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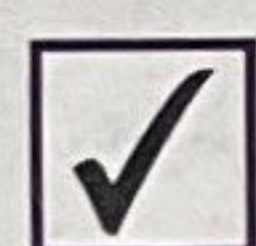
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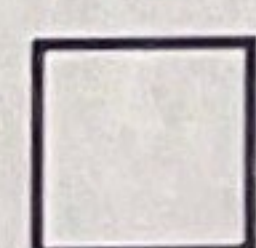
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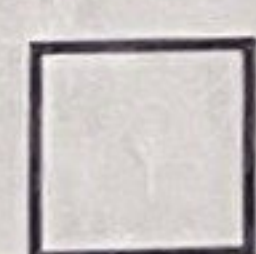
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**THE CHINA WAY OF WAR: PERSPECTIVES FROM SUN TZU**

**By**

**Sheng-Chang DAI**

**Lieutenant Colonel, Taiwan Air Force**

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satisfaction of the requirements of the Degree of Master of Science in Joint Campaign Planning Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by National Defense University or the Department of Defense.

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# THE CHINA WAY OF WAR: PERSPECTIVES FROM SUN TZU

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# **THE CHINA WAY OF WAR: PERSPECTIVES FROM SUN TZU**

## **Executive Summary**

**Lt Col Sheng-Chang DAI, Taiwan Air Force**

I begin by expressing my deep gratitude to Irene Hong, my dear wife, for her unwavering support. Her constant encouragement has been an invaluable source of strength throughout this endeavor. I am equally indebted to Dr. Redearmal for their exceptional guidance and diligent instruction, which have significantly influenced the trajectory of this study. Furthermore, I sincerely thank Joint Force Staff College for providing a stimulating educational environment and access to enriching resources. The knowledge and experiences gained during my time at JFSC have been truly transformative.

In this study, we analyze China's policies under Xi Jinping's leadership and their alignment with Sun Tzu's Art of War principles. Under Xi's leadership, China aims to achieve moderately developed country status by 2035, adapting to global geopolitical shifts. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) exemplifies this adaptability, reflecting Sun Tzu's teachings through infrastructure development and trade. Our analysis explores the link between China's policies, the BRI, and Sun Tzu's theory, examining limitations, implications, and weaknesses. By understanding the influence of Sun Tzu's Art of War on Xi's thoughts, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of China's policies.

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## Introduction

The October 2022 closure of the 20<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress, and election of the 20<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the People's Republic of China (PRC), marked the formal beginning of Xi Jinping's third term as the Party and PRC leader.<sup>1</sup> As he announced and pursues his goals for China to reach moderately-developed country status by 2035, it is likely that he will seek to continue to lead the country for at least the next 15 years.<sup>2</sup> This is a significant moment in China's history as it is undergoing “great changes unseen in a century,” with the shift in the world’s political focus towards the East and the evolution of economic strength in Asia, particularly China. The Beijing authorities view this change as both an opportunity and a challenge, with a complex and dynamic situation bringing instability to global development and relationships.

In analyzing China's policies, it is important to focus on the impact of Sun Tzu's *Art of War* on Xi Jinping's thoughts as well as on those of the CCP leadership. Xi Jinping, as the leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), operates under a one-person dictatorship system, with Xi’s decisions being implemented as the Party's decisions. Understanding the influence of Sun Tzu's philosophy on Xi's leadership can provide valuable insight into China's current policies.<sup>3</sup>

Sun Tzu's *Art of War* is a renowned ancient Chinese military treatise that provides strategic advice on warfare and conflict. The teachings in the book emphasize the importance of

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<sup>1</sup> Simone McCarthy, Nectar Gan, Steven Jiang, Yong Xiong and Wayne Chang, “Xi Jinping enters third term as China’s most powerful leader in decades surrounded by loyalists,” *CNN*, October 23, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/10/22/china/china-party-congress-xi-jinping-leadership-lineup-revealed-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> Economic Times Staff, “Xi Jinping expects to be in command till 2035,” *The Economic Times* (India), October 24, 2022, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/xi-jinping-expects-to-be-in-command-till-2035/articleshow/95066795.cms>

<sup>3</sup> Tanishk Saxena, “Decoding the usage of Sun Tzu tactics in Contemporary Geopolitics,” *ORCA*, May 20, 2022, <https://orcasia.org/2022/05/sun-tzu-geopolitics/>

flexibility, adaptability, and the ability to outmaneuver and deceive the enemy. Xi Jinping's leadership style can be seen as reflecting these principles, as he has demonstrated a willingness to adapt and respond to changing circumstances in both domestic and international affairs.

A current outstanding example is the “Belt and Road Development Strategy,” the English translation of which was later adjusted to the more benign-sounding “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI). This is a key aspect of China's current foreign policy, and it can be seen as reflecting Sun Tzu's teachings on flexibility and adaptability. The BRI is a global comprehensive economic development program that seeks to expand China's global influence through investment, infrastructure development, and trade, and it has been designed to be flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances. By examining the influence of Sun Tzu's *Art of War* on Xi Jinping's thoughts, one can gain a deeper understanding of China's policies. This ancient Chinese philosophy has had a lasting impact on Chinese political thought and continues to shape the actions of the CCP today.

The first chapter of this study provides an overview of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, including its basic formulation, philosophy, and strategic theory. The link between BRI, PRC geopolitics, and Sun Tzu's theory is analyzed and explained while highlighting the inadequacies of Sun Tzu's theory for some modern strategic applications.

The second chapter examines the background ideas and limitations of BRI and geopolitics, drawing on "Application" in Sun Tzu's *Art of War*.

The third chapter focuses on the implications and weaknesses of China's Way of War.

Finally, the fourth chapter analyzes the opportunities, challenges, and countermeasures involving China's Way of War in today's context. This study provides a comprehensive analysis of China's policies and their alignment with Sun Tzu's *Art of War* while also considering their

current limitations and challenges.

## **Chapter 1: The Philosophy and Theory of Sun Tzu's *Art of War***

Current PRC strategic thought is highly influenced by the teachings of Sun Tzu. It centers on attacking an enemy's strategy, plans, alliances, and will while seeking a pitched battle only if one must fight.<sup>4</sup> Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* reflects strategic thinking from China's Warring States period. Yet even today, one can see its linkages to the PRC's Anti-Access Area Denial (A2/AD) military approach, and to the PRC's attacking traditional US strategy and alliances while setting conditions for a *fait accompli*, if not a pitched battle, through informationized warfare and long-range fires. The PRC's ruling Communist Party sees the US as standing in the way of its territorial expansionist goals and its desire to reshape the global rules-based order to its own advantage.<sup>5</sup> The US is thus the enemy in a modern-day Sun Tzu narrative, and the PRC's sights are squarely set on the enemy's strategy.

Sun Tzu's *Art of War* is a renowned Chinese classic from the Warring States era, in circulation for over 2,500 years, and is widely considered one of the world's oldest and most-read military strategy books. Despite its age, *Art of War* remains highly relevant in modern times. It has been widely studied and applied in diverse fields such as politics, military strategy, entrepreneurship, personal development, and investment. Although *Art of War* is written in ancient Chinese, and so may have significantly different interpretations based on cultural or language differences, its content is not mysterious but rather straightforward.

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<sup>4</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 77.

<sup>5</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense (U.S.), *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2022: Annual Report to Congress*, Washington: Department of Defense, 2022, 8.

The *Art of War* consists of thirteen chapters that can be divided into three main parts. The first part, which covers chapters one to four, discusses the most important strategic concepts, including "Calculations," "Starting a Battle," and "Planning an Attack."

The second part, covering chapters five to eight, delves into tactical principles, including "Circumstance," "Virtuality and Reality," "Armies Contending," and "Nine Variations."

The third part, covering chapters nine to thirteen, focuses on the implementation of tactics and includes discussions on marching, camping, surveillance, and the tactical considerations for different terrains such as mountains, plains, swamps, rivers, and deep valleys. The chapter "Fire Attack" covers the principles of incendiary fire attacks, while the chapter "Using Spies" focuses on intelligence and the use of spies in military strategy.

In summation, the *Art of War* is structured to progress from strategic concepts to tactical principles and finally to the specific tactics and precautions for different terrains and situations. The book is a valuable resource for anyone seeking to deepen their understanding of military strategy and tactics, as well as those who wish to apply its principles to various aspects of life.

