

**“WINNING THE BATTLE WITHOUT FIGHTING”: STRATEGIC CULTURE AND
INFORMATION WARFARE IN THE PEOPLE’S LIBERATION ARMY OF CHINA**

by

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Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Nicholas Budak has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Asian Studies.

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List of Acronyms

C2I - Command, Control and Intelligence

CPC - Communist Party of China

CMC - Central Military Commission (CPC)

COSTIND - Commission of Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense
(PRC)

DOD - Department of Defense (US)

FBIS - Foreign Broadcast Information Service (US)

IW - Information Warfare

LW - Local War

LWUMHTC - Local War Under Modern High-Tech Conditions

PAP - People's Armed Police (PRC)

PLA - People's Liberation Army (PRC)

PLA-AF - PLA Air Force

PLA-N - PLA Navy

PRC - People's Republic of China

PW - People's War

RMA - Revolution in Military Affairs

ROC - Republic of China (Taiwan)

I: Introduction

The United States Army's PAC-3 Patriot missile system, the Navy's Aegis ballistic-missile defense system, and the Air Force's F/A-18 and V-22 Osprey aircraft were all weapons which made America's entry into the first Gulf War a decisive victory. They are also all weapons whose schematics now lie firmly in the grasp of People's Liberation Army cyberwarriors. On May 27, 2013, the *Washington Post* leaked Department of Defense documents which implicated Chinese hackers in the digital theft of the military technologies that form the backbone of the Pentagon's first-line defense strategy in Asia, Europe, and the Persian Gulf.¹ This stunning development in global power politics has come to symbolize the unpredictable and radically new world of security doctrine emerging from the current revolution in military affairs.

Despite carrying out a wildly successful act of information warfare, China, too, is fearful. In a recent analysis, the top 16 psychological factors motivating the Chinese military included 3 different scenarios for an information-based attack on China, all of which have pushed it to further develop information warfare capabilities and recruit hackers under newly ascendant leader Xi Jinping.² This is a sobering fact, particularly for a country with \$1 trillion to spend on defense that is still nursing a multi-decade burden left by the foreign imperialists who "carved it up like a melon" in the early 20th century.

¹ Nakashima, 1.

² Bodeen, 1.

All the same, some believe China may have cause for celebration alongside its fears. The new world of information warfare is uncharted territory, where our assumptions about previous wars and the way they were fought could be discredited entirely. Many scholars suspect China has a trump card hidden in plain sight - its millenia-spanning archive of cultural strategic texts. Long consigned to history or discarded as obsolete, strategic writers from Sun Zi (Sun Tzu) to Mao Zedong may be pulled from their shelves to “give China an edge” in the information-based wars of tomorrow. To quote a prominent admiral in the People’s Liberation Army-Navy:

Culture is the root and foundation of strategy. Strategic thinking, in the process of its evolutionary history, flows into the mainstream of a country or a nation’s culture. Each country or nation’s strategic culture cannot but bear the imprint of cultural traditions, which in a subconscious and complex way, prescribes and defines strategy making.³

A study of the role culture has played, and will continue to play, in the evolution of modern Chinese information warfare doctrine is thus urgently needed. Though the task is ambitious, a growing body of literature has made taking a rhetorical and historical inventory of Chinese military writing possible.

With that in mind, this study seeks to accomplish four main objectives. Its first goal is to look at the internal doctrinal rhetoric of the People’s Liberation Army

³ Scobell, *China and Strategic Culture*, 1.

- what are the commanders who would fight a 21st-century information war saying amongst themselves? Secondly, it tries to “cut through the noise” and deliver a rhetorical analysis keyed to the most important and influential viewpoints and actors in the debate over information warfare. Thirdly, it seeks to identify broad rhetorical trends throughout the history of Chinese debate on information warfare, noting significant periods of doctrinal change and development. Lastly, it attempts to construct an “insider’s view” of Chinese military motivations, goals, and methods. In pursuing these goals, it distinguishes itself from similar studies through its relatively wide historical range as well as its cultural, linguistic, and rhetorical foci.

Ultimately, it concludes that Chinese cultural strategic writing - both ancient and modern – acted to create a unique discursive space wherein information warfare in particular was seen as a powerful, attractive, and uniquely Chinese weapon. This refines and challenges the conclusions of other approaches to the problem, which have either suffered from a lack of scope and focus or incorrectly assessed a more passive role for strategic culture. Rejecting the idea that Sun Zi, Mao, and other influential writers should be treated as history once the security climate undergoes drastic change, we instead affirm a cyclical process wherein Chinese strategic culture both informs and is informed by geopolitical change or realpolitik.

II: Security, Discourse, Culture, and the PLA

Ontology is a term found in the discourse of both philosophy and, appropriately, information science. In both cases, the word refers to questions of being or becoming. Thus before engaging in an investigation of security ideologies within the PLA, we must ask the ontological question “what is security?” For the state, security draws its force and power not from weapons or postures but from words themselves. Ronnie Lipschutz, professor of political science at the University of Santa Cruz, explains:

Conceptualizations of security - from which follow policy and practice - are to be found in *discourses of security*. These...are the products of historical structures and processes, of struggles for power within the state, of conflicts between the societal groupings that inhabit states and the interests that besiege them. Hence, there are not only struggles over security among *nations*, but also struggles over security among *notions*.⁴

This idea of discursively constructed security suggests that the ultimate determinant of security outcomes is security rhetoric. Thus one need only follow the trail of ideas back to the mouthpieces of state or military organs to make predictive claims about the priorities and strategies of the state. Moreover, the ‘struggle over security notions’ suggests that states do not conceive of security monolithically -

⁴ Lipschutz, 8.

rather, agents within the state battle over the right to articulate their respective interpretations of security and control the levers of policymaking.

Sometimes referred to as “critical security”, this conceptualization of security is nontraditional, insofar as it eschews realist attempts to make security a numbers game in favor of casting it as a debate. Departure from tradition is an asset to us in this study, for two reasons. The first is that critical security “requires us to acknowledge that the perception of security is socially constructed, and in particular is inseparable from the creation of identity.”⁵ Having done so, we are well-disposed to flag and include unique cultural ideas (such as Sun Zi’s strategic maxims) in our survey of rhetoric. Second, “the characteristics of information warfare compel us to seek explanations other than those offered by traditional international relations theories.”⁶ Progressive IR theorists like the Virginia Military Institute’s James J. Hentz have identified information warfare as a force that threatens the “conceptual edifice” of traditional security studies, but is also frequently ignored “in favor of enduring assumptions that guarantee the primacy” of the traditional approach.⁷ Thus, we also avoid the potential blind spots that reliance on a traditional definition of security could cost us when studying information warfare.

Before proceeding any further, we must define key terms - an exercise that James Mulvenon, a China scholar and private information security contractor,

⁵ Rawnsley 2005, 1061.

⁶ Ibid, 1063.

⁷ Ibid, 1064.

describes as “fraught with terminological, ideological, and political peril”.⁸ Fortunately, Mulvenon’s writing in *The PLA in the Information Age* gives us a definition for information warfare that will be relevant throughout our study. The DOD’s publicly available Joint Publication 3-13 defines IW as “information operations during a time of crisis or conflict to achieve or promote specific objectives over a specific adversary or adversaries.”⁹ Why a definition from the DOD? Two reasons - first, this one is “straight from the top”, insofar as it has guided US military orientation towards IW. Second, China *also* adheres to this same definition - as Mulvenon notes, “...the Chinese themselves have made the job a little easier...Chinese writings clearly suggest that IW is a solely military subject, and as such they draw inspiration primarily from US military writings. The net result of this ‘borrowing’ is that many PLA authors’ definitions of IW and IW concepts sound eerily familiar.”¹⁰

A second term integral to our rhetorical analysis is the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). Analysts Steven Metz and James Kievit, writing for the US Army War College in 1995, claimed the idea of an RMA grew from Soviet writing of the 1970s and 80s - the initial term was “military technical revolution”, but the idea later came to encompass a more holistic vision of military change. Most analysts define the RMA as “a discontinuous increase in military capability and effectiveness arising from simultaneous and mutually supportive change in technology, systems,

⁸ Mulvenon and Yang, 176.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

operational methods, and military organizations.”¹¹ All Western authors cited in this paper - and most Chinese authors as well - are of the opinion that the Gulf War was the harbinger of the latest RMA occurring worldwide. At the time Metz and Kievit were writing, the “RMA school of thought” - even within the DOD - remained a small but elite portion of military thinkers. The authors all but demanded a deeper investigation into the implications of the new RMA, foretelling dire consequences for the effectiveness of the US military if it were not fully appreciated.¹²

Jumping ahead to 2010, Jacqueline Newmeyer (President of the Long-Term Strategy Group) wrote in the *Journal of Strategic Studies* that “Chinese strategists believe the Revolution in Military Affairs offers a ‘historic opportunity’ to alter the military balance with the United States.”¹³ The RMA - like information warfare - has transitioned from an experimental concept among US elites to a worldwide phenomenon that demands attention by major powers. Chinese military leaders have borrowed and tweaked RMA doctrine accordingly, creating what Newmeyer calls an “RMA with Chinese Characteristics.”

The Chinese term for the RMA meshes well with party doctrine and rhetoric, using the familiar term *geming* (革命, “revolution”) to form the compound word *junshi geming* (军事革命, “military affairs revolution”). The word “revolution” as *geming* carries ideological and cultural baggage unique to today’s PRC. Wielders of Chinese communist rhetoric labored extensively to construct *geming* with positive

¹¹ Metz and Kievit, v.

¹² Ibid, 6.

¹³ Newmeyer, 483.

and progressive connotations, often blacklisting enemies of the state or party as *fangeming* (反革命, “counterrevolutionary”). Chairman Mao’s revolution, as distinct from textbook Marxism-Leninism, was a continuous and turbulent one - and intentionally so. Within China, the *junshi geming* inherited aspects of urgency, power, crisis, and change. Thus, charting the progress and power of its adherents and critics is one focus of this study.

Before the current RMA, military debate in China was a simpler affair. In the early days of the People’s Republic, the community of nations was dominated by a bipolar and hegemonic system of security relations. An ‘iron curtain’ clearly delineated friend and foe, and even the most powerful nations could count on a system of mutually assured destruction that forestalled war indefinitely. But as the post-Soviet world moved towards an increasingly unstable unipolar regime, the ontological question of national security became more complex - if not the enemy bloc, what were we securing ourselves against? As the 20th century drew to a close, prominent PLA authors were asking penetrating questions: “the times of clearly drawn sides are over. Who are our enemies? Who are our friends?”¹⁴ In the West, noted University of Chicago professor of political science John Mearsheimer ominously assured the United States that it would “soon miss the cold war.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Qiao and Wang, 37.

¹⁵ Lipschutz, 6.

After the breakup of the USSR, President Bush appealed to the US military intelligence community, asking it to “find new security problems” to pursue.¹⁶ Why might a country’s paramount leader actively seek out - even fabricate - new threats to national security? The answer lies in University of Sydney professor James Der Derian’s idea of an “ontotheology of security.”¹⁷ For Der Derian, security must always have a “referent object” - something to be secure against. The ontotheology of security is a genealogy of discourse about security - a history of who secures what against whom. Drawing on the work of semiotic analyst Jacques Derrida, Der Darian asserts that “the security of the center has been the shifting site from which the forces of authority, order, and identity philosophically defined and physically kept at bay anarchy, chaos, and indifference.”¹⁸ In the empire of ancient China, state forces often struggled against “barbarians” on China’s borders, keeping capital cities like Beijing secure against myriad invading forces for centuries at a time only to eventually yield to a more powerful force which established its own ‘center’ within the old capital. The legacy of security discourse is likewise a legacy of substituting one center for another, as threats themselves change over time.

In the world of the Gulf War and beyond, Der Darian’s ‘referent object’ of security – the periphery – began to dissolve. International terrorism, resource shortages, and ‘asymmetric’ warfighting technology problematized the idea of state security as security vis-a-vis other states or uniform entities, leading Bush to declare

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, 25.

¹⁸ Ibid.

in 1992 “...the enemy is instability...the enemy is unpredictability.”¹⁹ Thus Der Darian deduced the “...immediate response, the unthinking action, [was] to master this anxiety...and resecure the center by remapping peripheral threats.”²⁰ Lacking a clear sense of what put it at the center, the United States sought - and found - new threats that justified waging “war on terror”, “war on drugs”, and war against an “axis of evil.” The United States is, of course, not alone in its remapping of threats - a rising China sought to craft her own vision of security as well.

Lipschutz and Der Darian thus make clear the relationship between discourses of security and the modern state. As we saw with the concept of the Revolution in Military Affairs, states and their composite agents are constantly reacting to changes in the world by forwarding new rhetoric about security. In this struggle to define what is secure, discourses “...delimit the range of policy options, thereby functioning as precursors to policy outcomes.”²¹ In the critical security model, the RMA is usually accompanied by new rhetoric that justifies and explains its utility - for example, the United States’ definition of “enemy combatant” over the course of the war on terror changed dramatically after the “revolutionary” introduction of targeted-killing drone technology. The remaining question is how the ‘battle over notions’ is *won*: what factors affect a state’s decision to securitize in a particular way? Are some security discourses more appealing?

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, 8.

Throughout the 1990's, most mainstream political theorists claimed that geopolitical conditions - present demands on the state such as resource scarcity or territorial integrity - were the primary motivator in security decisions.²² Yet some challenged this neorealist paradigm, claiming that culture and history could play a strong role in how a state spoke about and constructed its notions of security. Among them was Harvard professor Iain Alastair Johnston, who was the first to examine the expanding field of strategic culture studies. Johnston published *Cultural Realism* in 1995, a landmark work which undertook to analyze the role that ancient security texts played in security decisionmaking during China's Ming dynasty. In his critique of strategic culture, Johnston defined the term as "ranked grand strategic preferences derived from central paradigmatic assumptions about the nature of conflict and the enemy, and collectively shared by decisionmakers."²³ *Cultural Realism* traces the path of scholarship on strategic culture, splitting it into three veins.

