – 1042 A.D. of how they interpreted and applied Sun Tzu's 13 chapters into their military strategies.³⁵ Giles uses 11 distinguished commentators to help translate the *Art of War* and places Sun Tzu's work in the context of how it was applied. Of the 11 commentators, several commentators that are most notable. Ts'ao Kung is regarded as an adept master of military strategies between 155-220 A.D. (Nearly half-century after the *Art of War* was developed).³⁶ Ts'ao applied Sun Tzu's teachings to dominate his enemy by controlling his armies' tempo during decisive battles. Another commentator to mention is Li Ch'uan, a skilled writer in military tactics in 8th century China.³⁷ His writings were influenced by Sun Tzu in which generals used a variant of Sun Tzu and Ch'uan's tactics that are prevalent in China to this day.³⁸ Tu Mu is also a well-known writer with no war experience that offers keen insight into *The Art of War* in 9th century China.³⁹ Giles mentions that among the 11 critics mentioned in the book, Tu Mu's translation of Sun Tzu is held in the highest regard compared to the other commentators.⁴⁰ The purpose of mentioning the commentators' background is to understand the credibility that is warranted when translating Sun Tzu from a myriad of perspectives. Multiple English language versions underscore the challenge of understanding the original meaning of the *Art of War* which seems destined to get partially lost in translation or at least generate differing interpretations of Sun Tzu.

Assumptions

Sun Tzu and Chinese strategists more broadly tend to assume that deception is a useful and indeed integral part of strategy and warfare. “All warfare is based on deception” is one of the most quoted sentences from the *Art of War*. In contrast, for many Western strategists, deception is either peripheral to their analyses or be seen as a challenge to overcome rather than dynamic which can be embraced and exploited by a commander. Clausewitz, for example, discusses the “fog of war” as serious problem confronting a general instead of issue that could be leveraged.

One of the most common themes that the commentators alluded to throughout the 13 chapters in the *Art of War* is the concept of deception, diversion, and concealment. The commentators attest that a skillful soldier or a great tactician knows how to poke or probe their adversary to force them to expose their weaknesses and utilize their resources until their will is broken.⁴¹ Luring the enemy to play a cat and mouse game to get the enemy to fight unprepared for the battle is crucial to deceiving the enemy.⁴²

Another form of deception related to the dimensions of *zheng* and *qi*. *Zheng* is passively facing the enemy while looking for open opportunities; *qi* is active in making later diversions against your enemy.⁴³ This concept is used to explain Sun Tzu's maxim of energy, being able to make direct and indirect moves to deceive and confuse the enemy.⁴⁴ For instance, if *zheng* movements are moving towards the enemy and *qi* movements turn (or flanking) movements, *qi* movement may be a *zheng* maneuver if you get the enemy fixed on your position.⁴⁵ By this confusion, you can fix the enemy in a direction (*zheng*) and attack his blindspot (*qi*) based on how the enemy perceives your movement. What is interesting in this section is that Sun Tzu (based on the *zheng/qi* definitions) talks more about *qi* and rarely mentions *zheng* as a tactic. Sun Tzu states that indirect tactics are limitless and should be never-ending.⁴⁶ Specifically, Sun

Tzu states, "Indirect tactics, efficiently applied, are inexhaustible as Heaven and Earth, unending as the flow of rivers and streams; like the sun and moon, they end to begin anew; like the four seasons, they pass away to return once more."⁴⁷ The commentators, unlike Sun Tzu, apply *zheng* and *qi* interchangeably, which is an exciting development in the later years after the *Art of War* was disseminated.

Another tactic used by Sun Tzu to deceive the enemy is by employing simulated disorder to cause confusion and chaos and conceal your strength against their weaknesses.⁴⁸ The commentators all understand that Sun Tzu is trying to explain how to hide or even express faulty courage, timidity, or weakness to confuse the enemy into a trap.⁴⁹

Concepts

A key theme in Chinese strategic thought that is highlighted in the *Art of War* is to avoid battle where possible and to “win without fighting.” While Sun Tzu devotes considerable attention to campaign and tactical issues, including advice on matters of maneuver and terrain, he does not neglect strategic level issues. Meanwhile the focus of many Western strategists—or at least the way they are taught in U.S. PME is—concentrated upon the operational level where the correct response to a challenge is presumed to be military action.