### **The Key Characteristics of *Art of War***

Sun Tzu's *Art of War* has thirteen chapters, but it does not mean that after learning their lessons, one can defeat the enemy with less and defeat the strong with the weak. Sun Tzu's *Art of War* is, in fact, not a method of war for fighting, but rather primarily a method for conducting war without fighting. Sun Tzu's *Art of War* is not the law of invincibility, but rather the law of "no defeat." It is the method of winning more with less, not the technique of winning less with more. Therefore, there are two "No" concepts of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*. The first "No" is "No Fight (War)." The second "No" is "No Defeat."

There are three points in "No Fight." The first is that if you cannot win, do not fight. If you cannot win, do not wage a battle. Secondly, if you can win, but the cost is too high, do not fight. Finally, if you can win at an acceptable cost, you can still avoid fighting. Do not rush to fight; see if you can make the enemy surrender without fighting. As Sun Tzu' said: "To subdue the enemy without fighting in the acme of skill."<sup>6</sup> Xi Jinping adopted this concept when he said, "Time and momentum are on our side."<sup>7</sup> Sometimes, patience is also a kind of strategy.<sup>8</sup>

*The Art of War* posits three "No Fight" concepts at the outset: (1) if you cannot win, do not fight; (2) if you can win, but the cost is too high, do not fight; and (3) if you can win at an acceptable cost, you can still avoid fighting. These three "No Fight" principles are set forth in the first three chapters of *Art of War*, "Calculations," "Starting a Battle," and "Offensive Strategy." "No Fight" is adopted because the cost of war is too high, the risk of failure is too high, and the consequences are too severe. So, we must be good at patience and waiting, an essential strategy and component of operational art. The fourth chapter, "Military Form," is about to start considering fighting, but it is still considering means of achieving, or setting the conditions for, victory first and then fighting. If I must fight now, what should I do? We must first get the most ideal conditions for a win and then fight, and wait for the ideal opportunity to win before fighting. If there is no chance of victory, we will never fight. If we do not fight, we will lose nothing. Winning first and then fighting is about strategic judgment. When the opportunity for

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<sup>6</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Trans. and with Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 77.

<sup>7</sup> Johnny Erling, "Xi's new slogan for China's trajectory: 'Time and momentum are on our side'", *MERICIS*, Jul 09, 2021, <https://merics.org/en/opinion/xis-new-slogan-chinas-trajectory-time-and-momentum-are-our-side>

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Ward, Lara Seligman and Matt Berg, "Strategic patience 2.0", *POLITICO*, October 4, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/10/04/strategic-patience-2-0-00060273>

victory arises, we can win at the lowest cost. It is too risky to look for chances of success by accident and rashly fighting.

Sun Tzu said don't pursue victory but pursue avoiding defeat. Don't aim for victory; aim for standing undefeated. It is thus very important that *The Art of War* is mainly negative, not positive.<sup>9</sup> It does not make us stronger, but it makes us fully aware of our powerlessness. There is a saying that there are very few things we can control, and the world is not under our control, so the essential thing in Sun Tzu's *Art of War* is to learn to control yourself correctly. Next, we will analyze the content of Sun Tzu's *Art of War* and the chapters most relevant to this paper.

## Calculation

The first chapter of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, "Calculation," is a very important one. The term *Ji* used here signifies "calculation" rather than "estimation." Some authorities translate *ji* as the estimate,<sup>10</sup> assessment,<sup>11</sup> surveying,<sup>12</sup> or even the making of plans.<sup>13</sup> But in fact, it should be translated as calculation, which is much closer to the original intention. The Calculation will result in a certain answer, but Estimation is a process in which we are not certain about the answer. In *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu said, "War is a matter of vital importance to the State.... it is

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Handel, "Corbett, Clausewitz, and Sun Tzu," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (Nov 2000): 111, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol53/iss4/9>

<sup>10</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 63. Also Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph D. Sawyer (USA: Westview Press, 1994), 165

<sup>11</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War - Sun Zi's Military Methods*, trans. Victor H. Mair (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 76.

<sup>12</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War: The Definitive Translation of the Linyi Text*, trans. and ed. J. H. Huang (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), 37.

<sup>13</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and ed. John Minford (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 3

mandatory that it be thoroughly studied."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it would be more appropriate to use 'calculation' here. This chapter summarizes the importance of war, and it is a very important one. There are mainly two levels of content:

The first level is the theme of "Calculation." What should we calculate? And how does one calculate? Sun Tzu said that we should calculate in five directions: Tao (the way, or natural order), heaven, earth, general (command), and law (method). And we can observe here the seven elements of Calculation: "Which ruler possesses moral influence? Which commander is the more able? Which army obtains the advantages of nature and the terrain? Which regulations and instructions are better carried out? Which troops are the stronger? Which force has the better trained officers and men? Which administers rewards and punishments in a more enlightened manner?" Sun Tzu said, "with many calculations, one can win; with few one cannot"<sup>15</sup>

The second level treats deceptions, and Sun Tzu taught a total of 12 deceptions. "So when you are capable, appear to be incapable," "when you are deploying soldiers, appear not to be deploying them," "when you are nearby, appear to be far away," "when you are far away, appear to be nearby," "use the prospect of gain to lure the enemy in," "sow confusion, then take him," "if he is strong, get away from him," "if he is ill-tempered, provoke him," "if he is humble, stir up his pride," "if he is relaxed, wear him out," "if his forces are loyal, break them up."<sup>16</sup> This exposition is also the basis for what the West often thinks of as China's 'way of war,' which is considered fundamentally based upon deception.

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<sup>14</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 65-66.

<sup>15</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 71.

<sup>16</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and ed. Peter Harris (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018), 48-49.

But Sun Tzu finally concluded: “These are military strategists' ways to achieve victory and cannot be divulged to others beforehand.” This means that deceptions are a critical point of the war, but these cannot be taught or decided upon beforehand. All depends on the direction of the war. That is to say, the most essential thing in war is to rely on strength, not deception. The purpose of deception is to lure the enemy into making mistakes. When the enemy makes a mistake, this can turn the advantage of the war to our side.<sup>17</sup>

### **Commencing War or Battle**

The second chapter of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, “Starting a Battle,” does not discuss how to fight throughout the entire chapter, but rather treats the cost of war. It mainly posits two points: First, the cost of war is high. Second, after understanding the high cost of war, generals should seize the enemy's supplies to supplement themselves. In other words, wars cost too much in money and resources, and no matter how many resources you have, they are not sufficient. You may think the country is rich, but no matter how much money you have, it is not enough for expansion of the territory. In ancient China, there were many powerful dynasties and monarchs, but the country turned from strong to weak due to repeated instances of military aggressions. Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty was an illustrative example of collapse and losing a state due to a mixture of crippling internal corruption and external rebellion.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, there is a saying in this Chapter: “the wise general sees to it that his troops feed on the enemy, for one bushel of the enemy's provisions is equivalent to twenty of his; one

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<sup>17</sup> Commander Mark Metcalf, U.S. Navy (Retired), "Deception Is the Chinese Way of War," *US Naval Institute Proceedings*: Vol. 143/2/1,368 (Feb 2017), <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2017/february/deception-chinese-way-war>

<sup>18</sup> Kallie Szczepanski, “The Collapse of the Han Dynasty in China-Bringing Down the Great Classical Civilization of China,” *ThoughtCo*, Jun 25, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/why-did-han-china-collapse-195115>

hundredweight of enemy fodder to twenty hundredweight of his.”<sup>19</sup> It is thus said that a wise general must obtain food, supplies and equipment from the enemy because eating one bell of the enemy's grain is equivalent to eating twenty bells of one's own grain. Why? What are the reasons for the extra nineteen bells? These nineteen bells are the cost of transporting the grain along the extended lines of supply. This also profoundly speaks to the importance of efficient logistics.

How to reduce the cost of war is a very important key to war. There is the famous example in history of Genghis Khan. Why was Genghis Khan able to fight all the way into Europe? It is because he significantly reduced the cost of military rations and supplies. First, his was a nomadic people and army, fighting west along the steppe belt of Eurasia, so he did not have to worry about fodder for his horses. Second, the Mongolian people did not eat much grain, but rather they ate mainly beef and mutton. His sheep were driven all the way along the army's route, so he could still produce food while marching.