The first-generation strategic culture scholars of the cold war era were generally neorealists. Many sought to explain supposedly "cultural" differences between United States and USSR nuclear doctrines. Johnston credits their cultural focus as arising from a 1977 RAND corporation (**R**esearch **A**nd **D**evelopment, a US think tank) study, which insinuated that the previously inscrutable Soviet willingness to deploy nuclear weapons in the face of MAD (mutually assured

²² Johnston, ix.

²³ Ibid.

destruction) might have something to do with “Bolshevik culture.”²⁴ The second-generation scholars vastly expanded the scope and focus of strategic culture studies, specifically with regards to the disjuncture between security rhetoric and strategic choices. Moreover, Johnston found evidence that writers of the 1980s and 1990s were open to the idea of multiple competing strategic cultures, with their own associated discourses - what Lipschutz dubbed the “struggle over notions.” The third generation of scholars, with whom Johnston identifies, were working in the 90’s and early 2000’s to expand upon their predecessors. The most important feature of their writing was its openness to rapidly changing security cultures, wherein *modern interpretations of ancient sources* provide mutable grounds for security discourse. With regard to China specifically, Johnston asserts that the majority of strategic studies in the mid-1990s unfortunately “would fit comfortably in the first-generation literature”, classing them as generally outdated in methodology.²⁵ Having noted many problems with the first-generation approach, he sought to reexamine Chinese strategic culture with an eye to changing and competing strains of discourse and behavior.

Cultural Realism concluded that Ming security culture operated on two simultaneous levels: an *overt* layer of repeated reference to and justification by traditional security texts, which concealed a *covert* layer of *parabellum* (aggressively realist) thinking amongst elites. These, by the above definition, are *both* strategic cultures. The former, which Johnston dubbed the “Confucian culture”, draws from

²⁴ Ibid, 20.

²⁵ Ibid, 22.

the so-called “7 strategic classics” of ancient Chinese warfare. One hallmark of this strain of thought is that resorting to violence is generally disadvantageous, given Sun Zi’s admonition that a ruler should “subdue the enemy without fighting” (不战而屈人之兵, *buzhan er quren zhi bing*). Moreover, conflict is constructed as a non-zero-sum activity which can be avoided entirely by cultivating virtue and adhering to stratagems. Johnston calls this culture the “Confucian culture” because many of its axioms stress traditional Confucian values (e.g. harmony, virtue), but we have an opportunity to correct his generalization and coin our own term here. Many of the concepts we will examine – such as the idea of “absolute flexibility” Mao drew from ancient writings – are not explicitly Confucian but rather draw on a mélange of Daoist, Confucian, Buddhist, Legalist, and other teachings that make up China’s general underlying cultural framework. As such, it is more accurate to use the general term “traditional” when describing these ideas. What Johnston calls the *parabellum* culture, by contrast, can be thought of as “realism with Chinese characteristics” - an opportunity model of realpolitik, where “states need no special motivation to threaten or use force; rather they are always predisposed to do so, unless restrained by contextual variables.”²⁶ In this culture, the nature of conflict is assumed to be zero-sum, and violence is assumed to be a relatively constant and necessary part of state affairs.

Johnston used close-reading and translation of select terms and phrases drawn from the ancient texts to evaluate the prevalence of the two cultures. It

²⁶ Ibid, x.

stands to reason, then, that the same could be done with respect to the PLA today - a rhetorical evaluation of the battle between security discourses, focusing on the key terms and phrases that characterize particular schools of thought. *Cultural Realism*, for all its brilliance, had the convenience of a highly centralized China from which to draw conclusions about security discourse - a stable and hierarchical Ming empire and a discrete, well-known compendium of traditional strategic texts. We do not have these luxuries. Thus, we must ask the subsequent question: who constructs Chinese security culture? In the modern Chinese state, whose rhetoric counts?

Michael D. Swaine's "The Role of the Chinese Military in National Security Policymaking", also the result of a RAND corporation study, details the emergent structure of the 21st-century Chinese military and its degree of influence on policymaking. Swaine divides national security policy into four distinct but related "subarenas": national strategic objectives, foreign policy, defense policy, and strategic research and intelligence. The principal finding of the study is that "military involvement is evident in all four security policy subarenas...ranging from near total control over defense policy to limited but significant influence over foreign policy." Moreover, "...the military's role in shaping national strategic objectives and in providing strategic analysis and intelligence to civilian leaders is significant and apparently increasing."²⁷ One other relevant finding, irrespective of which subarena one considers, is that "...the level of influence in the policy process enjoyed by a specific civilian or military policy organ is often determined primarily

²⁷ Swaine, *The Role of the Chinese Military*, x.

by the personal prestige and power of the individual who heads it.”²⁸ Putting the pieces together, we can form a picture of Chinese security policymaking that preferences the rhetoric of well-known and charismatic senior PLA leaders in the struggle to define security. Where possible, our study will look to these types of figures as key mouthpieces in the “struggle for notions” about information warfare.

Like Johnston, Swaine’s work with RAND challenges what he sees as a premature consensus among Western authors writing about the Chinese military. Though the PLA’s influence on national security policymaking is clear, there appears to have been some doubt about whether PLA leaders exercised significant control over foreign affairs as well. The tendency to assume that the PLA did not influence foreign affairs, Swaine claimed, came from the historical distinction between the Chinese terms *waishi* (外事, foreign affairs) and *junshi* (军事, military affairs). While this may have been true prior to military modernization, RAND data suggests military challenges to civilian authority at the top of the power structure could only have increased as the vacuum left by powerful paramount leaders like Deng Xiaoping continued to be felt. Thus the PLA was, and remains, quite capable of flexing its muscles to affect foreign diplomatic relations through military channels.

With respect to major questions of defense policy, such as Taiwan, Swaine anticipated a rising degree of military involvement in policymaking. Finally, he noted that “military research, analysis, and intelligence play a far more important

²⁸ Ibid.

role in the overall national security policy process than most observers assume.”²⁹ All of these conclusions suggest a focus on internal military journals and analysis, with a view to particularly senior or charismatic PLA leaders, will give us a picture of the dominant voices in Chinese security discourse. Swaine himself seems to be on the right track, given that one of his most prominent predictions - the creation of a Chinese analogue of the U.S. President’s National Security Council - came true this January, with Xi Jinping at the helm.

Though we have taken Swaine at his word as to the PLA’s power in policymaking, we need not wholly neglect the much-vaunted “paramount leaders” of the PRC. Our study is divided into chronologically sequential sections roughly corresponding to the terms of each Chairman of the CPC Central Military Commission, beginning with Mao Zedong. This is done for two reasons. First, the six individuals who have held this position (with the exception of the brief and uneventful tenure of Hua Guofeng) were, concurrently, General Secretaries of the CPC as well as Presidents of the PRC. This allowed them to exercise a high degree of power at the top of the party-army hierarchy and made them a crucial conduit for PLA policy and thought. Second, doctrinal rhetoric within the PLA frequently referenced the personal writings and ideological work of the CPC Chairmen, seeking to use them as a legitimizing device in the ‘battle for notions’. We can categorize schools of thought by whose thinking they are predominantly referencing – for example, the “Local War” doctrinal school within the PLA often draws on Deng

²⁹ Ibid, xii.

Xiaoping's political theory (and his name) to advance the legitimacy of its arguments.

All that remains now is to locate our study amongst the other writers on the subject. Though we will adopt the terms and conclusions of many notable PLA scholars, none of the authors cited in this paper have attempted to draw together studies of PLA discourse and studies of strategic culture with a discursive focus on information warfare – save one. In 2002, US Army Major Robyn E. Ferguson wrote a dissertation on “IW with Chinese Characteristics” as a master's candidate at West Point. Ferguson began from much the same standpoint as we have, seeking to characterize evolving PLA discourse on IW and its relationship with strategic culture. Her conclusion was that geopolitical factors drove the PLA to acquire IW capability and to reform its strategic culture in response to the RMA – in other words, that realist needs won out over the power of culture in the “battle for notions”.

One potential problem with Ferguson's conclusion, however, was a lack of thorough rhetorical analysis. Rather than tracing the full evolution of PLA discourse on IW, Ferguson elected to survey only recent journal articles to gain a general understanding of strategic culture at one point in time (in her case, 2002). A focus on individual terms and phrases, including their subsequent reinterpretations will help us gain a better window on the “battle for notions” within the PLA, and a much larger historical range will reveal the “staying power” of important ideas and trends.

Moreover, many recent structural and historical changes warrant a new look

at PLA discourse on IW. Over 10 years have passed since Ferguson's publication; as we noted in the introduction, China's cyberwarriors have achieved what was then deemed unachievable. In 2012, a new white paper on the specific goals and functions of the PLA was published; Ferguson was working with a document released in 2002 that only detailed China's broad strategic objectives. The CPC has held multiple major meetings and strategic planning sessions, and a new paramount leader (Xi Jinping) has taken the helm of the PRC. Finally, the PLA faces a diverse array of new security issues, including looming territorial conflicts and the informationalization of global militaries. For all these reasons and more, our look inside the PLA is both timely and important.

III: The PLA under Mao Zedong

No history of PLA doctrine - indeed, of China - can afford to skirt around the role of Chairman Mao. Though concepts of IW as we have defined them had little play during Mao's period as paramount leader, important strategic and doctrinal changes certainly took place - the most crucial to our purposes being the struggle for notions between the traditional and *parabellum* paradigms. Johnston, who coined the terms in *Cultural Realism*, expanded on his characterization of them in another later work, admitting that two strains of discourse were not at all "separate but equal."³⁰ His analysis of the Ming revealed that, even as elites drew on the ancient military classics to discuss strategy, traditional axioms were relegated to "indistinct golden ages of sage kings and legendary rulers."³¹ That being the case, whither the traditional paradigm under Mao? The conclusions of *Cultural Realism*, as Johnston readily admits, hold up only prior to "...China's integration into the European/global state system and before the importation into China of 'Western' liberal democratic and Marxist-Leninist ideologies."³² Once China famously "stood up", how did the balance of security culture change? This question is a prerequisite to understanding the space in which a unique discourse about IW emerged later on, because it is an early instance of the development of a cyclical relationship between strategic culture and realism.

³⁰ Johnston, 220.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, 221.

There is evidence that Mao read the ancient texts (including Sun Zi's *Art of War*) as early as 1913, well before he had any contact with Clausewitz's or Lenin's works.³³ In fact, Mao was tutored by the foremost Chinese authority on Sun Zi at the time, Guo Huaruo. Yet from the time he began writing - including journals from his time at school - it is clear that Traditional ideas about the role of violence and conflict were subject to de-emphasis. In Johnston's words, "Mao's writings are nothing if not paeans to the constancy of conflict and struggle in human affairs...for Mao, conflict didn't require a solution, it *was* the solution to political problems."³⁴ Hegelian ideas of synthesis were held up as a model of conflict resolution, with violent clash of interests a desirable, necessary, and inevitable outcome - in Mao's own words, "politics is bloodless warfare...warfare is bloody politics."³⁵ One clear and enduring influence in Mao's work from his studies of the ancients is his reference to the idea of *yi zhan* (义战), or righteous war - yet even this term acquired a new meaning courtesy of Marx. The righteousness of a conflict became a matter of class struggle for Mao - just, or "rational" wars (正义战争, *zhengyi zhanzheng*) were those carried out by the oppressed against the oppressors, the resolution of class struggle through violent means. Mao "clearly rejected the minimal violence notion in Sun Zi that one could 'not fight and subdue the enemy'" given that this notion was "un-Marxist, since class enemies could not credibly be

³³ Ibid, 246.

³⁴ Ibid, 229.

³⁵ Ibid, 230.

defeated without the application of violence.”³⁶ Other classical Traditional values, such as harmony, were rejected as false depictions of history - class conflict, as the defining feature of human association, offered no respite wherein harmony or stability could be established.

Were the traditional ideas utterly discredited under Mao? Not quite. Though *parabellum* components drawn from the Leninist and Clausewitzian traditions Mao studied were the functional doctrine of the time, China outwardly espoused many tenets of the Traditional tradition. China’s self-image of this time does not acknowledge the offensive predispositions of Maoist doctrine - instead, civilian scholars assert that the ancient principle of “trying peaceful means before resorting to force” (先礼后兵, *xianli houbing*) has been a defining characteristic of PLA policy since 1949.³⁷ This practice of cloaking *parabellum* policy in Traditional justifications is what Andrew Scobell has dubbed the “Chinese cult of defense.” According to Scobell, “Most Chinese strategic thinkers believe that Chinese strategic culture is pacifistic, defensive-minded, and nonexpansionist.” However, these sincerely held beliefs are “...twisted by [the] assumptions that any war China fights is just and any military action is defensive, even when it is offensive in nature.”³⁸ Thus the two strategic cultures were not at all mutually exclusive - under Mao, the rhetoric of the Traditional paradigm was used to justify offensive actions *as* defensive. As Scobell

³⁶ Ibid, 247.

³⁷ Scobell, *China and Strategic Culture*, 13.