A study of the *Art of War* suggests that kinetic activity should not be the preferred course of action. Sun Tzu urges attacking the enemy’s strategy to destroy the enemy’s resistance to fight, and if possible to win without fighting.⁵⁰ Sun Tzu uses the word "balk" when it comes to destroying an enemy's plans, but the commentators look at this teaching more in-depth; they look at "balking" an enemy's plans to anticipate when the enemy is going to attack, therefore one should deliver the attack first.⁵¹ Next is to isolate the enemy from its allies and, if the numbers are in your favor, to surround and attack the enemy before they regain their strength.⁵² Here, the

commentators agree with Sun Tzu when discussing how to attack an aggressive strategy. With further discussions, the commentators and Sun Tzu do not believe in besieging walled cities when it comes to attacking the enemy. The cost of besieging cities outstretches your resources and thins your Army making them susceptible to an attack. Additionally, a sub-set to attacking an enemy's strategy is to know the enemy and yourself. This concept is most common throughout most military, especially officer ranks; however, knowing the enemy is about being on the offensive in this context. The commentators believed that knowing your enemy enables offensive tactics and knowing yourself prepares you for a defensive posture in preparation to counter-attack.⁵³

The other key concept to mention is strategic positioning to always gain an advantage over the enemy. Sun Tzu emphasized that one can ensure a defensive position by holding positions that cannot be attacked (i.e., strong points) vice attacking positions that are undefended (weak points).⁵⁴ This is the main area where the commentators had differing points of view. Tu Mu, Ch'en Hao, and Mei Yao-Chen assumed that Sun Tzu is saying that to keep a defense position safe, you must also defend those places that are unlikely to be attacked.⁵⁵ Chang Yu believes that Sun Tzu states that those holding defensive positions must be at an advantage from the enemy either by terrain or being highly concealed, making it impossible for the enemy to know its location and attack.⁵⁶

This paper thus far has briefly analyzed Chinese strategic thought as manifest one of the most significant military classics. In a nutshell, we can determine that China's warfare strategy is to deceive the enemy at all warfare facets. Deception should be used to lure the enemy into traps to make bad decisions and even mistakes. Additionally, your accurate movements towards the enemy should be concealed (*zheng* and *qi*) to have the enemy misperceive your true intentions.

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We have observed how the Art of War values an offensive first mindset against the enemy to gain an advantage on the battlefield. The battlefield can be any medium relative to today's society (i.e., cyber, biohazard attacks, etc.) that will allow China to attack first in anticipation of an enemy's attack or be in the defense to conceal their attacking plans. Lastly, the Art of War focuses on knowing oneself and the enemy to disrupt the enemy's plan to win a war without fighting possibly. Now that there is an understanding on how this study perceives The Art of War, there are two questions that can be applied to stimulate critical thinking: 1. What did China Learn from Sun Tzu?; 2. Is a Re-Emergence of the Gray Zone an indicator of a China's way of war?

What did China Learn from Sun Tzu?

Based on current events such as the One Belt One Road (OBOR)/Silk Road initiative, attempted seizures of the Spratly and Parcel islands, and taking leading roles in the international community, China is posturing itself to supersede America and become an economic and political world power without engaging in a kinetic war. Their actions are textbook Sun Tzu warfare. The One Belt One Road initiative is an economic trade plan led by the Chinese that involves building railways, roads, ports, power grids, oil and gas pipelines across nearly 80 countries and spans across three continents.⁵⁷ This initiative has provided China with the accessibility to spread their influence globally and posture Chinese presence in key tactical areas. They have gained a strategic advantage to diplomatically have access to countries where the United States usually is not welcomed, such as Pakistan and countries in Africa. China has thus far loaned trillions of dollars to countries that are participating in OBOR, ultimately placing them in a debt status to China.⁵⁸ China is essentially creating allies by (allegedly) bringing jobs, money, and infrastructure to countries generally overlooked by the United States. China is now

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extending the OBOR initiative to Latin America, where they have already invested \$500 billion to Latin participating countries.⁵⁹ This diplomatic approach offers China the ability to open opportunities to create alliances, isolate alliances from America and possibly push for a military agenda later.