In a modern application of these principles, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been promoting the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) since 2013. In addition to assisting countries in infrastructure construction and providing them with loans which in effect build countries' dependence on China's economy, the BRI also provides economic, military, and the promotion (and divergence) of hard power. All of this can reduce costs, which is more in line with Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* concepts that advise "feed on the enemy." In addition to reducing economic import and export costs in peacetime, BRI can also reduce military costs in wartime. At the same time, through Loan cooperation, the long-term injection of foreign funds for China will have

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<sup>19</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 74.

significant benefits, as well as producing great influence on the host-country's economy and society.

## **Offensive Strategy**

After explaining the methods of reducing costs and improving efficiency in the "Starting a Battle" chapter, the following "Offensive Strategy" chapter discusses two aspects: How to defeat the enemy army, and how to predict the outcome of victory.

On the offensive side, the goal is to "seek perfection," in hopes of achieving "no war, no fight." When both sides are thus largely unharmed in achieving your goals, allow the enemy to surrender, incorporate its resources into one's own forces and state, and thereby "win without fighting." If it is necessary to launch an offensive, this also nevertheless requires a short battle and a quick victory. Therefore, the first thing in war is to plan such that the enemy knows they have no chance of winning, and then gives up the attack and surrenders. If attacking the enemy strategy fails, one will also still work to disrupt the enemy's alliances.

If neither attacking the enemy's strategy nor disrupting its alliances is successful, then consider attacking with troops and laying siege. The reason why siege is the worst strategy is that it runs counter to the concept of "quick battle" at lower cost. "If the general is unable to control his impatience and orders his troops to swarm up the wall like ants, one-third of them will be killed without taking the city. Such is the calamity of these attacks.<sup>20</sup> Even if they win, they will only get dilapidated cities and troops, which violates the principle of "seek perfection."

If you decide to send troops, you need to consider the difference in the enemy's strength and your own in the strategy of using troops. Suppose the overall situation is not as good as that of

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<sup>20</sup> Sun Tzu, *Art of War*, trans and with an Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 78-79.

the other party. In that case, you must know how to admit defeat and escape as soon as possible. One must not stubbornly insist on not retreating, but rather learn to let go of the present, and only then will you have a chance to recover in the future.

Sun Tzu taught that victory or defeat should not be forced, but can be predicted. He proposed five indicators for predicting victory or defeat: “If you know when you can fight and when you cannot fight, you will win,” “if you understand when to deploy many men and when to deploy a few, you will win,” and “If your upper and lower ranks want the same things, you will win.” This holds the same meaning as the *Tao* in the five strategies: “if you are ready and waiting for those who are not ready, you will win,” and “if your general is capable and your ruler refrains from taking charge, you will win.”<sup>21</sup>

Summary of the “Offensive Strategy” chapter: On the battlefield, every step is related to state affairs and human life, and the cost is exceptionally high. Therefore, it can be seen that Sun Tzu's thinking is first ‘consider the chance of winning, and then consider the loss when the chance of winning is obtained.’ Interests are considered last when loss can be accepted. So, Sun Tzu said: “know your enemy and know yourself and fight a hundred battles without danger. Know yourself but not your enemy and win one battle but lose another. Know neither your enemy nor yourself, and there is sure to be danger in every battle.”<sup>22</sup> In planning and attacking, the critical goal is to seek perfection, follow the priority order of attacking the strategy, disrupting the alliance, attacking the army, and only lastly the siege. Strive to fight cautiously, quickly, and with ‘no fight.’ This is the crucial idea of "Offensive Strategy."

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<sup>21</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and ed. Peter Harris (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018), 55.

<sup>22</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and ed. Peter Harris (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018), 55.

## Form and *Shi*

The contents of the first three chapters, as heretofore analyzed, are mainly about preparations and concepts for war. The subsequent “*Shi*,” signifying “Form” and “Empty and Solid,” are about the way of using troops. Some authorities here translate chapter four as “control”<sup>23</sup> or “dispositions.”<sup>24</sup> But I think it is more appropriate to translate it into FORM, because the content of the chapter involves identifying the situation so as to allow forming the undefeated situation.

Sun Tzu believed “the skillful warriors first made themselves invincible and awaited the enemy's moment of vulnerability. Invincibility depends on oneself; the enemy's vulnerability on him.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, victory can be predictable but cannot be forced. If you can't win now, the most important action is to preserve your strength and wait until your own transformation becomes stronger, and then you cannot be defeated. At the same time one waits for the opponent to make a mistake, and then again there is a chance of victory. Avoid trying to fight first and then win, never engage based upon only a hope of winning, and understand that inaction is also a kind of action. This recalls the concept of “strategic patience” treated earlier.

Sun Tzu said: “to lift an autumn down requires no great strength; to distinguish between the sun and moon is no test of vision; to hear the thunderclap is no indication of acute hearing.”<sup>26</sup> Those who are good at fighting can see the situation that others cannot see, and always defeat the

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<sup>23</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and ed. J. H. Huang (New York: First Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), 163.

<sup>24</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 85.

<sup>25</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 85.

<sup>26</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 86.

enemy that is easy to defeat, so ordinary people don't think they are powerful. Similarly, the truly powerful generals are not famous generals, and good wars are usually not exciting, so it is said that "the victories won by a master of war gain him neither reputation for wisdom nor merit for valour."<sup>27</sup>

The "Form" is the first thing to look at in a war, and the *Shih* is the key to winning a battle. When you feel that you have already won the game, you start to fight, and then you have to think about how to achieve "victory" by building momentum. The so-called building *shih* refers to artificially creating momentum and then using this momentum to drive the team to win. To build *Shih*, the essence lies in management, tactics, and formation of troops, which is the core content of *Shih*.

Sun Tzu's core tactic is "in battle, use the regular force to engage; use the irregular to win." Simply put, it is the strategy of dividing the troops: the ones fighting are the regular soldiers, and the ones left in reserve to fight later are the surprise soldiers. Just like the three primary colors of red, green, and blue can be used to create any other color, the concept of regular and irregular is simple, but the tactics that can be designed by mixing them are endless.

Sun Tzu said that "hence, one is good at fighting, seek out what *Shih* you need, rather than seek out the men." *Shih* is a difficult term and concept to explain. It can be explained by momentum, terrain, and *Guanxi*. First, let yourself be strong and confident, and then let others feel your strength, then you will have momentum. Second, act such as grabbing the location before others see its value and taking the first step. To seize the strategic location, you can get the terrain. Lastly, as in the Chinese traditional game of *Weiqi*, analyze the enemy's psychological

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<sup>27</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 87.

state and needs and use this to find ways to disrupt the opponent's situation and strengthen your situation based on the situation.<sup>28</sup>

## **Empty and Solid**

The sixth chapter of Sun Tzu, “The Empty and the Solid,” is another key lesson. The most remarkable sentence is: “have the enemy come to you; do not go to him.”<sup>29</sup> It is I who mobilize the enemy, and not the enemy that mobilizes me.

The opening chapter of “the empty and the solid” says this: “he who occupies the field of battle first and awaits his enemy is at ease; he who comes later to the scene and rushes into the fight is weary.”<sup>30</sup> You arrive at the battlefield first and line up your troops to wait for the enemy to come. In recent years, in accordance with this teaching, China has continuously strengthened its homeland defenses and simultaneously expanded its defense depth, materializing its military forces in the South China Sea on Yongshu Reef, Mischief Reef, and Subi Reef in the Nansha (Spratly) Islands, and with the launching of the aircraft carriers Liaoning and Shandong.<sup>31</sup> The introduction into service of various new fighter jets has made China's defense forces more robust in the first island chain and made the situation in the Taiwan Strait more severe. Most of the reports tend to look upon Taiwan as the next Ukraine. When China's deployments in the first island chain are completed, when the United States and other allies attempt to offer assistance in

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<sup>28</sup> Zhongqi Pan, “Guanxi, Weiqi and Chinese Strategic Thinking”, *Chinese Political Science Review*, volume 1, pages 303–321 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41111-016-0015-1>

<sup>29</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and ed. Peter Harris (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018), 62.

<sup>30</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. and with an Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 96.