³⁸ Ibid, 4.

puts its, “...the impact of the Cult of Defense is a predisposition by Chinese elites to opt for force because they perceive its use by China as always defensive in nature.”³⁹

PLA thinkers of the time drew heavily from Mao’s writing to form the doctrine that characterized post-1949 military posture in China, and it is still relevant today. Called “people’s war” (人民战争, *renmin zhanzheng*), the ideas of this period structured the PLA to combat incursions into Chinese territory by a major power such as Russia. People’s war eschews overly modern warfighting tactics (military modernization was later ranked lowest among the ‘four modernizations’ of the Deng era) and saw little integration of the PLA navy and air forces with the ground forces. Tactics focused on drawing an enemy into protracted guerilla warfare, which would make it impossible for incursions into the Chinese mainland to succeed. Military posture was guided by “the assumption of an inevitable global war that would pit China against the Soviet Union”, which persisted until the early 1980s.⁴⁰ One notable Maoism emblematic of people’s war was the chairman’s assertion that “if people don’t attack us, we won’t attack them” (人不反我，我不反人: *ren bu fan wo, wo bu fan ren*) - empirically denied, of course, by China’s decisions to invade Tibet “for the sake of Tibetans” and to back Korea in a war against the United States (who had not attacked the Chinese mainland).

Some key ideas of people’s war actually did harken back to the Traditional strategic culture, though not in ways that one might expect. The idea of the weak

³⁹ Ibid, 13.

⁴⁰ Li, 445.

defeating the strong (以弱胜强, *yi ruo sheng qiang*), repeated throughout the 7 strategic classics, often appears in statements by Mao, Zhou Enlai, and other leaders exercising control over the PLA at this time. This is understandable, given that China has often emphasized its relative lack of modernization as a reason why war against better-armed oppressors is just (*zhengyi zhanzheng*). However, Johnston rightly notes that this emphasis is not what we might call “asymmetric warfare with Chinese characteristics” - that is to say, people’s war does not actually advocate maintaining ‘weakness’ or force disparity per se. Instead, “defeating the superior” relies on a central tenet of people’s war - absolute flexibility in order to take advantage of opportunities. This idea is likely drawn from the notion of *quan bian* (权变, “flexibility”) found in ancient strategic texts - for example, the *Si Ma Fa*, a Warring-states era text included in the 7 strategic classics, declares war to be explicitly a matter of “expedient assessment” or flexibility (*zhan zhe quan bian ye*). Mao was “quite at home” with the idea of *quan bian*, and the idea surfaces frequently in his work.⁴¹ In people’s war, weakness is not an asset - rather, it provides the ‘opportunity’ through which one can exercise *quan bian*. Put another way, by judicious use of *quan bian* and correct application of people’s war, *the weak become the strong*. Thus, the initially weak China could defeat an initially stronger foreign enemy by adhering to what was, at its core, a fundamentally offensive doctrine.

The Mao years were a formative period for the PLA, despite a relative lack of doctrinal heterogeneity. What is most revealing for our study is the degree to which

⁴¹ Johnston, 248.

traditional elements of the Traditional strategic culture were appropriated and repurposed by the *parabellum* nature of the people's war doctrine - among them the nature of righteous war and the method by which to overcome a stronger enemy. In doing so, Mao's PLA established a precedent of *justifying* new interpretations using the source material - for example, tying class warfare to *quan bian* as a way to make it more legitimate and desirable. Mao did not place *quan bian* in a realist context - rather, he allowed the idea to give his own maxim of "absolute flexibility" cultural meaning and relevance. Though tactics would go on to change dramatically, Mao's rhetoric of flexibility would play a key part in the birth of Chinese IW doctrine. People's war, for its part, became the standard by which all following PLA doctrines were judged.

IV: The PLA under Deng Xiaoping

If one single figure deserves credit for engineering the People's Republic of China's entry into the modern community of nations, that figure is certainly Deng Xiaoping. Alongside a host of economic and political changes, the decade-plus period that Deng spent overseeing the PLA - whether nominally or behind the scenes - ultimately set the stage for the explosion of IW literature and cultural references occasioned by the first Gulf War. By the time Jiang Zemin ascended to paramount leadership, military strategists were already speculating about the effect that the void of Deng's leadership would have on the PLA. Were Deng's changes to the strategic culture and doctrine of the PLA as sweeping as those he made to PRC economic policy? Perhaps - though carefully constructed references to the ancient classics and even more careful veneration of Maoisms kept them well-concealed. The broad overview provided in *Asian Security Practice* concludes that, if anything, "Deng's reappraisal of security represents a refinement rather than an abandonment of Mao's construction of security."⁴² Major changes during the Deng era fell into three categories - the first being the prioritization of development and deprioritization of class struggle as the "key link" to China's modernization, which had interesting implications for the notion of *yi zhan*.⁴³ On the global front, Deng emphasized opportunity over danger and cooperation over conflict - even as he oversaw the proliferation of doctrines designed to end a war in a single battle.

⁴² Alagappa, 123.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 122.

Finally, reassessment of China's local security situation - particularly with respect to the Soviets - brought a host of policy changes during this period of time.

Scobell's "Chinese Cult of Defense" hypothesis holds up well during the Deng era, with major figures inside and outside the PLA continuing to outwardly tout the righteousness of Traditional strategy culture. The 1980's in particular showed a new (and yet not so new) focus on the 'peace-loving' nature of Chinese security - Li Jijun, deputy director of the Academy of Military Sciences, claimed that "China's ancient strategic culture is rooted in the philosophical idea of unity between man and nature (天人合一, *tian ren he yi*), which pursues overall harmony between man and nature and harmony among men."⁴⁴ Scholars looking back at Deng's military policy likewise remarked "for many years we employed the thinking that, in whatever method we adopt to solve a problem, we should not use the means of war [but rather] peaceful means."⁴⁵ Deng himself explicitly declared world peace to be a PRC goal in 1979, playing up China's public decision to preference nonmilitary unification with Taiwan as of 1980 as an example of his commitment to this ideal. Yet Scobell notes that this decision was "more tactical than strategic...Beijing has, after all, refused to renounce the use of force."⁴⁶ The Traditional strategic culture continued to be used to justify PLA decisions that were essentially motivated by force parity rather than altruism.

⁴⁴ Scobell, *China and Strategic Culture*, 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

Another example of the Cult of Defense was to be found in a new focus on antihegemonic policy as an extension of Mao's "strong vs weak" rhetoric. Deng asserted in 1980 that a key part of supporting peace is a commitment to oppose hegemony (反对霸权主义, *fandui baquanzhuyi*). In this case, hegemony is merely a coded term for the increasingly hostile Soviet Union on China's doorstep, though the term will later be repurposed to indicate America. Opposition to hegemony is itself a reinterpretation of Mao's ideas about *yi zhan* - righteous conflict is not just class war, it is war against a hegemon. Most interestingly, the language Deng chose to use has cultural connotations - the *ba* of *baquanzhuyi* has quite a negative sense, as it is also used to form the term *badao* ("rule by force"). The opposite of *badao* is *wangdao* (王道, "kingly rule"), the type of virtuous rule explicitly advocated by Sun Zi as a method of winning over an enemy.

The final - and most obvious, in retrospect - proof of Scobell's theory is the failure of China's no-first-strike policy to explain its actions during this period. Marshal Xu Xiangqian of the PLA, in an interview in 1980, quotes Mao's *ren bu fan wo...* assertion ("if people don't attack us, we won't attack them") *in the same breath* he talks about the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979. This is miraculously reconciled by the doublespeak of a "defensive counterattack" (自卫还击, *ziwei huanji*). Of the Vietnam invasion, one strategist later wrote: "offensive actions were employed...nevertheless, the essence of this kind of offense was a self-defense

counterattack.”⁴⁷*Quan bian*, Mao’s idea of absolute flexibility, likewise evolves into a doctrine of “active defense”, another doublespeak term for offensive opportunism. Deng explains: “active defense is not merely defense per se, but includes defensive offensives. Active defense includes our going out, so that if we are attacked we will certainly counter attack.”⁴⁸ It is the Cult of Defense that allows “defensive offensives” to be rationalized as virtuous and necessary responses to threats on China’s periphery.

PLA doctrine during the Deng era underwent two major shifts, with corresponding designations provided by military analysts. The first was a modification of people’s war, somewhat appropriately dubbed “people’s war under modern conditions.” By 1970, military planners had realized the unfeasibility of executing the draw-in maneuvers needed to bring an enemy deep into Chinese territory, and had backed off of this portion of people’s war in favor of winning border conflicts. China’s landmark decision to develop nuclear weapons also had implications for Mao’s strategy of “deterrence by denial”, so the PRC strategic arsenal was placed into the category of “no-first-use” weapons as per the Cult of Defense, neatly solving that particular problem of keeping up appearances as a peace-loving nation. Finally, the early battles of a war were judged to be more important, in contrast to Mao’s fondness for protracted and costly conflicts that dissuaded the enemy.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 10.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

In 1985, even more significant developments in China's security environment caused Deng to articulate a new vision for PLA policy - the idea of "local war." Though the Soviet situation had steadily worsened throughout the 1970s, the Central Military Commission (CMC) assessed that the newly formed nuclear stalemate between the two Communist countries would keep the risk of a cataclysmic nuclear war quite low for the foreseeable future. As such, the rhetoric of *zaoda, dada, da hezhanzheng* (early war, major war, thermonuclear war) was phased out of PLA policy.⁴⁹ At the same time, a conflict resolution strategy was urgently needed, given that stark ideological differences could still spark a conventional border war, and negotiations were clearly insufficient to resolve the issue. As such, Deng and the PLA focused on previously unseen levels of integration of air and ground forces, as well as the brand-new consolidation of forces into "fist" or "RRU" (rapid reaction unit) groups. Designed to employ *quan bian* to the utmost, these flexible units were set up to make the difference in a rapid and "hot" border conflict.

A whole host of new vocabulary accompanied the advent of local war. Some notable phrases that focused on a newfound appreciation for speed in conflict included "fighting a quick battle to force a quick resolution" (速战速决, *suzhan sujue*), using surprise (*turan xing*), and winning with one strike (*yizhan ersheng*). Moreover, the RRUs and other technological advancements produced an ideal of conflict-breaking 'superweapons', such as the phrase "victory through elite troops"

⁴⁹ Li, 445.

(jingbing zhisheng). Along with an emphasis on high technology, these ideas and phrases characterize PLA discourse on the eve of the Gulf War.⁵⁰ The ultimate result of doctrinal shifts and new strategic culture during the Deng era was that the *parabellum* culture moved towards speedier, more decisive battles, while identifying these types of actions with the peace called for by the Traditional culture. *Quan bian* and similar terms were re-envisioned in a framework of active and offensive quality-focused attacks, creating a space for a unique cultural propensity towards IW to emerge.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 446.

V: The PLA under Jiang Zemin

Jiang Zemin ascended to Chairmanship of the Central Military Commission of the Communist Party of China in November 1989, struggling to fill the shoes of Deng Xiaoping. Less than 12 months later, a coalition of 34 nations led by the United States declared war on Iraq, in what became known as Operation Desert Storm - the first Gulf War. The war played out in a matter of months, with the Coalition announcing a ceasefire just 100 hours after the first ground campaigns - a decisive victory for the new information-based weaponry and tactics of the United States and its major allies. A few months later, the Soviet Union officially dissolved itself, ending the Cold War. Judging by the explosion of scholarship within the PLA and other organs of the state around this time, it is fair to say that these events 'changed everything' - in the words of Vincent Wei-Cheng Wang, "the decisive role of modern information technology in warfare became indisputably clear."⁵¹ By 1999, the Pentagon had successfully launched a cyberattack against Serbia during the NATO conflict. Even more amazing was the fact that, just 7 years after the Gulf, the US was already facing the largest and most serious information-based attack it had ever encountered. Codenamed Moonlight Maze, the episode saw foreign hackers simultaneously break into networks at the DOD, NASA, the Department of Energy, private universities, and research labs across the country. Most stunningly, the operation was only uncovered accidentally - and it is *still ongoing today*, highlighting

⁵¹ Wei-cheng Wang, 6.

the vulnerability of the United States' increasingly informationalized military. For its part, China began to turn its eyes west to the United States, and to seriously consider the nature of global post-Soviet power politics, warfare, and strategic culture.

James Adams' *Virtual Defense* (a treatise on warfare in the information age) mentions the focused but conflicted Chinese pivot west, noting that "the heated Chinese debate about how to seize a military advantage over the United States produced an answer" in the writings of two up-and-coming PLA officers.⁵² Those men were Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, who in 1999 published *Unrestricted Warfare*, a book Vincent Wei-Cheng Wang also calls a "very significant" example of PLA literature during the Jiang era.⁵³ The Foreign Broadcast Information Service translated and released the book for a United States audience, noting in the introduction that:

The book was written by two PLA senior colonels from the younger generation of Chinese military officers and was published by the PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House in Beijing, suggesting that its release was endorsed by at least some elements of the PLA leadership. This impression was reinforced by an interview with Qiao and laudatory review of the book carried by the party youth league's official daily *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* on 28 June.⁵⁴

⁵² Adams, 103.

⁵³ Wei-cheng Wang, 7.

⁵⁴ Qiao and Wang, 1.

The first chapter of the work, “Technology is the Totem of Modern Man”, is focused on how technology is driven by man’s desire, but also in turn drives him. The authors use a metaphor of ‘magic shoes’ that at first convey a speed boost, but eventually end up doing the walking all on their own. Yet “there is absolutely no doubt that the appearance of information technology has been good news for human civilization. This is because it...provides a magic charm as a means of controlling [technology]. It is just that, at present, there is still a question of *who* in turn will have a magic charm with which to control it [information technology].”⁵⁵ The language of the “magic charm” is a unique characteristic of Chinese writing on the RMA - it is related to the idea of “assassin’s mace” (杀手锏, *shashoujian*), which will be examined later, and the culturally unique concept of “winning the battle without fighting.” Interpreted broadly, this adage is not just about never fighting - it is also about never taking a loss, i.e. offensively eliminating an enemy without suffering any casualties (perhaps through IW “magic”).