The attempted seizures of the Spratly Islands and the building of islands in the South China Sea demonstrate that China is configuring its military footprint to strengthen its posture in the Western Pacific. China can launch missiles, aircraft, and other military assets against American positions in the South China Sea.⁶⁰ This is another strategic positioning method that China is using to create strong points against a potential enemy.

Additionally, China has taken a leadership role in the 2018 Paris Agreement to lead the world in climate change; they are currently the world's largest solar panel producer.⁶¹ After taking leadership roles in the global economy, they also seek to take over political roles in the global arena.⁶² With America being focused on Iran, Afghanistan, and North Korea, China has taken advantage of America being distracted by wars and conflict to become a global power and further push their objective of creating a new Chinese World Order.⁶³

Additionally, we have seen China has performed several soft attacks against America, primarily cyberattacks that exposed America's vulnerability. For the past five years, Chinese hackers have performed several spear-fishing cyber attacks targeting businesses, universities, and several government agencies.⁶⁴ As previously stated, these attacks exposed America's vulnerability to defend against adversary's receiving illegal access to infiltrate and sabotage America's economy and its military.⁶⁵ Though it has not been proven that the Chinese government was involved, the hackers who were caught did reveal they have ties to the Chinese Ministry of State Security.⁶⁶

The actions above that China has performed show how they are using Sun Tzu tactics to diplomatically influence the world with their agenda, financially control countries because of debt, and can perform attacks against weak points without engaging in a war. So, how do we stop China from becoming a world-dominating power to prevent their World Order?

Is a Re-Emergence of the Gray Zone an indicator of a China's way of war?

In addition to China's aggression in the South China Sea, China, today, is operating under a rare type of warfare known as the "Gray Zone" against Taiwan; Gray Zone warfare has the symptoms of a Cold War; however, the difference is that one wants to subdue their enemy into submission without engaging into kinetic shooting battles.⁶⁷ China has been antagonizing Taiwan for decades; however, this time, they are using military "drills" such as flying tactical aircraft carrying destructive payloads near the border, conducting amphibious landing exercises naval patrols along the Taiwanese Strait, and executing cyber-attacks to aggravate Taiwan into a forced a diplomatic treaty with China.⁶⁸ Though Taiwan's defenses are not considered a near-peer competitor against China, the United States adds buffer between their relationship. With Taiwan have a national defense of only 20% of China's forces, the U.S. will be brought along if Gray Warfare becomes conventional warfare.⁶⁹ Taiwan is significant to China in respect to the number of advantages and leverage China would gain if Taiwan falls under Beijing:

1. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China would have a commanding and controlling position in the South China Sea, which would place the Chinese military in the middle of the islands from Japan to the Philippines and onwards to Borneo, which will enclose China's coastal seas in its entirety.⁷⁰

2. As a result of China's coastal areas expanding, the PLA Navy will have the leverage to dominate the shipping lanes in North Asia, becoming a powerful domain over Japan and South Korea that can negatively affect trade and commerce within the region.⁷¹
3. Additionally, the PLA Navy would have free access to the Western Pacific, possibly impacting U.S. military operations in Japan, Okinawa, and South Korea; China would be seen as the dominant force over America that dictates policy and "diplomacy" in Far East Asia.⁷²