<sup>31</sup> Amanda Macias, “China Quietly Installed Missile Systems on Strategic Spratly Islands in Hotly Contested South China Sea,” *CNBC*, May 2, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/02/china-added-missile-systems- on-spratly-islands-in-south-china-sea.html>.

a new Taiwan Strait crisis, the possibility of assisting Taiwan in successfully defending against a PRC invasion will be significantly reduced.

In addition, Sun Tzu also mentions in the chapter that “I am able to determine the enemy's dispositions while at the same time I conceal my own then I can concentrate, and he must divide. And if I concentrate while he divides, I can use my entire strength to attack a fraction of his.” This concept is similar to that of Carl von Clausewitz in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where he talked attacking the enemy's center of gravity can lead to the disintegration of their forces, collapse of their will to fight, or a significant loss of their capabilities. Conversely, protecting one's own center of gravity is crucial for maintaining strength and resilience in the face of enemy actions. Clausewitz also emphasizes the importance of correctly identifying the center of gravity.<sup>32</sup>

The theory of strategic center of gravity is promoted more concretely, which is called the decisive point. You must find where the decisive point is, and when the decisive point is overwhelmingly addressed, the whole problem is solved.

### **The Weakness of Theory**

Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* is a classic Chinese military treatise written over 2,500 years ago. It is considered one of the most important works on strategy and military tactics in Chinese history. The book is divided into 13 chapters, each of which covers a different aspect of warfare.

One of the main criticisms of *The Art of War* is that it may be too theoretical and not practical enough for modern warfare.<sup>33</sup> The tactics and strategies outlined in the book were

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<sup>32</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret; Introductory Essays by Peter Paret, Michael Howard, and Bernard Brodie; with a Commentary by Bernard Brodie. Princeton University Press, 1976/1984, 427-606.

<sup>33</sup> Jones, Archer. *The Art of War in the Western World*. (Oxford University Press, 1989).

written for ancient Chinese warfare, which was characterized by relatively small armies and simple weapons. Today's warfare is much more complex, with advanced technology, larger armies, and different types of conflicts.<sup>34</sup>

Another criticism of *The Art of War* is that it places too much emphasis on strategy and intelligence, while neglecting the importance of military training and technology. Sun Tzu believed that a general's intelligence and wisdom were the most important factors in winning a battle. However, in modern warfare, a well-trained and equipped military force is often even more necessary for success.<sup>35</sup>

Additionally, the book is often criticized for its emphasis on deception and manipulation which might be seen as unethical in modern warfare.

Despite these criticisms, *The Art of War* remains an influential work in military strategy and is widely studied and applied in both military and business contexts. Many of the principles outlined in the book, such as the importance of understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of the enemy, remain relevant today.

Overall, while "The Art of War" is a classic and important work on strategy and military tactics, it is important to keep in mind that it was written for a very specific historical context and may not be directly applicable to modern warfare in all cases and aspects.

## **Chapter Conclusions**

In analyzing China's policies, it is important to focus on the impact of Sun Tzu's *Art of War* on Xi Jinping's thoughts. Sun Tzu's *Art of War* is a renowned ancient Chinese military treatise

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Trans and with Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 179-183.

that provides strategic advice on warfare and conflict. The teachings in the book emphasize the importance of flexibility, adaptability, and the ability to outmaneuver the enemy. Xi Jinping is the current leader of the Communist Party of China (CCP), and operates under a one-person dictatorship system, with his decisions being implemented as the party's decisions. Understanding the influence of Sun Tzu's philosophy on Xi's leadership can provide valuable insight into China's current policies.

Xi Jinping's leadership style can be seen as reflecting the principles of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*. He has demonstrated a willingness to adapt and respond to changing circumstances in both domestic and international affairs. For example, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is a crucial aspect of China's current foreign policy, can be seen as reflecting Sun Tzu's teachings on flexibility and adaptability. The BRI is a comprehensive program that seeks to expand China's global influence through investment and trade, and it has been designed to be flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances.

Sun Tzu's *Art of War* is a classic Chinese military treatise written over 2,500 years ago. It is widely considered one of the most essential works on strategy and military tactics in Chinese history. The book is divided into 13 chapters, each covering a different aspect of warfare. The first part of the book covers strategic concepts, the second part delves into tactical principles, and the third part focuses on implementing tactics.

Despite its age, *Art of War* remains relevant. It has been widely studied and applied in diverse fields such as politics, military strategy, entrepreneurship, personal development, and investment. Although *Art of War* is written in ancient Chinese and may have different interpretations based on cultural or language differences, its content is straightforward.

One of the main criticisms of "The Art of War" is that it may be too theoretical and not practical enough for modern warfare. The tactics and strategies outlined in the book were written for ancient Chinese warfare, characterized by relatively small armies and simple weapons. Today's warfare is much more complex, with advanced technology, larger armies, and different conflicts. Another criticism of "The Art of War" is that it places too much emphasis on strategy and intelligence while neglecting the importance of military training and technology. Sun Tzu believed that a general's intelligence and wisdom were the most critical factors in winning a battle. However, in modern warfare, a well-trained and equipped military force is often necessary for success.

In conclusion, by examining the influence of Sun Tzu's Art of War on Xi Jinping's thoughts, one can gain a deeper understanding of China's policies. This ancient Chinese philosophy has had a lasting impact on Chinese political thought and continues to shape the actions of the CCP. Understanding the background ideas and limitations of BRI and geopolitics and the implications and weaknesses of China's Way of War is crucial.

## **Chapter 2: The Implications of the China Way of War on Contemporary Issues**

In recent years, Chinese President Xi Jinping has emphasized the concept of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” as a central aspect of China's modernization drive. This goal is rooted in the historical context of the “century of humiliation,” during which China was subjugated and exploited by foreign powers. Now, with China's rapidly growing economic and military power, the country can assert itself as a major global player.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Carrie Gracie, “The credo: Great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation,” *BBC* (Nov 7, 2014), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-29788802>

One key aspect of this rejuvenation is the concept of a “community of life” between China and the rest of the world.<sup>37</sup> This concept emphasizes the interconnectedness of global affairs, and the idea that the fate of China is closely tied to the fate of the international community. In this view, China must work with other nations to maintain peace, seek development, and share prosperity.

However, Xi has also emphasized the need for China to maintain a strong national defense in order to safeguard its sovereignty and development interests. This includes a focus on modernizing China's military, with a particular emphasis on the “active defense” strategy.<sup>38</sup> The ultimate goal is to build a "powerful modern socialist country" by 2049, while claiming to adhere to the principle of “never seeking hegemony.”<sup>39</sup>

It's worth noting that the Chinese government has long emphasized the importance of maintaining “peaceful development.” This language is often used to reassure other countries that China's rise will not be disruptive or aggressive. However, at the same time, China's military modernization and territorial disputes with neighboring countries have led to concerns about its intentions.

Overall, Xi's vision of a “great rejuvenation” for China is rooted in a deep sense of national pride and a desire to overcome the historical injustices of the past. The Chinese government will

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<sup>37</sup> “Xi Jinping on building community of life for man, nature,” China State Council Information Office (Oct 9, 2021), [http://english.scio.gov.cn/topnews/202110/09/content\\_77797512.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/topnews/202110/09/content_77797512.htm)

<sup>38</sup> Maj Timothy A. Ornelas, “China’s Active Defense Military Strategy”, *Marine Corps Gazette* (October 2021), <https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/57-Chinas-Active-Defense-Military-Strategy.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Christian Shepherdv and Lily Kuo, “Xi presents China as ‘new choice’ for humanity as he readies for next term”, *Washington Post* (Oct 16, 2022), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/16/xi-china-communist-party-congress/>

continue to promote the idea of a “community of life” with other countries, while also emphasizing the need for a strong national defense in order to protect China's sovereignty and development interests.

### **The Motivation of the One Belt and One Road Initiative (BRI)**

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a comprehensive infrastructure project launched by the Chinese government in 2013. The project aims to connect participating countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa through a network of infrastructure projects, including highways, railways, ports, airports, and power plants. The BRI is a long-term strategic plan that seeks to improve transportation and communication links, promote economic development, and increase trade and investment among participating countries.<sup>40</sup>

The BRI is divided into two main components: the Silk Road Economic Belt, and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The Silk Road Economic Belt is focused on connecting China with Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe through a network of highways, railways, fiber-optic networks, and oil and gas pipelines. This component of the BRI is intended to improve transportation and communication links between participating countries, promote economic development, and increase trade and investment. The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, on the other hand, aims to connect China with Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, and Europe through a network of ports, airports, and other infrastructure. This component of the BRI is intended to improve transportation and communication links between participating countries, promote economic development, and increase trade and investment.