Though it problematizes the human relationship with technology, *Unrestricted Warfare* certainly categorizes IW and the weapons of the Gulf as appealing. Qiao and Wang write: “during the Gulf War, more than 500 kinds of new and advanced technology of the 80s ascended the stage to strike a pose, making the war simply seem like a demonstration site for new weaponry.”⁵⁶ They also discuss in-depth the informationalized process of firing a Patriot missile, while examining

⁵⁵ Ibid, 9. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 11.

the processes and tactics which enabled a swift Coalition victory over Iraq. The book itself gets its name from the authors' term for the wars that will occur in the post-gulf 21st century. We find a barrage of methodological questions: "Does a single 'hacker' attack count as a hostile act or not? Can using financial instruments to destroy a country's economy be seen as a battle? Did CNN's broadcast of an exposed corpse of a U.S. soldier in the streets of Mogadishu shake the determination of the Americans to act as the world's policeman, thereby altering the world's strategic situation?"⁵⁷ The new warfare answers in the affirmative - these are all modes of war, war which will be "unrestricted." Further initial chapters are a discussion of the way in which IW allows one to "shape the weapon to the battle", as opposed to vice versa. The authors argue that the US was able to do this with the "digitized battlefield" that it deployed in the Gulf for the first time. As for "fighting the fight that suits one's weapons", "people still wrongfully believe that this is the only initiative that can be taken by backward countries in their helplessness."⁵⁸ China can play the game of innovation too, and it is hinted that the US military may not be cognizant of this fact.

Qiao and Wang take pains to differentiate the potential that IW holds for China vs. the ways it may be utilized by the US. In particular, the book cautions against expenditure on the 'latest greatest' weapons systems and suggests that it is to China's advantage *not* to have to play hegemon. By this token, the Soviet Union collapsed because it had to keep up with the exponentially rising costs of "playing

⁵⁷ Ibid, 12.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 22.

the game” in the nuclear age. The authors quote Kipling here - "When empires perish, it is not with a rumble, but a snicker."⁵⁹ The next empire to perish? Perhaps the United States, because of its commitment to remain hegemon. Moreover, the thinking required to succeed in the new era may privilege China. According to the authors, we have left the age of “weapons of new concepts” and are now in an age of “new concepts of weapons.” The latter category includes “...a single man-made stock-market crash, a single computer virus invasion, or a single rumor or scandal that results in a fluctuation in the enemy country's exchange rates or exposes the leaders of an enemy country on the Internet...all can be included in the ranks of new-concept weapons.”⁶⁰ The US will fail to properly seize on new concepts of weapons because they are at a disadvantage for this type of thinking - “proposing a new concept of weapons does not require relying on the springboard of new technology, it just demands lucid and incisive thinking. However, this is not a strong point of the Americans, who are slaves to technology in their thinking.”⁶¹ This quite explicit appeal to China’s history of strategic culture makes ancient writing suddenly seem more viable, as it could provide a way for China to “leap ahead” and threaten United States IW hegemony.

The volume also exemplifies the features of Scobell’s “Chinese Cult of Defense” – namely, adhering to *parabellum* views on the role of conflict while talking up the Traditional potentials for peace. *Unrestricted Warfare’s* genealogy of future

⁵⁹ Ibid, 23.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 25.

⁶¹ Ibid, 24.

weapons includes Maoist criticisms of nuclear hegemony: “Nuclear weapons have become a sword of Damocles hanging over the head of mankind which forces it to ponder: Do we really need ‘ultra-lethal weapons’?”⁶² The answer is no; weapons are becoming physically “kinder” in the wake of the Gulf. Moreover, IW highlights the idea of being able to win a battle without sustaining real and damaging physical losses. Qiao and Wang contemplate: “technological progress has given us the means to strike at the enemy's nerve center directly without harming other things, giving us numerous new options for achieving victory, and all these make people believe that the best way to achieve victory is to control, not to kill.”⁶³ Yet, as ‘kind’ as war may become, *Unrestricted Warfare* reminds us that its essence is still one of compulsion. These *parabellum* tendencies are rapidly confirmed by the insertion of a Clausewitz quote about warfare as politics, and the patently realist statement that “all friendship is in flux; self-interest is the only constant.”⁶⁴ Overall, the book confirms a deeply rooted tendency towards the *parabellum* thinking of the Mao years and earlier, along with a preference for IW as a potentially ‘magical’ source of Chinese strength alongside a declining US. The ‘magic’ of IW is not just drawn from its newness, but also from the unique Chinese potential to apply strategic culture to the *use* of information weapons, making them a more than legitimate policy option. These themes broadly characterize the RMA group of PLA writers during the Jiang years - those who looked forward towards a potential IW conflict with the United States.

⁶² Ibid, 27.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 38.

Let us turn our attention for a moment to the official rhetorical organs of the PRC. Though we have already established that the rhetoric of powerful PLA leaders is the best determinant of China's security objectives, it is useful to examine the public tack that Jiang Zemin and other PRC officials were taking during the Chinese period of development after the Gulf. In 1998, for the first time, the CPC published a white paper directly related to military posture, entitled "China's National Defense." This document, while brief, has been widely studied by US strategic culture scholars because it exemplifies the tendency of the Chinese state to use cultural arguments to explain and justify its military policy, proving that the thesis of Scobell's "Cult of Defense" theory still held true throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

The 7 strategic classics frequently emphasize virtuous rule and a satisfied populace as a prerequisite to victory. Accordingly, the PRC takes pains to assure international readers that, despite the presence of the RMA, military development will continue to take a backseat to economic modernization (as per the four modernizations of Deng Xiaoping). The white paper reads: "China unswervingly pursues a national defense policy that . . . keeps national defense construction in a position subordinate to and in the service of the nation's economic construction."⁶⁵As for policies of preemption, "strategically China pursues the defensive policy featuring self-defense and gaining mastery by striking only after the enemy has struck, and adheres to the principle: 'We will not attack unless we are

⁶⁵ *China's National Defense*, 1.

attacked; if we are attacked, we will certainly counter-attack.”⁶⁶ Recalling that this is a Maoism which begins “*ren bu fan wo...*”, we can see that the PRC is very intentionally creating rhetorical continuity within its defense policy.

Some PLA writers and leaders made similar attempts to publicly cast China as a peaceful and traditional actor after the Gulf as they did during the Deng years. Scobell records Xing Shizhong, Commandant of China’s National Defense University, conducting an interview in 1995: “The Chinese people have always dearly loved peace.... This historical tradition and national psychology have a profound influence on national defense objectives and strategic policies of the new socialist China.”⁶⁷ Likewise Admiral Liu Huaqing, Vice Chairman of the CMC at that time, points to Deng’s 500,000 man troop drawdown (and Jiang Zemin’s commitment to do the same) as an example of China’s preference for peace. Clearly the “Cult of Defense” is still at play - the writers of the RMA internally speculate about China’s renewed ability to go on the offensive using IW, while the official organs of state publicly trumpet China’s ancient peace-loving traditions.

Like its strategic culture, the doctrines used by the PLA during this time underwent tectonic changes that would set the stage for the 21st century. In response to changing security definitions, commanders had begun to speak of a modified *gaojishu tiaojian xia de jubu zhanzheng* (“Local War Under Modern/High-Tech Conditions”, or LWUMHTC), and by the mid-90s this was the dominant

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Scobell 2002, 6.

doctrine in the PLA (though still only a modification of LW). The Gulf War fundamentally changed the calculus of what Wei-Cheng Wang has called the “PLA old guards”, who valued personnel and professionalism over technology. At the same time, however, the study of IW expanded “under the rubric of RMA”, creating competing schools of thought.⁶⁸ Writers who strove to make IW the holy grail of Chinese military development – and who criticized the lack of vision of their brethren in the PW and LW schools – seized on the RMA as their rallying cry. This created the largest doctrinal schisms among PLA commanders that had ever occurred:

Multiple doctrinal concepts have existed or been in development concurrently within the PLA...elements within the force with differing structures, missions, and doctrinal orientations exist concurrently. Even today many ground force units are still best suited for People’s War operations to defend the Chinese mainland. Others, such as the RRUs, have mobilized to the point that they are trained for a role in LWUMHTC...A very few units, such as electronic warfare units, are also beginning to develop capabilities suitable for 21st-century RMA warfare.⁶⁹

The remarkable doctrinal heterogeneity that emerged during the 1990s is still being felt in China today. The figures below, taken from Michael Pillsbury’s collection of

⁶⁸ Wei-cheng Wang, 14.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 15.

analysis on the Chinese debate about future security⁷⁰, give a general review of the three doctrines at this point in time, though we have already examined the first two during the relevant previous chapters on Deng and Mao.

Figure 1. *Three Schools of Future Warfare*

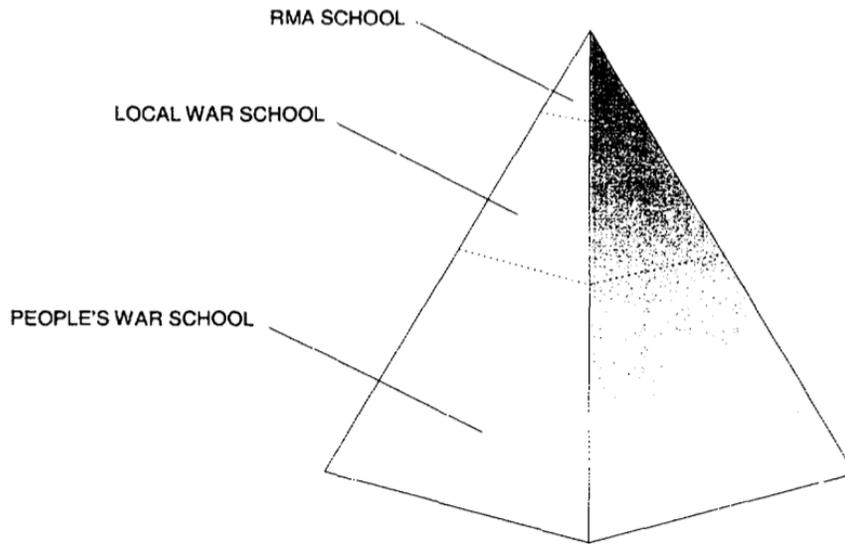


Figure 2. *People's War Scenarios*

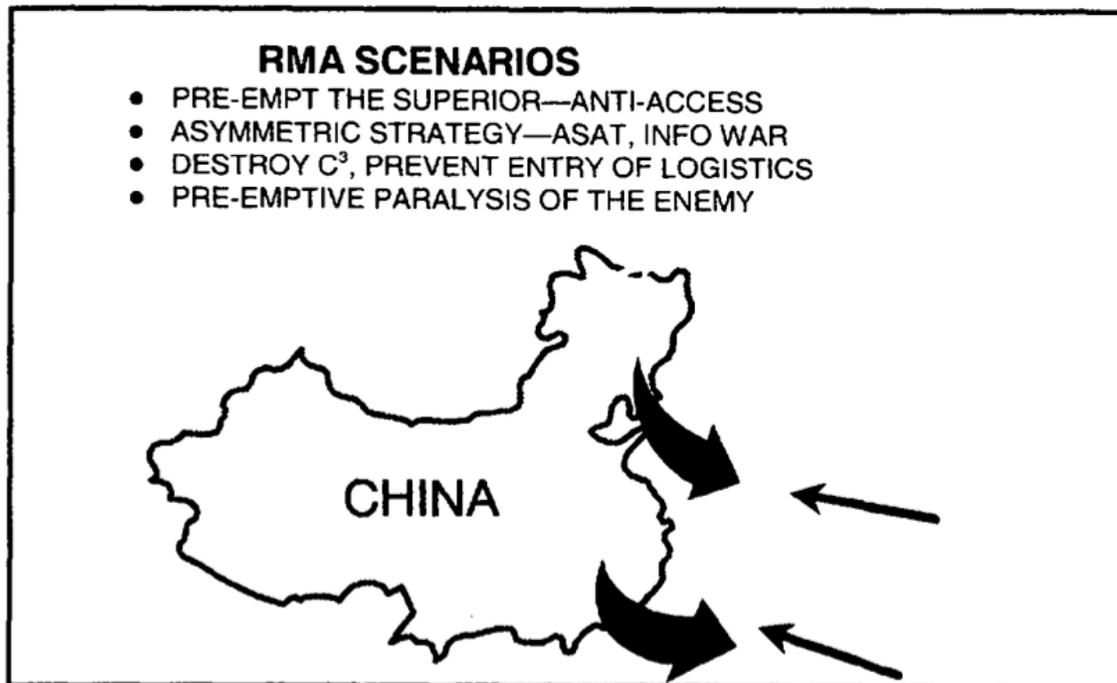


⁷⁰ Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future*, 275.

Figure 3. *Local War Scenarios*



Figure 4. *RMA Scenarios*



As is visible in Figure 1, the doctrines of all three eras coexisted - Mao's "People's War" (PW), the LWUMHTC that had developed under Deng and matured under Jiang, and the forward-thinking but still small group of believers in the RMA. Materially, roughly 80% of the PLA is equipped to fight in, and trained for, PW.⁷¹ In 1997, Jiang announced that the PW segment of the PLA would be reduced by 500,000 personnel, who would be transferred to the police forces, showing the reluctant if inexorable de-emphasis on Mao era strategy. As for LWUMHTC, about 15% of the PLA was materially equipped to fight, mainly consisting of regiments who received advanced technology from the Soviets.⁷² Thus the two major doctrines of the two previous paramount leaders of the PRC occupied roughly 95% of the PLA's focus. Note that the vertical organization of Figure 1 is not a statement on PLA preference for RMA theory - rather the opposite. The RMA theorists are at the top of Pillsbury's pyramid only because they make up by far the smallest contingent of writers (the "tip" of the pyramid).