Using the Taiwan example above, China's tactic appears to be another emergence of Sun Tzu-esque methodologies being applied to their warfare. For instance, in the 1998 book, *Unrestricted Warfare*, two Chinese PLA colonels named Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, indicates what we now recognize all too quickly as "gray zone warfare" and most notably, "Great Power Competition" as modern Chinese Warfare. According to Liang and Xiangsui, China believed in using Sun Tzu's teachings of subduing an army without fighting through clever operations.⁷³

The authors continue to state how they applied multi-nodal methods such as attacking the enemy financial structure without their awareness, cyberattacks using computer viruses, and disrupting civilian networks such as media and electricity to create social unrest, riots, and political crises to divide the enemy's nation; self-implosion.⁷⁴ These methods were geared towards achieving the ultimate end state of forcing an enemy to agree to an unfavorable and dishonorable treaty.⁷⁵

Using the Taiwan example above, along with the accounts from two senior colonels in the PLA, strictly the Chinese are performing in this day and age.

To provide some context, both PLA Colonels annotated *Unrestricted Warfare* to develop strategies against a superior country such as the United States in the event highly technical war surfaces.⁷⁶ The book intended to cultivate multi-nodal measures for both kinetic and non-kinetic

means to attack the United States. Two significant theories resulted from this book that foreshadows America's ability to solve today's problem with China actively:

1. In the words of Colonel Liang, "...the first rule of unrestricted warfare is that there are no rules, with nothing forbidden."⁷⁷
2. Liang continues to say that "strong countries make the rules while rising ones break them and exploit loopholes . . .The United States breaks [United Nation rules] and makes new ones when these rules do not suit [its purposes], *but it has to observe its own rules or the whole world will not trust it.*"

Both statements by Liang in 1999 exposed America's vulnerability to unrestricted warfare by even today's account. Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan have demonstrated that the American military is not adequately prepared to combat against an unrestricted enemy that possesses the capabilities to confront a war. Colonel Liang and Xiangsui believe the reason is that America "...have never taken into consideration and have even refused to consider means that are contrary to tradition and to select measures of operation other than military means. This will naturally not allow them to add and combine the two into new measures and new methods of operation."⁷⁸ The Colonel's further their psychological insight into America's military strategy by stating, "This will naturally not allow them to add and combine...new measures and new methods of operation...in actuality, it only requires broadening one's outlook a little and being uninhibited in thought...thus prying loose the wheel of the military revolution rusted as a result of lagging in terms of thinking."⁷⁹ Though both Colonel's perspective is from a potential enemy of the United States, their insight about how America broadening one's outlook, being uninhibited in thought, and lagging in thinking skills should be questioned. These are the types

of questions that should be discussed in a PME environment to stimulate critical thinking in a learning environment.

Studying Sun Tzu's *Art of War* is an excellent opportunity to advance an officer's critical thinking and creative problem solving. However, studying the Art of War is only a start to convey an understanding of Chinese strategic thought, which precludes the limitations of this paper.

Limitations

As stated earlier in the paper, there are several other known classical Chinese war theorists that was not included in this study, that have arguably influenced Chinese military strategy. According to Ralph Sawyer, the People Republic of China (PRC) have evolved and modernized over the course of decades; if one of the U.S. objectives is to prevent a pervasive China from being a global hegemony it is relevant for Officers, who will likely confront China as a foe in the event of war, to study the Seven Classical war strategist to critically think of ways to win and discuss China strategies of what winning looks like to them.⁸⁰ Additionally, the PRC developed focus groups at their Academy of Military Science to solely analyze the ancient concepts and tactics that can deceptively be applied to an unconventional environment to posture China in a more advantageous position to win than the U.S.⁸¹

Another control within this study is the limited amount of resources that were used to translate the Art of War. There are multiple amounts of different types of translations from scholars that study Chinese ancient history that is omitted from this study. Sun tzu translation alone is a stand alone thesis paper. Therefore, this paper briefly approached the translation of Sun Tzu using a limited scope of sources to truly translate and interpret The Art of War.