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<sup>40</sup> “Belt and Road Initiative,” World Bank (Mar 29, 2018), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/brief/belt-and-road-initiative>.

Figure 1: China's Belt and Road Initiative



Source: "Our Bulldozers, Our Rules," *The Economist*

The BRI is expected to include over 60 countries, representing about two-thirds of the world's population. These countries are in Asia, Europe, Africa, and Oceania, and they are expected to benefit from the BRI through improved transportation and communication links, increased trade, and investment, and enhanced cultural exchange.<sup>41</sup> The initiative is also expected to play a key role in shaping the global economic and political landscape. The BRI is expected to increase economic growth and reduce poverty in participating countries, as well as promote peace and stability in the region. Additionally, the BRI is expected to enhance China's economic and political influence in the region and around the world.

<sup>41</sup> "Our Bulldozers, Our Rules," *The Economist*, July 2, 2016, <https://www.economist.com/china/2016/07/02/our-bulldozers-our-rules>.

However, the initiative also faces many challenges and criticisms. Some countries and analysts have raised concerns about the potential debt burden on participating countries, as well as issues related to transparency, governance, and environmental and social impact. These concerns have led some participating countries to delay or cancel projects, and others to renegotiate the terms of their participation in the initiative. Additionally, there have been concerns about the potential geopolitical implications of the BRI, as some countries have raised concerns about the initiative as a means for China to exert greater influence over participating countries.<sup>42</sup>

Despite these challenges, the BRI continues to move forward, with a growing number of countries signing on to the initiative and a growing number of infrastructure projects being planned and implemented. The initiative is also continuing to evolve, with an increasing emphasis on areas such as digital connectivity, sustainable development, and green finance.

In conclusion, The Belt and Road Initiative is a massive infrastructure project that seeks to connect participating countries through a network of infrastructure projects, including highways, railways, ports, airports, and power plants. The initiative aims to improve transportation and communication links, promote economic development and increase trade and investment, and enhance cultural exchange among the participating countries. The BRI is expected to play a key role in shaping the global economic and political landscape, but also facing many challenges and criticisms. The initiative is still ongoing, and the Chinese government is still actively promoting the project, and many countries are still showing interest. However, the initiative also needs to address the concerns raised by critics, such as issues related to transparency, governance, and

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<sup>42</sup> James Griffiths, "Just what is this One Belt, One Road thing anyway?" *CNN* (May 11, 2017), <https://www.cnn.com/2017/05/11/asia/china-one-belt-one-road-explainer/index.html>

environmental and social impact, and work to address potential debt burden and geopolitical implications.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Application of Sun Tzu's *Art of War* on BRI**

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a Chinese-led infrastructure development project aimed at connecting Asia, Europe, and Africa, has identified several principles of Sun Tzu's *Art of War* as valuable guides to its strategy. The first principle, "to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill," emphasizes the importance of building mutually advantageous partnerships and seeking cooperation rather than competition, intending to achieve win-win outcomes.<sup>44</sup> The BRI endeavors to enhance trade, stimulate economic growth and create opportunities that benefit all involved parties by investing in infrastructure and development projects. This principle underscores the value of avoiding direct conflict and instead prioritizing establishing collaborative relationships that are advantageous to all parties involved.

Another principle of Sun Tzu's *Art of War* that can be applied to the BRI is the concept of strategic deception. Sun Tzu said: offer the enemy a bait to lure him.<sup>45</sup> The use of tactics such as offering loans with favorable terms or leveraging influence to persuade other countries to support projects can be viewed in different ways. While some may see it as a form of strategic deception, others may view it as part of standard negotiation and diplomacy. However, regardless of one's interpretation, it is crucial to remember that these tactics should not be used to deceive or harm others, but rather to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. The success of these tactics in

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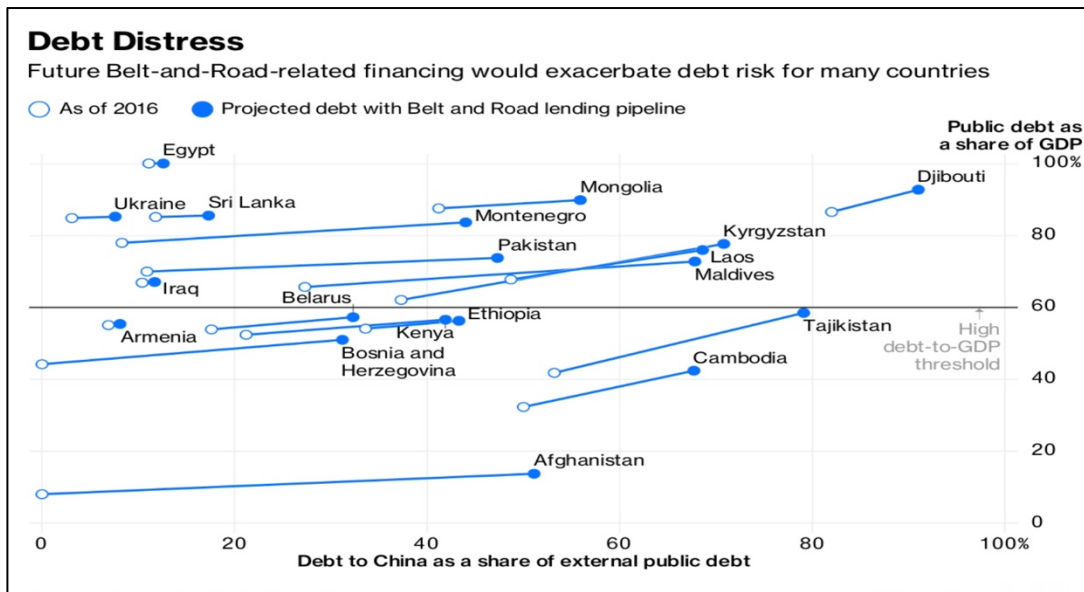
<sup>43</sup> Deborah Brautigam, "China and Zambia: Creating a Sovereign Debt Crisis," *International Affairs*, Volume 98, Issue 4, July 2022, Pages 1347–1365, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia109>

<sup>44</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 77.

<sup>45</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 66.

building strong partnerships and promoting economic growth will depend on the motivations and expectations of all parties involved. Ultimately, the key is to ensure that the use of such tactics aligns with the overall goal of the Belt and Road Initiative, which is to establish partnerships and promote cooperation rather than competition.<sup>46</sup>

Figure2: Exacerbated Debt Risk for BRI Countries



Source: “Five Myths About China's Belt and Road Initiative,” *Bloomberg Opinion*

Furthermore, Sun Tzu's emphasis on the importance of diligent planning and preparation can be applied to the BRI. By conducting extensive research and analysis before investing in a project, including evaluating the economic, political, and social risks and opportunities and identifying potential partners and stakeholders, China can enhance the likelihood of success while minimizing possible risks. Sun Tzu famously stated, “the estimates made in the temple

<sup>46</sup> Browne, Andrew, (2018), “Five Myths About China's Belt and Road Initiative.” *Bloomberg Opinion*, May 4, 2019, accessed January 31, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2019-05-04/five-myths-of-china-s-belt-and-road-initiative>.

before hostilities indicate victory it is because calculations show one's strength to be superior to that of his enemy."<sup>47</sup>

Finally, the idea that "War is a matter of vital importance to the State" underscores the need to take a long-term perspective and consider the broader implications of actions. Within the context of the BRI, China must evaluate the impact of its investments on local economies and communities as well as geopolitical implications. This requires careful consideration and flexibility in adapting strategies to changing circumstances. Sun Tzu famously stated, "War is a matter of vital importance to the State; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied."<sup>48</sup>

In summary, the principles of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, including building mutually beneficial relationships, strategic deception, diligent planning and preparation, and a long-term perspective, can be applied to the BRI to guide China's approach to the initiative and achieve its goals of promoting economic growth and building strong partnerships.

### **The PRC's Management of Geopolitical Relations**

China's geopolitical influence and the advancement of its interests have been shaped by a combination of various strategies, including geographical proximity, economic power, military capabilities, and diplomatic influence. Regarding geographical proximity, China has leveraged its location concerning neighboring countries to exert political influence. For example, its proximity to North Korea has allowed it to influence the political situation in the Korean

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<sup>47</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 71.