In terms of doctrinal interaction - our 'battle for notions' - Pillsbury is fascinated by the relative lack of interplay between PW and LWUMHTC. Adherents and theorists of both schools often reference their respective paramount leaders, but rarely explicitly critique each other, and fail to mention the RMA at all. The RMA school, by noticeable contrast, implicitly rebukes other doctrines *using cultural references*. One forward-thinking writer claims of the RMA that "those who perceive it first will swiftly rise to the top and have the advantage of the first opportunities.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

Those who perceive it late will unavoidably also be caught up in the vortex of this revolution. Every military will receive this baptism.”⁷³ One RMA strategist writes extensively on the relationship between the RMA, strategic culture, and IW to distinguish himself from those who have come before:

Meeting the challenge of the world military revolution demands that we give better play to our own advantages. The rich strategy of the east (*dongfang moulue*) is one of them. Over the past several years, our study and research of high-tech local wars and high-tech information war tend to show two tendencies: on the one hand, owing to their overestimation of the importance of technology and underestimation of the role of strategy, some people consider themselves to have nothing worthy of praise; on the other hand, however, with the belief that strategic principles can replace the development of technology, some are sure that the magic weapon passed down by their forefathers can bless them to win every battle. These two opposite tendencies are both lopsided views...the military revolution will push the military strategy of the east to a new level.⁷⁴

This writer has more or less explained the ultimate conclusion of our study – that military revolutions and *dongfang moulue*, or China’s strategic culture, interact in a mutually reinforcing and synergistic manner. For his part, Pillsbury concludes his survey by noting the difficulty of resolving this debate from an outsider’s

⁷³ Ibid, 278.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 280.

perspective. Regardless, he maintains, something special is happening - doctrinal debate is reaching a fever pitch.

China scholar James Mulvenon has written about the way in which the increasing credence of the RMA after the Gulf War allowed a new and specific discourse of IW to emerge in the PLA. As senior official Chen Huan noted, "...the Gulf War...opened the curtain on the information war era and marked the sudden appearance of the third military revolution."⁷⁵ Recall that Chinese scholars 'borrow' quite a few of their IW terms and definitions from US literature, having read up heavily on US public documentation before and after the Gulf. However, because of the unique influence of strategic culture both ancient and modern in China, Mulvenon writes that the United States should "...not preclud[e] that the Chinese may eventually develop an indigenous IW strategy, and there is limited evidence of movement in this direction."⁷⁶ Mulvenon's survey of IW literature concludes that China draws many of the "right" conclusions about the Gulf War, but that the PLA notably overestimates its own capacity to engage in IW. Though Chinese IW doctrine began with a mention of IW as such in 1985 by writer Shen Weiguang - whose work we will analyse shortly - IW did not have "an analytical focus" until 1991.⁷⁷ During the Jiang years, many powerful figures in the PLA joined the RMA group to write about IW, as indicated by the table below (taken from Mulvenon's

⁷⁵ Pillsbury, *Chinese Views*, 389.

⁷⁶ Mulvenon, 177.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

essay). This essay will examine work by the top four figures on this list, as well as other writers with different perspectives on IW.

Table 1
Important Chinese IW Theorists

| Theorist | Billet/ Comments |
|----------------|---|
| MG Wang Pufeng | Father of Chinese IW field Seminal work: <i>Information Warfare and the Revolution in Military Affairs</i> |
| Shen Weiguang | State Council Special Economic Zones Office (former PLA) |
| Wang Baocun | Academy of Military Sciences |
| Li Fei | <i>Liberation Army Daily</i> |
| Wang Xusheng | PLA Academy of Electronic Technology |
| Su Jinhai | PLA Academy of Electronic Technology |
| Zhang Hong | PLA Academy of Electronic Technology |

In 1994 and 1995, high-level meetings focusing on the potential of IW were beginning to take place among adherents to the RMA school. The Commission of Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense (COSTIND) - China's equivalent of the US DARPA (the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, responsible for, among other things, the origins of the internet) - held meetings in 1994 on IW and in 1995 on the RMA. By 1995, Liu Huaqing announced at a COSTIND meeting that "China is more convinced than ever that as far as the PLA is concerned, a military revolution *with information warfare as the core* has reached the stage where efforts must be made *to catch up with and overtake rivals*."⁷⁸ The new focus on IW had as its ultimate goal "information dominance" (治信息权, *zhixinxiquan*), which is the same term that US writers use on the subject. Yet Mulvenon alludes to a developing possibility for Chinese reinterpretation of *zhixinxiquan* - "some Chinese

⁷⁸ Ibid, 179. I've kept Mulvenon's emphasis.

commentators assert that information superiority is not [just] determined by technological superiority, but by new tactics.”⁷⁹ Admittedly, familiar elements of strategic culture are at first hard to find in the new IW writings. The ideas of “integration” (*yitihua*) and seamless operations (*feixianxing zuozhan*) are said to tie together the five dimensions of warfare—air, land, sea, space, and the electromagnetic spectrum—through the integration of sensors with mobile missiles, air, and sea-based forces. These sensors are meant to facilitate “dominant battlefield awareness,” which in turn permits deep strike (*zongshen zuozhan*). Viewing these very American ideas, Mulvenon asks whether there is a truly Chinese mode of IW.

The answer is an emphatic yes. Not only did “Chinese IW authors embed their discussions within familiar ideological frameworks, such as Maoist guerrilla strategy and Sun Zi,” some - like *Unrestricted Warfare’s* authors - discussed the potential for IW to become a uniquely Chinese path to victory.⁸⁰ Moreover, the IW writers engage in discursive reinterpretations of their predecessors - in the case of Mao, their term is “new people’s war” (新人民战争, *xin renmin zhanzheng*), with particular attention paid to “overcoming the superior with the inferior.” With respect to Sun Zi (who Mulvenon says *both* the US and China are guilty of ‘overusing’) it’s the familiar adage “winning the battle without fighting.” Despite this clear effort by the writers of the RMA school to begin describing “IW with Chinese characteristics”, Mulvenon relegates these cultural references to “nothing more than

⁷⁹ Ibid, 180.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 182.

rhetorical flourishes.”⁸¹ He admits only one potential lesson to be learned from the new IW discourse - that it proves the lack of applicable terminology for IW in the status quo. We, however, argue that Mulvenon is not doing enough work - security rhetoric shapes security reality, and the chorus of PLA authors in this era are not ‘flourishing’ pointlessly. They are doing the writing, and the thinking, that will determine China’s military posture in the 21st century. In ignoring the clear calls of the RMA writers to justify and guide PLA policy using strategic culture, Mulvenon has fallen into the trap of taking a “lopsided view” earlier critiqued by one writer. He has assumed the relationship between the RMA and strategic culture is a one-sided one wherein new security needs are altering the Chinese interpretation of ancient concepts. Yet we have already seen RMA writers push for IW development, not for its own sake or to counteract US hegemony, but *because it is in line with ancient maxims* and security rhetoric. Far from having “nothing to offer”, strategic culture exerts rhetorical agency in its own right through the RMA writers.

Mulvenon’s omission is worrying, given he admits that the intersection of strategic culture, IW, and the “Cult of Defense” could prove ‘worrisome’ for the US military in at least one instance. He writes: “IW could permit China to fight and win an information campaign, precluding the need for military action. When this train of thought is combined with the notions of ‘overcoming the superior with the inferior,’ one can quickly see the logical conclusion of the argument: *IW as a preemption*

⁸¹ Ibid, 183.

weapon."⁸² Lu Linzhi, an RMA writer, actually published an article to this effect in the *Liberation Army Daily (jiefangjun bao)* in 1996 entitled "Preemptive Strikes Crucial in Limited High-Tech Wars." The lesson Lu wanted us to draw from the Gulf was that if Iraq had engaged in a pre-emptive strike, they might have been able to cripple US IW capability and defeat the superior using the inferior. Alarmingly, Linzhi states that the PLA should "zero in on the hubs and other crucial links in the system that moves enemy troops as well as the war-making machine, such as harbors, airports, means of transportation, battlefield installations, and the communications, command and control and information systems" of a potential enemy.⁸³ This strategy might prove devastatingly effective against the increasingly information-reliant military of the United States. Here, again, Mulvenon admits that "American forces are highly information-dependent, and rely heavily on precisely coordinated logistics networks."²⁹ He concludes by asserting that the Chinese military does not - yet - have a coherent IW doctrine. Nor does it have the technology adequate to achieve its goals - again, for the time being. Yet the fact that strategic culture continues to influence IW doctrine will no doubt shape the manner in which China conducts such a strike, were it to do so. We cannot help but take this as a sign that the study of this essay's topic is imperative - now, and in the future.

We now turn our attention to the relatively rich collection of primary sources from the Jiang era. In fact, there was such a high volume of new domestic Chinese publications about the RMA and changing military issues that the DOD and the

⁸² Ibid, emphasis mine.

⁸³ Ibid, 184.

Atlantic Council (a nonprofit public policy center) jointly sponsored the publication of a compendium of translated Chinese military writing. It was entitled *Chinese Views of Future Warfare*. Michael Pillsbury, the China scholar who edited the volume, writes in the introduction about his choice to split up the translated works into four broad categories. The first focused entirely on Deng Xiaoping's own strategic thought, while the second addressed the potential for China's outward security environment to change. The other two are even more relevant to our study, being short-term challenges for Local War and long-term studies about the RMA, respectively. Perhaps most revealing about the introduction is that Pillsbury recalls meeting with the Chinese editor of *zhongguo junshi kexue* (*China Military Science*), the flagship journal which nearly all of his sources are drawn from. Pillsbury notes with interest that his counterpart "...even publishes several articles in each issue about the continuing relevance of ancient strategic theory."⁸⁴ As far as Pillsbury's four categories go, we have already examined some of the rhetorical trends that categorize the first category in the preceding section on Deng Xiaoping. The second category, while interesting, deals with Chinese perception of international actors, and is thus less relevant. The two final categories interest us, however. On the Local War section, Pillsbury reiterates the conclusions he drew in the secondary source *Chinese Debates the Future Security Environment* - "what is remarkable about the Local War school's writing is that the ideas contained in the articles on the military

⁸⁴ Pillsbury, *Chinese Views*, xvii.

revolution are never explicitly criticized or even mentioned.”⁸⁵ Though the RMA school represents the kernel of forward-thinkers in the PLA most relevant to our study, this quote reminds us that they still have far to go in the ‘battle for notions’ about future warfare.

There is perhaps one exception to Pillsbury’s observation above, and his name is Shen Kuiguan. Though placed into Pillsbury’s third category of LWUMHTC writers, Shen’s piece on the “Dialectics of Defeating the Superior with the Inferior” is a nod towards the effects of the Gulf War and the potential implications for modernizing Deng’s strategic thought. The piece begins with the statement that “...a comprehensive understanding and analysis of the Gulf War are needed in order to avoid the erroneous conclusion that it is impossible for a weak force to defeat a powerful opponent in a high-tech war.”⁸⁶ RMA writers heeded this call, producing *Unrestricted Warfare*. On his main subject (defeating the superior with the inferior, which is quite familiar to us as a tenet of both PW and LW) Shen asserts that the tactic goes back millennia, having been used successfully by people of the Yin, Zhou, Ming and Qing dynasties.⁸⁷ Unfortunately, defeating the superior with the inferior in a high-tech local war like the Gulf is extremely difficult, though possible. One way Shen advocates the PLA approach this strategem is to simply pursue a kind of total war, or to be utterly determined in its mission. The piece offers little discussion of ‘asymmetric warfare’ as such - indeed, it seems to also suggest that outright better

⁸⁵ Ibid, xxvi.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 217.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 214.

numbers or weapons trump the usage of ‘tricky’ tactics like those drawn from the classics. Overall, the piece seems to be mired in Deng Xiaoping’s *realpolitik*, but does not totally discount the use of stratagems in the case of LWUMHTC or IW. In this way, it shows the potential for LW and PW advocates to be co-opted by the thinking of the RMA group.

Moving to Pillsbury’s fourth category of RMA writers, we find a wealth of diverse writing on the effects of the Gulf War and the unique potential of IW. Chang Mengxiong, director of the aforementioned COSTIND, begins his piece by acknowledging that “numerous facts show that we are in the midst of a new revolution in military technology in which electronic information technology is the central technology.”⁸⁸ Stunningly, he goes on to predict the advent of robot warfare - more specifically, “unmanned information-intensified combat platforms.”⁸⁹ The 21st-century reader immediately conjures up an image of a United States Predator drone; Chang has here demonstrated the extraordinary forward-thinking capacity of the RMA group. Among Chang’s other contributions are a direct link between the philosophy of Sun Zi and the application of IW - one statement in *The Art of War* (‘By knowing the enemy and knowing yourself, you can fight a hundred battles and win them all’) is used as a justification for expanding IW capabilities to ‘know the enemy’ more accurately. Perhaps Chang’s most eclectic metaphor is that of IW as a Chinese martial artist: “Information-intensified combat methods are like a Chinese boxer with a knowledge of vital body points who can bring an opponent to his knees with

⁸⁸ Ibid, 249.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 251.

a minimum of movement.”⁹⁰ The Chinese boxer is a culturally unique image replete with symbolism - Boxer movements of the late 19th century frequently practiced ancient ‘immunity’ rituals that allowed them to fearlessly challenge the superior forces of the Qing government and foreign invaders. Wu Guoqing, another writer of the RMA school, echoes the Boxer metaphor, suggesting it carries significant rhetorical weight.

Several RMA adherents from the PLA-N and PLA-AF follow Chang with pieces about how naval and air warfare will change over the coming decades. We find here one of the first rhetorical appearances of the “assassin’s mace” (*shashoujian*) concept - a magical ‘killer weapon’ that would receive increasing attention during the Hu Jintao era. Authors unveil the term very briefly in reference to electromagnetic attacks being used to precede a naval strike, suggesting an early association between *shashoujian* and electronic or information warfare.⁹¹ Much speculation follows as to how all forms of ground combat will expand into “electromagnetic space.” These sources seem to broadly support ‘informationalization’ or continuing to make Local War ‘high-tech’ rather than explicitly conducting IW, though the pieces are clearly falling into place.