Recommendations

There are two recommendations that have immediate effects that advances military officers critical thinking skills. The first recommendation is to leverage PME institutions by incorporating Classical Chinese military strategy to PME curricula that goes beyond Sun Tzu. China has thousands of years of internal fighting where their strategy was used to either dissuade, deceive or decisive defeat their enemies that across a spectrum of nonlinear capabilities. Studying ancient Chinese war strategist in depth and engaging in scholastic discussions will better prepare the military officer to critically think of solutions beyond kinetic warfare. Additionally, when students study Western war theorist in PME, the seminars go beyond the actual war theory, they also learn about the theorist countries culture, way of life to gain a perspective from the classical war theorist and the perspective of other General's on how they perceive their doctrine. PME will need to incorporate a curricula that is submerged in Chinese culture and dynasties to gain a better perspective of their strategic thoughts.

The second recommendation is similar to what China is doing today. Leverage PME institutions to incorporate think tanks to study, combat, and create innovative solutions to the Chinese problem. Having a cell only dedicated to Chinese warfare will provide insight on how China perform linear and non-linear attacks to develop linear and non-linear counter attacking measures. Students currently are encouraged to develop new concepts to create future doctrine capabilities in anticipation of a future combat against China. However, PME has a robust curriculum that spans 17th century military studies to present times within a nine-month period.

Conclusion

Studying Sun Tzu's *Art of War* is an excellent opportunity to advance an officer's critical thinking and creative problem solving. This paper recognized that PME is oversaturated with

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Western war philosophies compared to non-Western war studies. This exposes a vulnerability for officers to develop critical thinking skills to solve unexpected future war problems. Military might alone will not defeat a foe that is diplomatically taking over the world while establishing allies worldwide.

PME is designed to educate military officers and provide them with the knowledge, critical thinking skills, and capabilities to confront tomorrow's challenges and solve complex situations for future wars.⁸² Two of the primary goals of PME, according to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, are to:

1. Build strategically-minded warfighters or applied strategists who can execute and adapt strategy through campaigns and operations.⁸³
2. Discern the military dimensions of a challenge and recommend viable military options within the overarching frameworks of globally integrated operations.⁸⁴

So, if PME has evolved to enhance critical thinking skills and develop officers to become strategic thinkers, why are non-Western war theories not studied in the same depth as Western war theory? Currently, the military operates under multi-dimensional modern warfare, where officers have to acquire the knowledge and thinking to be better prepared to deal with the unexpected consequences of future warfare.⁸⁵

According to the Joint Staff, “[in recent military conflicts]...there was a failure to recognize, acknowledge and accurately define the environment in which the conflicts occurred, leading to a mismatch between forces, capabilities, missions, and goals...”⁸⁶ The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq presented unexpected challenges to an inexperienced military that simultaneously conducted counter-insurgency operations, nation-building, and reconstruction

efforts. General Zinni attributed Iraq's failures to a lack of critical thinking and a failure to engage in essential strategic thinking.⁸⁷

To prevent these failures from happening again, PME must emphasize critical and creative thinking in curricula. This can be advanced by peering more carefully into the 'Chinese box' as well as by taking a fresh look what is in the 'U.S. box.'

One of the last point to make to conclude this study is that this is not the first time that the U.S. was in a Great Power Competition battle with a near peer. The Soviet Union during the Cold War was considered a near peer threat to the U.S. During the post-Vietnam era, the U.S. found itself in a time where the U.S. military had to redefine doctrine to combat the Soviets (who were massing military manpower and capabilities) in the event the Cold War became kinetic. The U.S. military find itself in the same position four decades later: in an era of post-Operation Enduring Freedom/Iraqi Freedom where a near peer is massing manpower and military capabilities to the U.S. military. With Design Force 2030 on the rise, the military's predicament look quite similar to that of the early 1980's. The bottom line is that the U.S. military used think tanks to develop non-linear methods to defeat the Soviet Union while remaining below the level of armed conflict. The military should learn from successful examples such as the defeat of a the Soviet Union during a Great Power Competition struggle between two global hegemonies.

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