<sup>48</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 63.

Peninsula.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, its proximity to Southeast Asian countries has enhanced its economic and political ties with the region.

A complex interplay of political, economic, and security factors, including historical tensions and territorial disputes, shapes China's relationship with neighboring countries such as Japan and South Korea. Despite these tensions, the two countries have also sought to improve economic ties and cooperate on regional and global issues.<sup>50</sup>

China's economic power has been a significant tool for enhancing its geopolitical influence. The country has used its economic might to negotiate favorable trade agreements, invest in foreign infrastructure projects, and offer economic aid to developing countries, building strong relationships, and enhancing its geopolitical influence worldwide.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to its economic power, China has also employed military capabilities to advance its geopolitical interests. Its military modernization has given it the ability to project power overseas and defend its territorial claims in the South China Sea.<sup>52</sup> The Chinese military has also been used to support its interests in other regions, such as the Middle East.

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<sup>49</sup> “The crisis on the Korean Peninsula and the effects on the geopolitical balance in the East China Sea,” *SpecialEurasia ASIA-PACIFIC*, November 7, 2022, accessed February 7, 2023, <https://www.specialeurasia.com/2022/11/07/korean-peninsula-geopolitics/>

<sup>50</sup> Frank Aum, “Mended Ties Between Japan and South Korea Would Boost Regional Security,” *Briefing*, United States Institute of Peace July 2022, accessed February 7, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/07/mended-ties-between-japan-and-south-korea-would-boost-regional-security>

<sup>51</sup> Martha Lawrence, Richard Bullock, and Ziming Liu, *China’s High-Speed Rail Development*, World Bank Washington, 2019, <https://olc.worldbank.org/system/files/Chinas%20High-Speed%20-%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> Lindsay Maizland, “China’s Modernizing Military,” *Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder*, accessed February 7, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-modernizing-military>

Figure 3: How the PLA compares in Spending and Naval Assets

▲	Defense spending	Active naval service members	Major surface warships	Submarines
Australia	\$27B	13,660	13	6
<b>China</b>	<b>\$239B</b>	<b>250,000</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>59</b>
India	\$67B	67,700	28	16
Japan	\$45B	45,350	49	20
North Korea	No data	60,000	2	73
Philippines	\$4B	23,750	0	0
Russia	\$64B	150,000	35	58
South Korea	\$41B	70,000	26	22
Taiwan	\$10B	40,000	26	4
United States	\$634B	329,850	112	67

Source: “China’s Modernizing Military,” Council on Foreign Relations

China's diplomatic influence has also been crucial in enhancing its geopolitical standing. The country has used its diplomatic influence to negotiate peace treaties, resolve conflicts, and build strong relationships with countries worldwide.<sup>53</sup> Its government has also used its diplomatic influence in international forums, such as the United Nations, to promote its interests and values.

In conclusion, China's geopolitical influence and the advancement of its interests have been shaped by a combination of its geographical proximity, economic power, military capabilities, and diplomatic influence. The Belt and Road Initiative is just one of China's many strategies to enhance its geopolitical influence. The country will likely continue to utilize these strategies in the future.

<sup>53</sup> Nadeem Ahmed Moonakal, “The Impact and Implications of China’s Growing Influence in the Middle East,” *The Diplomat*, accessed February 7, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/the-impact-and-implications-of-chinas-growing-influence-in-the-middle-east/>

## The Application of Sun Tzu's *Art of War* on Geopolitics

In Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, the author emphasizes the importance of understanding the enemy and the environment in which a battle is taking place. These principles can be applied to China's geopolitical strategy, as the country seeks to exert its influence and advance its interests in the international arena.

Sun Tzu said: "Anciently the skillful warriors first made themselves invincible and awaited the enemy's moment of vulnerability."<sup>54</sup> It highlights the importance of being aware of one's strengths and weaknesses and those of the enemy. In this sense, China has been able to leverage its proximity to North Korea to exert political influence over the Korean Peninsula while using its modernized military to defend its territorial claims in the South China Sea. By understanding the strengths and weaknesses of both it and its enemies, China can make strategic decisions about advancing its geopolitical interests.

Sun Tzu said:" thus, those skilled at making the enemy move do so by creating a situation to which he must conform; they entice him with something he is certain to take, and with lures of ostensible profit, they await him in strength."<sup>55</sup> He emphasized the importance of utilizing the resources of the enemy in battle, suggesting that those skilled in strategy create a situation in which the enemy must comply, luring them with something they cannot resist. This concept can be seen in China's geopolitical strategy, where the country leverages its economic power and resources to negotiate favorable trade agreements, invest in foreign infrastructure projects, and offer economic aid to countries in need. These actions serve to build strong relationships with

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<sup>54</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 85.

<sup>55</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 93.

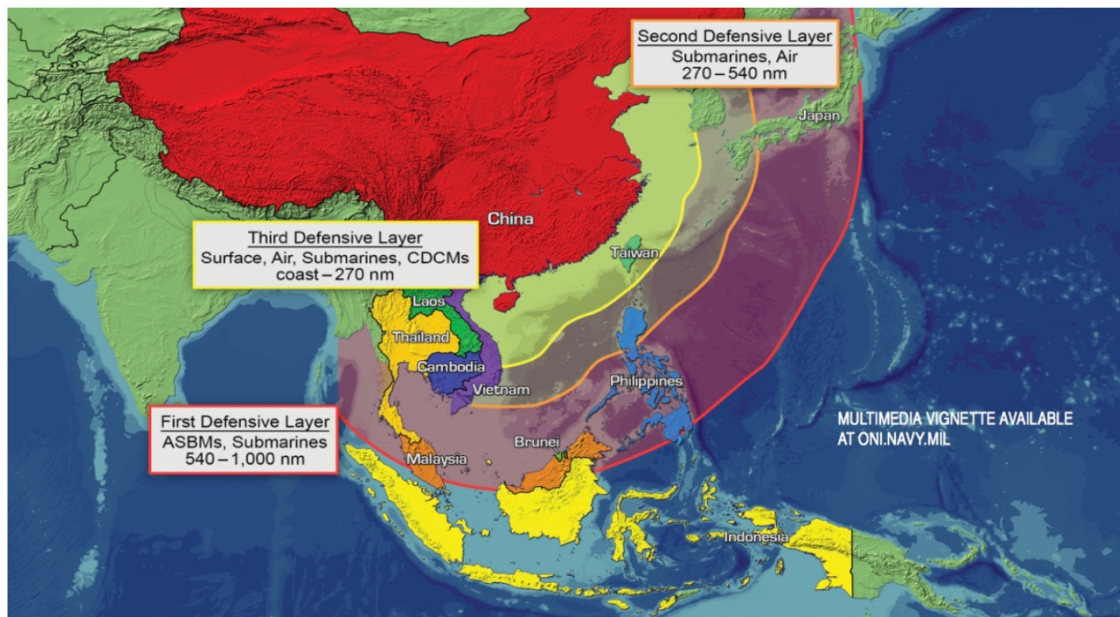
countries in the developing world, enhance China's geopolitical influence, and advance its interests. By creating mutually beneficial situations, China can secure access to resources and markets, foster positive relationships, and increase its political and economic influence.

The concept of “occupying the field of battle first and awaits the enemy” can be applied to China's intensive development of its Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities.<sup>56</sup> By investing in and modernizing its military, China has positioned itself in a position of strength and readiness to defend its interests and territorial claims in the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea, and beyond. This approach aligns with Sun Tzu's emphasis on preparation and readiness, as having a strong A2/AD capability allows China to be prepared and in control of its immediate surroundings. By combining its military capabilities with its other strategies, such as its proximity to neighboring countries and its economic power, China can exert greater influence and advance its geopolitical interests.

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<sup>56</sup> Fabian-Lucas Romero Meraner, “China’s Anti-Access/Area-Denial Strategy,” *The Defense Horizon Journal*, February 10, 2023, accessed February 12, 2023, <https://www.thedefencehorizon.org/post/china-a2ad-strategy>

Figure 4: China's A2/AD bubble in the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean



Source: "What is Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD)," MDA

In summation, China's geopolitical strategy can be understood through the lens of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*. By leveraging its proximity, economic power, military capabilities, and diplomatic influence, China can advance its interests in the international arena and exert its geopolitical influence. The country's strategic approach, which emphasizes planning, preparation, and adaptation, allows it to effectively navigate the complex political landscape and achieve its goals.