Next up is Major General Wang Pufeng, a PLA elder who has been dubbed the “father of Chinese IW doctrine” by Pillsbury and other China scholars. Wang’s piece in Pillsbury’s collection, entitled “The Challenge of Information Warfare”, is frank

⁹⁰ Ibid, 253.

⁹¹ Ibid, 263.

about China's IW capabilities, admitting that "the equipment, strategy, tactics, and military theory of China's military are still basically the products of the industrial era and are far from satisfying the demands of information warfare."⁹² The General is emphatic about the distinction between his vision of IW and that of the other RMA adherents within the PLA-N and PLA-AF who advocate 'informationalizing' their respective fields - guided missiles and other information-based weapons are still part of the LWUMHTC doctrine, as they are not *information operations* per se. Recalling the definition of IW set down by the DOD and reviewed earlier in this essay, we can see that he is technically correct. Moreover, if Shen Kuiguan alone among the third group of writers suggested that more study be done on IW, Wang Pufeng all but demands it. The General categorically states that China must focus on IW as a way to defeat superior with the inferior and calls for further study on the idea. He also goes so far as to eschew the Deng-era "Cult of Defense" doublespeak term "active defense" (主动防御, *zhudong fangyu*) where IW is concerned. Information warfare necessarily "includes engaging in an *active offense* (主动进攻, *zhudong jingong*) of information suppression and attack", and Wang accordingly notes with approval the DOD's offensive usage of viruses, electronic interference, and digital reconnaissance in Libya and Iraq.⁹³ In reinterpreting the strategic classics, Wang makes two recommendations for Chinese IW doctrine. The first is the return of *quan bian*, Sun Zi's maxim of absolute strategic flexibility also used in PW and LW. Wang extends *quan bian* to IW through the idea of an "information

⁹² Ibid, 318.

⁹³ Ibid, 319.

counterattack” by which the PRC might tip the battle in its favor. Second, Wang draws on Sun Zi’s famous statement that “all warfare is based on deception” in recommending the Chinese deliberately obfuscate their digital and informational presence as a form of IW.⁹⁴

Though it is not included in Pillsbury’s volume, Wang penned another important article on IW in the journal of the PLA Academy of Military Sciences (*junshi kexue*) in 1996. It reveals the extent to which even PLA-watchers of the day like Pillsbury may have missed the subtle undercurrents of strategic culture within the RMA school, and we will be the first to discuss and translate it. Wang’s trademark insistence on the primacy of IW and calls to action are nowhere more visible than here – his opening contention is that IW is “an inevitable stage” in the progression of warfare worldwide.⁹⁵ Going even further, Wang asserts that the underlying ideas of IW will be beneficial and even crucial to China’s military progression: “[IW’s] true guiding principles and lasting historical significance will bring effects on the safety of our country’s borders and military development and guide our country’s military ideology and military theory to reach a new level.”⁹⁶ These assertions place Wang at the spearhead of the RMA writers who were making arguments about the future in order to pressure their colleagues to accept the ascendance of IW.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 320.

⁹⁵ Wang, 1.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

The article is also a technical investigation of the emerging characteristics of IW, and it makes two key assertions that draw on ancient ideas. First, in pushing for the prioritization of “information battle platforms” (信息化作战平台, *xinxihua zuozhan pingtai*), Wang makes a delineation between the “hard casualties” (硬杀伤, *ying shashang*) of traditional weapons and the “soft casualties” (软杀伤, *ruan shashang*) newly made possible through IW.⁹⁷ The terms are new ones he has coined, but their implication draws on the Daoist notion of “winning the battle without fighting”. A “soft casualty”, Wang explains, is an enemy’s information system – a target that enables one to end a battle *without ever having fielded forces* or sustained casualties. Second, Wang carries forward the *yi zhan* righteous war idea in his coining of the phrase “information dominance” (*zhixinxiquan*), the significance of which Mulvenon noted but did not rhetorically pursue. Looking at the compound word, we identify *zhi* (治) as “control”, and *xinxi* (信息) as “information”, leaving *quan* (权). The character *quan* has many disparate meanings, but other uses include the words for “property rights” as well as the “right to know” about something. Such undertones of righteousness and justice clearly hearken back to *yi zhan*, as the term implies that one is *controlling the right* to information. Wang’s ideas are those of a leader at the forefront of PLA thinking on IW, and display a willingness to presciently recycle strategic culture not found in PW and LW writers. Wang adopts ancient concepts not just because he thinks they will give him a legitimating edge in the “battle for notions”, but also because he clearly *believes* in their applicability and

⁹⁷ Ibid.

relationship to current events. This tendency will noticeably shape the authors of the Hu era.

The last writer of interest to us in Pillsbury's collection of primary sources is Wei Jincheng, whose piece is entitled "Information Warfare: A New Form of People's War." Like Wang Pufeng, Wei displays a strong ability to re-adapt strategic and cultural concepts to the RMA. His piece focuses on the new options IW gives to adherents to the spirit of PW - for example, the relatively inexpensive nature of cyberwar provides for battles where "the enemy country can receive a paralyzing blow through the internet, and the party on the receiving end will ⁹⁸not be able to tell whether it is a child's prank or an attack from its enemy." This type of thinking keeps alive the guerilla warfare bent to PW as a potential asset in IW doctrine. For Wei, "a people's war in the context of information warfare is carried out by hundreds of millions of people using open-type modern information systems" who can collectively engage in warfare. The state is not the only entity that wages war, and citizens can participate through "patriotic emails, political mobilization via the internet, [and] databases for traditional education."⁹⁹ Again, the 21st-century reader cannot help but notice the prescience of this prediction, as world governments (China included) currently struggle with 'armed and dangerous' ideological factions of citizens who use the internet as a weapon. Wei even touches on the potential for state-to-populace IW, wherein "enemy civilians could receive a blow through the

⁹⁸ Pillsbury 1998, 411.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 412.

internet” dealt by the Chinese government.¹⁰⁰ The aforementioned Moonlight Maze incident is proof enough that this idea has come true.

Looking back at the large collection of primary and secondary sources available from the Jiang Zemin era, many things are made clear to us. First, the RMA school - despite the wide gulf between it and the other PLA doctrines - undeniably came into its own during this time. Despite only catering to a small portion of rank-and-file PLA forces, the RMA writers made a slew of prophetic inferences about future warfare. Second, the RMA school decisively opened up a discursive space in which the utility and nature of information warfare could be contested. Though the Mao and Deng years laid the groundwork, it was the RMA writers’ reactions to the Gulf War that made this possible by repeatedly connecting IW to ancient terms and legitimating it with cultural arguments. Finally, the RMA writers were by no means exempt from the dual-layer strategic culture that characterized earlier PLA writing and thinking. *Unrestricted Warfare* shows that they bought into the “Chinese Cult of Defense” as much, if not more than, their counterparts. The *parabellum* strategic culture continued to dominate strategic thinking, while decisions and doctrines were rationalized under a traditional framework. The “Cult” took on a new IW-related dimension in this era, as strategists began to contemplate the culturally unique potential for offensive (and even preemptive) information operations to “defeat the superior with the inferior.”

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

This is not to say that the RMA writers got everything right, of course. The idealism and creativity displayed in Pillsbury's collection of primary sources occasionally borders on the absurd, when viewed in hindsight. Many PLA-N and PLA-AF authors isolated outer space as the next vitally important component of air and sea battles, though space weapons have failed to gain much traction in the 21st century. Moreover, a handful of writers insisted on the rapid advent of nanotechnology weapons, claiming that "within the next 10 to 25 years, manufacture of these microscale electromechanical apparatuses of molecular dimensions will be possible."¹⁰¹ So far, the completion of the expected 'bomb-delivering nano-ants with changeable hair'¹⁰² has eluded military scientists. Despite their occasional missteps, however, the RMA writers often hit the nail on the head in predicting future warfare. Their ideas about drone technology, civilian-state IW, and computer virus warfare have all come to prominence less than 25 years after publication. Most importantly, they helped to create momentum for the expansion of the RMA school in a direction favoring rapid, offensive, and pre-emptive IW utilizing traditional stratagems. The reasons that IW doctrine began to move in this direction were not, as Ferguson might suggest, wholly motivated by realist concerns or *parabellum* thinking. Instead, rhetorical tenets of strategic culture both ancient and modern began to push China to develop IW in a particular way, at a particular time – because the Generals who believed in it were wielding that rhetoric to change the tide in their "battle over notions".

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 440.

¹⁰² Ibid.

VI: The PLA under Hu Jintao

Like his predecessor, President Hu faced rapidly changing security issues at home and abroad almost immediately upon taking office. With the US “war on terror” in full swing, China had to contend with the approach of US military forces from Pakistan in the West and from the Philippines in the South. As if that were not enough, during the delicate period of power transfer of the CMC Chairmanship from Jiang to Hu, Taiwan’s pro-independence President Chen Shui-Bian won a stunning re-election. Splittism and hegemony, the old threats to China’s sovereignty, had never seemed more relevant. Within the PLA, doctrinal discourse was moving underground - military journals gradually ceased to be published or translated for foreign consumption. Drawing on Sun Zi’s adage “all warfare is based on deception”, a PLA Daily article of the mid-2000s made the case that dominance in IW might be linked to strategic ambiguity: “In information warfare, not only must we ‘know ourselves and the enemy,’ we must, more importantly, make sure that the ‘enemy does not have the knowledge about us,’ and use our knowledge about the enemy to attack the enemy that does not have knowledge about us.”¹⁰³ Overall, this period witnessed a sharpening of IW focus on “killer weapons”, particularly in a potential conflict against Taiwan, the United States, or both. The focus was spearheaded by PLA ‘housecleaning’ that ushered the forward-thinking writers of the RMA generation into power. Finally, even as the PLA modernized by leaps and bounds, a

¹⁰³ Wei-cheng Wang, 5.

different sort of information operation was making rhetorical clues harder to find across the board.

In November 2002, the Party held its 16th congress, which involved sweeping changes to the leadership structure of the PLA. Many of the impacts of the congress were just beginning to be felt when Hu Jintao ascended to Chairmanship of the CMC in September 2004. That year, China experts in the US gathered at Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania to debate what impacts the restructuring might have on many diverse aspects of the Chinese government. The results of the conference were collected and published by the aforementioned Andrew Scobell of the RAND corporation, with the assistance of Larry Wortzel of the Congressional US-China Economic and Security Review Commission. The works collected in the volume broadly addressed the implications of the ascendance of China's "fourth generation" of leaders, not the least of which was an ongoing power struggle between Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao for control over the PLA. At the time of publication, Jiang had relinquished all critical party posts to Hu, save for one - the powerful Chairmanship of the CMC. This move mirrored Deng Xiaoping's own tendency to 'pull strings' from behind the scenes after publicly giving up power, and the authors make much of China's "two centers" in the party-army relationship. Yet just one year later, Jiang would relinquish the CMC Chairmanship as well, proving himself no equal to Deng Xiaoping. This episode served to further illustrate the widening gap between the party's third and fourth generations of leaders.

The first essay in the collection is written by another scholar by now familiar to us - James Mulvenon, also of RAND. Mulvenon's analysis of the growing generation gap in the new PLA and CMC reveals several significant developments that continued a trend of disaggregated and technocratic command begun under Jiang Zemin. First, the 16th congress marked the retirement of all PLA commanders over the age of 70. This group included the influential generals Chi Haotian and Fu Quanyou, along with several other Deng-era proponents of PW and LW. Joining the CPC's Central Committee to replace them were 43 officers of the PLA, including 26 'new names', who made up 22% of the overall body. Of these, three ascended to the CMC, all of whom are fourth-generation leaders and contemporaries of Hu Jintao.¹⁰⁴ Within the PLA itself, the heads of all four major departments (these being Logistics, Staff, Political, and Armament - refer to figure 6) were swapped out for fourth-generation personnel. The majority of these fourth-generation commanders had both combat experience and technocratic backgrounds, making the potential for a shift towards the RMA school quite high. Second, Jiang's decision to try to re-personalize army loyalty and adopt a Deng-like stance "strongly suggested that the system was becoming dangerously dysfunctional."¹⁰⁵ In Mulvenon's view, the two paramount leaders attempted to retain power for wholly different reasons - "while Deng was initiating and overseeing the gradual implementation of radical new norms, particularly age-based retirement, to improve the health of the system, Jiang's move appears to be institutional retrogression driven by unattractive

¹⁰⁴ Scobell, *Civil-Military Change*, 17.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 19.

personal ambition.”¹⁰⁶ This assertion is supported by the staggering number of personal thank-yous and congratulations by PLA elders towards Jiang during the ceremonies, dwarfing Hu Jintao’s media presence. Though this coverage gave the appearance of a united front, Mulvenon isolates at least two articles by PLA writers bemoaning the “problem of two centers” and criticizing Jiang’s ambition with barely-disguised venom. Thus the PLA was walking a dangerous path after the 16th party congress - powerful, increasingly technocratic, and potentially without consolidated political guidance.

Scholars Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise, Dean Cheng, and Ken Gause continue analysing PLA leadership changes with an eye to the personal allegiances of the fourth generation. They leave no doubt that the Gulf War “left a deeper impression on the leadership of the Chinese military than virtually any previous military action”, creating a “study campaign” we have examined at length in the previous chapter.¹⁰⁷ Jiang Zemin’s response at the time was to direct the PLA to focus on modernizing to fight and win LWUMHTC, and to focus on quality over quantity. The PLA responded by rapidly promoting forward-thinking leaders in 2003. For example, the new Vice Chairman of the CMC, Guo Boxiong, gained a reputation for tactical innovation drawing on reinterpretations of ancient strategy during 1993-4 PLA war games in Western China.¹⁰⁸ New Minister of Defense Cao Guangchan published on the Gulf War while serving in the General Staff Department of the PLA,

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 15.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 182.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 188.

and later went on to direct COSTIND, the powerful conglomerate driving debates amongst the RMA writers of the late 1990s.¹⁰⁹ CPC apparatchik Xu Caihou, another scholar of the Gulf conflict, we saw previously as the editor of *jiefangjun bao* (*Liberation Army Daily*) who told Pillsbury he made an effort to publish works on the strategic classics with every issue. Overall, two factors common to the ascendant fourth generation stand out in this analysis - first, all are “downright open to technological innovation”, as the authors put it.¹¹⁰ Second - a conclusion the authors fail to draw - all held pivotal roles observing or commanding the PLA during the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995-96. The significance of this special relationship with Taiwan will rapidly become evident, as the Taiwan question intersects in unique ways with China’s developing IW doctrine.

The last work in the volume relevant to our interests is a comprehensive analysis of *shashoujian* entitled “Demystifying China’s ‘Assassin’s Mace’ Concept.” Jason Bruzdinski, a Washington defense policy specialist and former Northrop Grumman employee, gives us an unprecedented level of research into an idea we saw beginning to develop during the Jiang era (recall the group 4 RMA writers in Pillsbury’s compendium and their preoccupation with “magic” or “killer” weapons). Beginning from a discursive standpoint, Bruzdinski notes the wide array of possible translations for the term *shashoujian*, with FBIS alone having used 15 different English terms since 1996.¹¹¹ Bruzdinski’s response is to refer to

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 184.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 209.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 312.

shashoujian solely in its romanized form, symbolizing the term’s journey from an idiom of the mid-90s to a potentially “formalized, clandestine weapons research, development and acquisition effort” totally unique to China by the year 2000. The word *shashoujian* incorporates three ideograms: 杀 (*sha*, to kill), 手 (*shou*, hand), and 钊 (*jian*, a form of sword-like Chinese club or mace). The first two characters, *shashou*, are often translated “assassin”, giving rise to the English term “assassin’s mace.”

As a cultural term, *shashoujian* has ancient and murky origins - it is related to the developing idea we saw in *Unrestricted Warfare* of IW as a “magic charm”, and to the metaphor of the Chinese boxer used by some IW theorists at COSTIND in the late 1990s. Bruzdinski shows in particular that the way of the mace or sword, *jianshu*, has been intimately related to *taiji quan* (shadow boxing) since the Warring States and Spring and Autumn periods of Chinese history in the first few centuries BCE.¹¹² A well-forged *shoujian*, or hand mace, was a fearsome weapon capable of breaking swords and sundering armor available during this time period. According to one Taiwanese legend, General Xin Xiong of the Tang empire attained significant fame as a wielder of the *shoujian*, and was rumored to have perfected a flawless killing technique called *shashoujian*. Xin kept this form secret from his cousin, fearing others could use it to defeat him; this created an aura of mystery and power that has remained around the term to this day.¹¹³ Thus, as a culturally rooted term,

¹¹² *Ibid*, 313.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 314.

shashoujian is not only a distinctive weapon, but also a form or technique capable of utterly annihilating one's enemy.

In the modern-day PLA, *shashoujian* survives in much the same capacity. Senior Colonel Yang Zhibo wrote in 2002 that *shashoujian* could be both weapons systems and combat methods, declaring "basically, it is whatever the PLA needs to win future local wars under modern high-tech conditions."¹¹⁴ Bruzdinski also mentions Chinese internet users, who discuss the rise of *shashoujian* in the late 90's and identify it as "a synonym for a secret weapon as originally used in traditional Chinese storytelling to describe an ancient weapon of surprising power."¹¹⁵ Usage of *shashoujian* is also not confined to the PLA - for example, some writers have listed assets like the F-117A stealth bomber as *shashoujian* utilized by the United States during the Gulf War. Beginning in 1996, Bruzdinski ties *shashoujian* to the ascendant RMA school - or, more precisely, to what he calls the "nonlinear RMA" group of PLA thinkers who advocate asymmetric and China-specific modes of modernization for IW. Quoting Major General Xu Yanbing, Bruzdinski decisively locates *shashoujian* within this group: "We should combine Western technology with Eastern wisdom. This is our trump card (王牌, *wangpai*) for winning a 21st century war."¹¹⁶ By 2002, Jiang Zemin himself had publicly hopped on the RMA bandwagon with his rhetoric of "military transformation", a campaign which Bruzdinski claims "served to acknowledge the success of efforts by the PLA's RMA

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 315.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 319.

scholars in their campaign to break from China's long adherence to 'People's War' doctrines and the PLA's practice of linear, reactive approaches to force modernization."¹¹⁷

Recalling that the RMA school made up (during the Jiang era) at most 5% of the PLA, one wonders how *shashoujian* factored into this spectacular victory in the battle for notions. One fact that occurs to us which Brudzinski did not note is the connection between the *sha* of *shashoujian* and the *sha* in *ruan shashang* – Wang Pufeng's earlier term for the "soft casualties" information warfare enables. The logical conclusion is that, with respect to IW, *sha* – to kill – was flexible enough to also refer to offensives in which *no one was actually killed* (i.e. the action was "soft"). Keeping this in mind, we can view Brudzinski's analysis in light of the fact that Chinese authors considered both the potential effectiveness and the potential nonlethality of IW as a *shashoujian* weapon. These two cultural foundations – the nonlethal or "soft" capacity to *sha* the enemy "without fighting", coupled with the one-strike efficacy of the *shoujian* – made IW a uniquely attractive option to PLA strategists.

The period in which Hu was being groomed for leadership (the late 1990s and early 2000) thus saw an increase in PLA scholarship and activity surrounding *shashoujian*. In 1997, PLA-AF commander Liu Shunyao hinted at the PLA's need to "form, as soon as possible, a certain scale of *shashoujian*." In 1998, outgoing Defense Minister Chi Haotian disclosed that Jiang Zemin had directly promoted the creation

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

of *shashoujian* as a national objective in CMC meetings. Jiang stressed the development of *shashoujian* weapons “as soon as possible” after the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, and in 2000 issued a memo to the senior PLA cadre rejecting calls for increased funding in favor of specifically pursuing *shashoujian* programs.¹¹⁸ These doctrinal power moves by the outgoing paramount leader potentially explain his attempts to retain military control in the 2003 congress, as well as a growing fascination with the unique potential of the RMA school amongst PRC elites. By the early 2000s, Jiang Zemin was prepared to hand Hu Jintao the keys to a full-blown secret program to develop *shashoujian* weapons and techniques, codenamed State Security Project 998. Overseen by the CMC and developed by the PLA, project 998 explicitly aimed to “accelerate the research, development and installation of new weapons to resist U.S. hegemonism”, according to leaked reports.¹¹⁹ In 2002, evidence suggests Jiang established two more such programs, with project codes 122 and 126, aimed at building China’s asymmetric warfare capabilities. Research by Pillsbury and other scholars revealed plans for native IW capabilities including an “aerospace technological system”, an “electronic information technological system”, a “strategic defense technological system”, a “deep-level counterattack technological system”, and an “optical laser technological system.” The executive director for all three programs was newly chosen PRC President Hu Jintao, whose tenure would be characterized by the

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 325.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 327.

marriage of IW to *shashoujian* as a stratagem for “defeating the superior with the inferior.”

Not coincidentally, obtaining sources that describe Chinese IW posture, tactics, or armament after the year 2003 rapidly becomes a difficult task. Jacqueline Newmeyer, who is quoted in the methodology section of this essay, has done an admirable job of combing through the literature of the Hu years to ascertain what may have been going on behind the scenes. Reading Newmeyer’s analysis, one begins to surmise that the “Chinese Cult of Defense” had evolved into a sort of micro-information war (conducted against the prying defense analyst) unto itself: traces of the *parabellum* paradigm disappear from publicly available archives, while journals favor bland, tangential, and non-threatening descriptions of progress in IW. An example:

During the Eighth Five-Year Plan period, China’s telephone switching capacity increased by 58.99 million lines, bringing the total interoffice switching capacity to 71 million lines and the total switching capacity of urban and rural telephones to 85.10 million lines. China thus became a country with one of the largest telephone networks in the world.¹²⁰

Newmeyer tried to nail down a uniquely Chinese approach to the RMA by piecing together the implications and subtexts of this increasingly obtuse rhetoric characterizing military scholarship of the 2000s.

¹²⁰ Newmeyer, 487.

One place such tidbits were less closely guarded was *outside* the PLA. Newmeyer hit paydirt in the journal of the CICIR (Chinese Institute for Contemporary International Relations), part of the PRC's intelligence/counterintelligence apparatus. One author initially attempted to reassure readers that increased political transparency in the 21st century had reduced both the scope and destructiveness of warfare, an argument analogous to *Unrestricted Warfare's* earlier ideas about "kinder" weapons and to traditional ideas about "virtuous" rule. What followed was a curious discussion of "information deterrence" - the logical evolution of nuclear deterrence, now made anew to fit the RMA.¹²¹ In practically explaining the concept, however, the author could not avoid a concrete discussion of IW. Information superiority (*zhixinxiquan*, Wang's term also used in the COSTIND meetings of the late 1990s) enabled one to "gain the initiative" through an offensive campaign, "make a huge strike on the opponent at an extremely small price", and ultimately win the war.¹²² Moreover, the author revealed a building focus on C2I systems and computer networks as key targets for IW. DARPA - the US analogue of COSTIND - was singled out specifically for its admirable interest in "injecting computer viruses at long range to paralyze the enemy."¹²³

The rhetoric of "paralysis" joins the list of confusing new terms Newmeyer has culled from the available publications of the Hu era. Unsurprisingly, *shashoujian*

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 488.

¹²² *Ibid*.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 489.

also makes the list. New to us are terms like *shineng* (势能, “potential energy”, or China’s gradually building IW capacity), *zhangongcheng* (战功程, “warfare engineering”, the practice of peacetime IW wargames), and “invisible” (无形, *wuxing*) forces (IW weapons and their operators, which are harder to count up and measure than tanks or planes).¹²⁴ Newmeyer’s conclusion is that the Chinese “have conceptualized the RMA as a set of technological advances that create new opportunities to target an enemy’s resolve through the threat or infliction of focused, limited, but highly damaging strikes.”¹²⁵ This was corroborated by Beijing’s 2004 white paper officially announcing an “RMA with Chinese Characteristics” having IW as its core.

Another area in which scholars have succeeded in probing China’s specific strategic ambitions vis-a-vis IW is the so-called “Taiwan question.” Gary Rawnsley’s article in a 2005 issue of *International Affairs* analyses the IW arms race occurring on both sides of the Taiwan strait at that time, noting that “substantial investment is directed towards designing and creating new architectures, training programmes and technology that facilitate offensive and defensive information warfare.”¹²⁶ By the mid-2000s, conflict between the PRC and ROC had become an indisputable and worrisome possibility: Premier Wen Jiabao emphasized China’s willingness to “pay any price to safeguard unity of the motherland” in 2003, and this hardline stance was codified in the so-called “anti-secession law” of 2005. Meanwhile, pro-

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 490.

¹²⁶ Rawnsley, 1061.

independence candidate Chen Shui-Bian won Taiwan's presidency in 2000 and a hotly contested second term in 2004, raising the stakes for a potential deterioration in relations.¹²⁷ Taiwan's National Defense Ministry has had to revise its estimates for the earliest possible date of a successful Chinese IW attack multiple times. In the late 1990s, Taiwanese theorists put the potential year of Chinese information dominance in 2010; this was rapidly revised to 2005 in 1999. By the year 2000, General Lin Chi-Cheng of Taiwan's Communications, Electronics and Information Bureau was forced to admit that China's IW mobilization was already surpassing that of Taiwan.¹²⁸

What specific utility could new forms of technologically advanced IW hold for China in its bid to reunite Taiwan with the mainland? The answer lies in what Rawnsley calls the "cross-strait propaganda offensive": a bitter IW campaign waged since the Cold War that nevertheless "has enjoyed little success beyond the recurrent exchange of political symbolism and rhetoric."¹²⁹ The repeatedly manufactured 'crises' of the strait serve to illustrate Rawnsley's point: though Taiwan and the PRC frequently shelled each other from the 1950s onwards, the attacks were done on a coordinated timetable of odd and even days, and the shells contained only propaganda leaflets. This 'IW for the masses' demonstrated "the tendency to grope in the dark" that characterized the cross-strait propaganda

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 1062.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 1067.

war.¹³⁰ The use of network-focused warfare allows for much more precise targeting and monitoring of propaganda campaigns, as well as virtual anonymity, giving rise to what other authors have called “neocortical warfare”: using information networks to control and shape the behavior of enemies without physically damaging them.¹³¹ This concept must have been particularly attractive to the PLA under Hu Jintao, as it provides the key to the decades-old problem of bloodlessly achieving reunification across the strait. Presumably for this exact reason, Rawnsley titled his piece “Old Wine in New Bottles.”

Vincent Wei-Cheng Wang has also written on the subject of IW as a “magic weapon” to retake Taiwan, likewise grappling with the decreasing number of declassified PLA documents to analyze. Unlike many other authors cited in this essay, he opts to include DOD studies of presumed Chinese IW capability in his research, some of which are revealing for our study. In 2002, for example, the DOD noted an uptick in multiple PLA IW ventures - more military exercises involved IW, more doctrine focused on defending against the threat of computer viruses, and more specialists in IW were being recruited through the PLA’s special programs.¹³² Another interesting study cited by Wang looks at the historical prevalence of “defeating the superior with the inferior”, breaking the past two centuries up into 50-year periods and recording which actor was the victor in military conflict. Astonishingly, victory of the numerically or technologically weak over the strong

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid, 1068.

¹³² Wei-cheng Wang, 5.

rose from 11.8% in the 1800s to 55% in the latter half of the 20th century, a finding that must have been particularly heartening to Chinese advocates of asymmetric IW.¹³³ Though it remains difficult to get a feel for PLA discourse surrounding IW in the latter half of the 2000s, these statistics paint a general picture of the direction PLA theorists may have been taking.