## Chapter Conclusions

In summary, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a significant geopolitical and economic strategy pursued by China to enhance its global influence. BRI aims to connect Asia, Europe, and Africa through a network of infrastructure projects, including ports, highways, railways, and pipelines. It has been influenced by the principles of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, which emphasize the importance of strategic thinking and preparation, as well as winning before fighting.

The principles of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* are also evident in China's foreign policies and relationships with neighboring countries. For example, China seeks to control key points and routes, build strategic partnerships, and create a favorable environment in its pursuit of regional dominance. In doing so, China utilizes tactics such as the principle of “controlling the waters” to gain control over strategic waterways, and the principle of “showing the enemy something he is not expecting” to keep other countries off balance and increase its strategic advantage.

In conclusion, the Belt and Road Initiative and China's foreign policies reflect the principles of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* in their pursuit of regional and global dominance. By embracing these principles, China is seeking to shape the global order and secure its place as a leading world power.

### **Chapter 3: The Implications and Weaknesses of the China Way of War**

The rise of China as a global power has been one of the most significant developments of the 21st century. Along with its economic growth, China has also invested in its military capabilities. As China's military modernization continues, the question arises about the nature of its military doctrine and strategy. This article aims to examine the implications and weaknesses of the China Way of War.

The China Way of War is a term used to describe the military doctrine and strategy of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA). It is based on the concepts of “active defense” and “local wars under modern conditions.”<sup>57</sup> Active defense means that China will not be the first to

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<sup>57</sup> Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, “Document: China's Military Strategy 2015,” *USNI News* May 23, 2015, accessed March 3, 2023, <https://news.usni.org/2015/05/26/document-chinas-military-strategy>

use military force but will respond if attacked. Local wars under modern conditions mean that China's wars will be limited in scope, geographically, and in time and involve modern technology and equipment.

The China Way of War is based on the idea that China is facing a “new historic juncture” in its development.<sup>58</sup> This juncture is characterized by the shift from an agricultural society to an industrial and information society and from a closed economy to an open economy. According to Chinese strategists, this shift creates both opportunities and challenges for China's national security.<sup>59</sup> Opportunities include increased economic growth, technological development, and global influence. Challenges include increased competition, potential conflict, and the need to defend China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

To address these challenges, the PLA has developed a military doctrine that emphasizes the need for "informationization" of the military, which means the integration of information technology into all aspects of military operations. The goal is to create a “new type of fighting force” that can conduct “informatized local wars” under modern conditions.

### **Implications of the China Way of War**

The China Way of War has several implications for regional and global security. First, it suggests that China is preparing for limited military conflicts, including territorial disputes, conflicts over resources, or intervention in other countries internal affairs. This could increase tensions and instability in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

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<sup>58</sup> Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. “General Outline of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era,” October 24, 2017, accessed 8 Mar 2023, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/24/c\\_1121848871.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/24/c_1121848871.htm).

<sup>59</sup> Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China, “White paper: China’s National Defense in the New Era,” July 24, 2019, accessed 8 Mar 2023, [http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/fwxw/tps/4846424\\_2.html](http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/fwxw/tps/4846424_2.html).

Second, the China Way of War highlights China's emphasis on information technology and cyber warfare. This has led to concerns about China's cyber espionage activities and its ability to disrupt or disable critical infrastructure in other countries.

Third, the China Way of War suggests that China wants to expand its military presence beyond its borders. China has been building military bases in the South China Sea, Middle East, and western Pacific which could provide a platform for power projection and influence beyond China's immediate neighborhood.<sup>60</sup>

Fourth, the China Way of War suggests that China is interested in developing capabilities to counter the military superiority of the United States. China's military modernization program includes the development of anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, such as long-range missiles and advanced air defense systems, which could make it difficult for the US to project military power into the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>61</sup>

Fifth, the China Way of War has arms control and disarmament implications. China's military modernization program includes the development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, as well as deploying conventional missiles and other advanced weapons systems. This could complicate efforts to negotiate arms control agreements or reduce the number of nuclear weapons worldwide.

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<sup>60</sup> Betsy Reed, "China will build string of military bases around world, says Pentagon," *The Guardian*, May 3, 2019, accessed 8 Mar 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/03/china-will-build-string-of-military-bases-around-world-says-pentagon>

<sup>61</sup> Yevtodyeva, M.G, "Development of the Chinese A2/AD System in the Context of US–China Relations." *Her. Russ. Acad. Sci.* 92 (Suppl 6), S534–S542 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1134/S1019331622120048>.

## **Weaknesses of the China Way of War**

Despite its apparent strengths, the China Way of War has several weaknesses. First, China's military modernization program faces significant challenges, including technological hurdles, corruption, and inefficiencies in procurement and logistics.<sup>62</sup>

Second, the China Way of War relies heavily on the concept of “informationization,” which means that the success of Chinese military operations will depend on the effectiveness of its information technology systems. However, China's military has been criticized for its lack of experience and proficiency in using advanced technologies, which could limit the effectiveness of its military operations.

Third, the China Way of War assumes that China will be able to maintain its economic growth and technological development in the face of domestic and international challenges. However, China's economic growth has been slowing in recent years. It faces significant demographic and environmental challenges that could undermine its ability to sustain its current level of economic development.<sup>63</sup>

Fourth, the China Way of War assumes that China will be able to maintain political stability and social cohesion in the face of domestic and international challenges. However, China faces significant domestic challenges, including social unrest, ethnic tensions, and political corruption, which could undermine its ability to maintain political stability and social cohesion.

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<sup>62</sup> Brad Lendon, “Chinese and Russian militaries share a potential weakness, new US report finds.” *CNN*, September 16, 2022, accessed 8 Mar 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/16/china/china-military-cross-training-weakness-russia-ukraine-analysis-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>

<sup>63</sup> Ari Hawkins, “China’s population is stalled — and its economy is faltering.” *POLITICO*, January 17, 2023, accessed 8 Mar 2023, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-nightly/2023/01/17/chinas-population-is-stalled-and-its-economy-is-faltering-00078225>

Fifth, the China Way of War assumes that China will be able to avoid conflicts with other major powers, particularly the United States. However, China's growing military capabilities and assertive foreign policy have raised concerns in the United States, its allies and partners, and other countries about China's intentions and its potential to become a strategic rival.

## **Chapter Conclusions**

The China Way of War is a complex and evolving concept that reflects China's aspirations to become a global power and defend its national interests. While the China Way of War has several strengths, including its emphasis on information technology and its focus on limited, geographically, and temporally constrained conflicts, it also faces significant challenges and weaknesses. These include the difficulties of modernizing China's military capabilities, the uncertainties of China's economic and political future, and the potential for conflict with other major powers, particularly the United States. Understanding the implications and weaknesses of the China Way of War is critical for policymakers and analysts in shaping regional and global security in the 21st century.

## **Chapter 4: View the China Way of War's Opportunities, Counters and Challenges**

The PRC has been emphasizing the "China Way of War" under the leadership of President Xi Jinping. This approach is rooted in Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, which emphasizes the importance of strategic thinking and preparation. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China's geopolitical strategy are two key aspects of the China Way of War. In this chapter, we will explore the opportunities, challenges and counters that arise from China's emphasis on the China Way of War.

### **Opportunities**

The China Way of War provides several opportunities for China to project power and advance its interests in the international arena. One opportunity is the ability to project power beyond its borders. China's intensive military modernization, including the development of anti-access/area denial capabilities, has given it the ability to project power overseas and defend its territorial claims. This has enabled China to exert influence and advance its interests in the international arena. The principles of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* are evident in this strategy, as China seeks to control key points and routes and build strategic partnerships, as well as utilizing tactics such as the principle of "when capable, feign incapacity" to increase its strategic advantage.<sup>64</sup>

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is another opportunity that arises from the China Way of War. The initiative aims to connect Asia, Europe, and Africa through a network of infrastructure projects, including ports, highways, railways, electricity systems, fiber-optic cables, and pipelines. The BRI provides China with an opportunity to promote economic growth and build

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<sup>64</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 66.

strong partnerships with participating countries. By applying the principle of “subduing the enemy without fighting” and seeking cooperation rather than competition, China can achieve what it claims are win-win outcomes and thereby enhance its global influence.<sup>65</sup>

The BRI also aligns with Sun Tzu's emphasis on the importance of diligent planning and preparation. By conducting extensive research and analysis before investing in a project, including evaluating the economic, political, and social risks and opportunities and identifying potential partners and stakeholders, China can enhance the likelihood of success while minimizing possible risks. Additionally, the emphasis on sustainable development and green finance aligns with Sun Tzu's emphasis on the importance of taking a long-term perspective and considering the broader implications of actions.

In summation, the China Way of War provides opportunities for China to project power and advance its interests in the international arena, such as through military modernization and the Belt and Road Initiative. By embracing the principles of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, such as strategic thinking and preparation, building strong partnerships, and taking a long-term perspective, China can enhance its global influence and shape the global order.

## **Counters**

The China Way of War also faces counters, including geopolitical tensions and conflict. China's territorial claims and disputes in the South China Sea together with its military assertiveness have raised concerns among neighboring countries and the broader international community. These concerns have led to countermeasures, such as the US concept of a pivot to Asia, and increased military cooperation among regional powers.

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<sup>65</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans and with an Introd. by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford University Press, 1963), 77.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) also faces counters. Some participating countries have raised concerns about the potential debt burden and environmental and social impact of BRI projects.<sup>66</sup> Others see the initiative as a means for China to exert greater influence over participating countries, leading to concerns about potential geopolitical implications. These concerns have led some countries to delay or cancel projects, and others to renegotiate their participation in the initiative.

The counters to the China Way of War can be effectively addressed through the principles of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*. Sun Tzu emphasizes the importance of understanding the enemy and the environment in which a battle is taking place. In the context of the South China Sea, this means that China must consider the concerns of neighboring countries the broader international order, and ideally work to resolve territorial disputes through peaceful means.

The concept of "winning without fighting" is also relevant. This means that China should seek to build mutually beneficial partnerships and seek cooperation rather than competition. The BRI can ideally be used as a tool to promote economic growth and build strong partnerships with participating countries, rather than as a means for China to exert greater influence over them.

Additionally, Sun Tzu's emphasis on diligent planning and preparation can be applied to address concerns about the potential debt burden and environmental and social impact of BRI projects. China can conduct extensive research and analysis before investing in projects, evaluating risks and opportunities and identifying potential partners and stakeholders. This

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<sup>66</sup> James McBride, Noah Berman, and Andrew Chatzky, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative," *Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder*, accessed 8 Mar 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>

approach can help minimize risks and adverse effects, and ensure that BRI projects align with the interests and values of participating countries.

In summation, the counters to the China Way of War can be addressed by applying the principles of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*. By understanding the concerns of neighboring countries, seeking mutually beneficial partnerships, and conducting diligent planning and preparation, China can advance its geopolitical interests and enhance its global influence while also promoting peace, stability, and sustainable development.

## Challenges

The lack of experience in modern warfare is a significant challenge that the PRC faces in implementing the China Way of War.<sup>67</sup> While China has made significant strides in modernizing its military and developing cutting-edge weapons systems, it has yet to test these capabilities in a real combat scenario. Without practical experience, it is difficult to predict how China's military doctrine and strategies would fare in a real conflict.

Misperceptions and misunderstandings between China and other countries are also significant challenges. China's growing military capabilities and assertiveness in territorial claims and disputes have raised concerns among its neighbors and other countries, leading to tensions and potential conflict. The lack of transparency in China's military modernization and territorial claims only adds to these concerns.<sup>68</sup> Sun Tzu's emphasis on understanding the enemy and the environment in which a battle is taking place can help address this challenge. By

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<sup>67</sup> Minne Chan "China military: 'leaders' lack of combat experience' a drag on modernization drive," *South China Morning Post*, US-China Relations, November 30, 2020, accessed 8 Mar 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3111922/china-military-leaders-lack-combat-experience-drag>

<sup>68</sup> Nora Vanaga, *China's Military Rise: The Lack of Transparency and Internal Political Uncertainty*, National Defence Academy of Latvia, Center for Security and Strategic Research, May 2014, accessed 8 Mar 2023, [https://www.naa.mil.lv/sites/naa/files/document/8\\_SA-8-China\\_0.pdf](https://www.naa.mil.lv/sites/naa/files/document/8_SA-8-China_0.pdf)

understanding the strengths and weaknesses of both China and its adversaries, China can make strategic decisions about gradually advancing its geopolitical interests without alarming its counterparts, and thereby prevent misunderstandings, misperceptions and countermeasures.

Furthermore, the China Way of War faces challenges related to international norms and values. The PRC's proclaimed emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs can conflict with what it calls “Western” values (shunning the concept of “Universal” Human Rights) such as democracy, human rights, and free speech.<sup>69</sup> This has led to criticism and tension between China and the West, as well as between China and some of its neighbors. Sun Tzu's emphasis on building mutually beneficial relationships can help China navigate these challenges. By prioritizing establishing collaborative relationships that are advantageous to all parties involved, China can promote cooperation and mitigate tensions.

Finally, the Belt and Road Initiative, a significant component of the China Way of War, has faced criticism and challenges. Some countries have expressed concerns about the potential long-term debt burden of BRI projects, as well as issues related to transparency, governance, and environmental and social impacts. Additionally, there have been concerns about the potential geopolitical implications of the BRI, as some countries have raised concerns about the initiative as a means for China to exert greater influence over participating countries and their domestic affairs. Sun Tzu's emphasis on diligent planning and preparation can help address these challenges. By conducting extensive research and analysis before investing in a project and identifying potential partners and stakeholders, China can enhance the likelihood of success while minimizing possible risks. Sun Tzu's emphasis on taking a long-term perspective and

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<sup>69</sup> “China - Events of 2021,” *Human Rights Watch World Report 2022*, accessed 8 Mar 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/china-and-tibet>

considering the broader implications of actions can also help China evaluate the impact of its investments on local economies and communities as well as geopolitical implications.

## **Chapter Conclusions**

In conclusion, the China Way of War presents both opportunities and challenges for China's pursuit of regional and global dominance. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is one of the significant opportunities provided by the China Way of War, which enables China to project power beyond its borders and promote economic growth and strong partnerships with participating countries. However, the BRI also faces challenges, including concerns about potential debt burden, transparency, governance, and environmental and social impacts.

Another challenge facing the China Way of War is the PRC's lack of experience in modern warfare, despite significant progress in military modernization and the development of cutting-edge weapons systems. The potential for misperceptions and misunderstandings between China and other countries, as well as challenges in terms of international norms and values, also pose significant challenges to China's pursuit of regional and global dominance.

In the context of the *Art of War*, these challenges and opportunities highlight the importance of strategic thinking and preparation, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of both oneself and the enemy, and adapting strategies to changing circumstances. By embracing these principles, China can navigate the challenges presented by the China Way of War and capitalize on its opportunities to shape the global order and secure its place as a leading world power.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the China Way of War is a multifaceted comprehensive strategy that includes economic, political, military, and diplomatic elements. The principles of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* are evident in China's approach to the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as in its foreign policies and relationships with neighboring countries. By embracing these principles, China seeks to shape the global order and secure its place as a leading world power.

However, the China Way of War also faces several challenges, including potential geopolitical tensions and conflict, misperceptions, and misunderstandings, clashes with international norms and values, and criticisms of the Belt and Road Initiative. These challenges highlight the need for China to navigate international relations with transparency and communication to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. It also underscores the importance of adherence to international norms and values to ensure sustainable and equitable development.

In the face of China's war methods, the United State must adopt a proactive posture to maintain its global leadership position. This includes continuing to strengthen military alliances and partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region, bolstering economic and trade relationships with other countries, and promoting democratic values and human rights. The United States must also invest in research and development of cutting-edge technologies to maintain its technological advantage over China.

Furthermore, the United States must remain vigilant against potential threats posed by China's military modernization and assertiveness in territorial disputes. It is important to engage in dialogue with China to address concerns and avoid misunderstandings, but also to have a credible military deterrent to prevent potential aggression.

Overall, the competition between major powers requires a nuanced and strategic approach that balances the pursuit of national interests with the need for global cooperation and adherence to international norms and values. The United States must be vigilant and proactive in its engagement with China to ensure a peaceful and stable global order.

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