One last place from which we may glean clues about doctrinal evolution is the 2012 PLA white paper, published at the end of Hu's tenure as Chairman of the CMC. This white paper was the eighth since the first landmark publication in 1998, which we examined earlier. Overall, the paper reveals two characteristics of the contemporary PLA - an expanding view of its 'entitlement' to regional power (bolstered by the "Cult of Defense") coupled with a relatively pessimistic outlook on China's local security environment. As panelists at the Center for Naval Analysis noted during a 2013 discussion on the white paper, such communiqués have attained significant weight in the study of PRC military policy - thorough vetting and the sponsorship of the State Council has led the white papers to "represent the coordinated and authoritative views of the PRC writ large."¹³⁴ Moreover, these views are a unique opportunity for the PRC to shape international perception of the PLA towards the way in which it would like its armed forces to be viewed. To this end, the 2012 white paper adopts a new structure not shared by its 7 predecessors, focusing on the ways in which the PLA is serving China and world interests

¹³³ Ibid, 21.

¹³⁴ "China's National Defense", 1.

domestically and abroad. One panelist jokingly phrased this thematic approach as “What can Red do for You?”¹³⁵

As far as telegraphing the PRC’s intended vision of the PLA, the white paper is quite clear. It first sets out to reassure international actors of the peaceful goals of the PLA, which is a recurring theme in most white papers. This one makes a “straightforward positive case” for PLA action abroad, using a litany of statistics about (for example) the impact of military cooperation with Hong Kong authorities to crack down on illicit trade.¹³⁶ Alongside the standard reassurance, the paper also contains undertones of what the Naval Analysis Center panelists called “expeditionary intentions” - for example, the statement embedded in the preface that China deserves “powerful armed forces commensurate with [its] international standing.”¹³⁷ These two messages clearly show the enduring relationship between the *parabellum* and traditional strategic cultures - peace-loving on the outside, realist on the inside. The Cult of Defense is evidently alive and well as of 2012.

In describing China’s security environment, the white paper displays a pessimism also distinct from its predecessors. PLA writers decry signs of “increasing hegemonism (*baquanzhuyi*, also Deng Xiaoping’s term), power politics, and neo-interventionism” in the world security climate.¹³⁸ These are almost certainly veiled criticisms of the United States, especially when coupled with the later assertion that

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

US presence “frequently makes the regional situation more tense.”¹³⁹ The risk of Taiwanese separatism is also specifically critiqued as the biggest threat to peaceful development in the region. Putting the pieces together, we can see that the PRC clearly intends the white paper to construct a worldview wherein an inherently peaceful PLA may nevertheless be forced into a just war (*zhengyi zhanzheng*) to defend China’s sovereignty or oppose hegemonism. Underlying this traditional rhetoric are claims about China’s newfound standing in the realist community of nations that justify the potential for offensive use of the PLA.

The veil pulled over PLA doctrinal writing has been occasionally marred by outright showings of force - for example the 2007 testing of ASAT (anti-satellite) capabilities, and China’s well-publicized construction of a new anti-ship ballistic missile to counter American sea power. One might well believe that, by 2012, the PLA had decided to let the cat out of the bag and advertise its entry into the IW-wielding armies of the future. Newmeyer asks whether or not the situation might be more complex: “Does this mean that China has given up on ‘hiding its capabilities and biding its time’, confident that it can broadcast once-secret aspects of its defense posture? ...the answer is clearly no. What has changed is that the PLA now uses uncertainty as a substitute for concealment, where hiding capabilities is no longer practical or desirable.”¹⁴⁰ This strategic ambiguity is, I would argue, the latest evolution of the “Chinese Cult of Defense” - an appearance of peacefulness cultivated through restricted publications, occasionally obfuscated through specific and

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Newmeyer, 500.

directed shows of force. As a bonus, strategic ambiguity is actually preferential where cyberwarfare is concerned - in the world of anonymous network intrusion, how would one attribute responsibility for an attack without knowing whether an enemy is capable or interested in doing so?

The rapid growth and institutionalization of IW as *shashoujian* also has broader implications for today's PLA. Cloaked in the "Cult of Defense", one might well ask whether PLA leaders might still be deterred from offensive military action if they recognized the informational superiority of an enemy. Analysts of the 16th party congress concluded otherwise: "although China's leading military strategists and scholars recognize the relative inferiority of PLA weapons and hardware, it is important to note that this acknowledgment is not consistent with their judgments about China's ability to prevail against a superior military adversary *in an information age war*."¹⁴¹ Again, though it is difficult to penetrate the veil of strategic ambiguity, IW seems to have gained widespread priority and respect under Hu Jintao. Moreover, the PLA after the 16th party congress seemed substantially more predisposed to consider modernization towards and usage of IW as a central strategy. The 4th-generation leaders who had still largely resided on the fringe during the Jiang Zemin era now had more power, and fewer aging advocates of PW and LW to contend with in doctrinal debates.

The last item made clear during the Hu Jintao era is not the 'what' or 'how' of PLA IW focus, but the 'where'. As early as July 2002, Pentagon reports to Congress

¹⁴¹ Scobell, *Civil-Military Change*, 334.

pointed out that China's military was developing strategies and tactics to use 'surprise, deception, and shock' in any opening military campaign, while 'exploring coercive strategies' designed to bring Taiwan to terms quickly.¹⁴² For all intents and purposes, IW as *shashoujian* seems to have neatly solved this problem. A PLA strategic conference on Taiwanese reunification put it thusly:

The foreign assessment that currently China does not have the ability to invade Taiwan is not correct...In comparing military strengths, not only the extent of modernization of one's weaponry, but also the use of tactics, one's mastery of weaponry, and the morale of the troops must be included. When all the factors, *including a certain degree of U.S. involvement*, are considered, the PLA can win the war without any doubt. Besides, the PLA has a *shashoujian* unknown to outsiders.¹⁴³

Putting the pieces together, it becomes clear that the PRC had, in essence, "doubled down" on its bet to win an asymmetric information war against the United States in at least one scenario. Even more alarming, the development of secret projects and reinterpretation of ancient stratagems had firmly convinced the PLA of its unique "edge" in such a conflict...provided, of course, that it began with a preemptive, swift, and devastating blow from the assassin's mace. The continued evolution of IW doctrine in this direction underscores the ability for cultural elements to drive China's relationship to its security environment – *shashoujian* as a concept was an

¹⁴² Wei-cheng Wang, 2.

¹⁴³ Scobell, *Civil-Military Change*, 337.

equally devastating rhetorical weapon for the Chinese generals who were using it to win their internal “battle over notions”. The developing characteristics of Chinese IW theory, far from being motivated solely by US posture and geopolitical constraints, were also being shaped by the forces of history.

VII: The PLA under Xi Jinping

The rise to power of Xi Jinping appears, at the present time, to have inaugurated an age of uncertainty, tension, and finger-pointing in the politics of information warfare. Fear of an IW campaign waged against China led the PLA to conduct drills simulating everything from information attacks on strategic nuclear weapons to non-state actor distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks throughout 2012. These fears proved justified: DDoS, a devastating and rapid method of denying access to network resources, attained worldwide fame when the “hactivist” collective Anonymous threatened to initiate “operation global blackout” in 2012 via a DDoS attack against the internet’s 13 root DNS servers, revealing a key vulnerability that could cripple access worldwide. The United States continued to expand its own IW programs, building on the wildly successful shutdown of Iran’s nuclear reactors using the Stuxnet virus in 2010. “Child” viruses and variants of Stuxnet, among them the notorious “Flame” virus, have been discovered actively conducting surveillance in Arab countries as of 2014. In many cases, IW doctrine thus seems to be being operationalized to devastating effect as network-based cyberwarfare. Xi’s ascendance coincided with the “squaring off” of the DOD and PLA over cyber issues; this was driven home by the May 2013 revelation that the DOD suffered “staggering losses of system design information” at the hands of Chinese hackers, including plans for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, lynchpin of American air

superiority.¹⁴⁴ In response, Xi created and headed off a brand-new National Security Council of the PRC, giving himself “significantly more power than predecessors Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin”, comparable to the indomitable Deng Xiaoping.¹⁴⁵ *Unrestricted Warfare’s* predictions for a radically open battlefield and constant war seem to be coming true ahead of their time - as the authors ominously put it, “the war god’s face has become indistinct.”¹⁴⁶

With the concerted effort to obfuscate internal PLA debate over IW doctrine in full swing, obtaining rhetorical sources has proven ever more difficult. Trusting in Michael Swaine, prolific PLA-watcher and author of previously cited *The Role of the Chinese Military in National Security Policymaking*, we can use his 2013 study in *China Leadership Monitor* on Chinese views of cybersecurity to chart a course through the evolving landscape of IW. One reason Swaine can claim reliability is his effort to isolate “authoritative” sources and preference their rhetoric above others. We made the same choice in section 2, based on the idea that the rhetoric powerful actors within the PLA was the best predictor of the Chinese debate more generally (or the most “authoritative”). Swaine mirrors our choice, attempting to focus on PLA elders who are well-connected to the policymaking process.

Unfortunately, such authoritative sources in China “do not provide a detailed definition of cybersecurity.”¹⁴⁷ Instead, they talk in general terms about the growth

¹⁴⁴ Nakashima, 1.

¹⁴⁵ Bodeen, 1.

¹⁴⁶ Qiao and Wang, 36.

¹⁴⁷ Swaine, *Chinese Views on Cybersecurity*, 2.

of the internet and the reliance of the nation-state on information-based structures, a continuance of the Hu-era policy of strategic ambiguity. PRC organs like the MOFA and Ministry of Defense often repeat the line that China is “a major victim of hacker attacks.” The PLA in particular is actually proactive about releasing statistics about cyber intrusions it claims to be suffering, in large part to rebut foreign claims that it is already engaged in a campaign of network-based IW.¹⁴⁸ The regime also seems concerned with the potential for IW to be waged against China’s citizenry, negatively impacting social and political norms. Some nonauthoritative sources have coined the term “cybersovereignty” (网络主权, *wangluo zhuquan*) to describe the future of sovereign “virtual territory” on the internet. This idea extends China’s disposition towards sovereignty-respecting and noninterventionist politics into the information realm. A *People’s Daily* (*renmin ribao*, a well-known state mouthpiece) editorial in 2013 asserted “[i]t has become a consensus worldwide that government should play the role of the Internet ‘administrator’ and set examples in Internet governance because it possesses the most management resources and management tools.”¹⁴⁹

This viewpoint is a strategically useful one for the PRC, for several reasons. First, it benefits China as a whole to align politically with the bloc of countries currently forwarding a state-centric approach to internet regulation (that group includes Russia, India, and many of the Arab League states). The opposing coalition

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 4.

(The United States, the EU, and others) is pushing for continued private and non-aligned management of key parts of the internet, such as domain registration (DNS), which matches up Internet Protocol (IP) addresses with website names to form a connection. The suggested alternative to the US-based ICANN (the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), which deals with these crucial functions, is a state-specific approach mediated by the UN that would potentially give nations substantially more control over the hosting of content within their sovereign “cyberterritory.” Thus, while the debate about internet regulation rages on, China has a key opportunity to delegitimize the United States’ laissez-faire approach and promote its political and ideological objectives in one stroke.

Second, *wangluo zhuquan* is uniquely beneficial to the PLA. As a continuation of the “Chinese Cult of Defense”, *wangluo zhuquan* would provide for increased and centralized PLA control of information resources and technologies under the rubric of “defending China’s sovereign territory” or “maintaining social harmony”, familiar themes of the traditional strategic culture. This has led to the curious phenomenon of PLA writers expressing concern for the social and moral health of the nation - one *jiefangjun bao* (*Liberation Army Daily*) article in 2013 states that “raising the ideological and moral standard of the citizens [is] a basic standard for achieving the unification of cyber freedom and cyber self-discipline.”¹⁵⁰ “Cyber freedom” (网络自由, *wangluo ziyou*) is a suitably innocuous term, though one cannot help but wonder what it means to “unify” such freedom, especially given that the first character in the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 42.

word “freedom” (自) means “self.” PLA writers have tacked closely with the mainstream PRC opposition to perceived US control of the internet; Major General Wu Jianguo complained in 2013 that its technological advantage allows the US to “display its fist of hegemony everywhere.”¹⁵¹ As such, the PLA can use *wangluo zhuquan* as a justification for increasing its capacity to wage IW while simultaneously galvanizing domestic and international opposition to US information dominance.

Overall, the outward response strategy of the PRC - and the PLA in particular - seems to be “accuse the opponent of whatever he blames you for.” In response to American criticism of Chinese internet censorship, PLA writers indignantly point to “PRISM gate” (the 2013 revelation that the NSA digitally surveils American citizens) and US condemnation of WikiLeaks as equally if not more problematic.¹⁵² When the NSA counters by saying that its cyber surveillance and IW activities are only targeted at foreign terrorists (now proven demonstrably false), one writer at the Academy of Military Sciences used the much-vaunted American value of privacy to fire off his own riposte: “the privacy right of the American people is treated with due respect . . . that of the people of other countries is not as important.”¹⁵³ Non-authoritative military sources go even further, accusing the US of engaging in a preemptive IW campaign that “could cause unforeseeable disastrous consequences

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 6.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 7.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 8.

for human society.”¹⁵⁴ Finally, PLA writers have begun to not-so-subtly remind the United States that they are aware of its vulnerabilities: current authors obliquely describe IW as “not in America’s own interests”, since its information systems “could turn out to be low-hanging fruit in the face of cyber attacks”¹⁵⁵. These warnings are characteristic of a PLA that feels deserving of respect and power parity in an increasingly IW-dominated security environment.

Can any sense be made of this blame game? Swaine believes that many of China’s general claims about the IW environment are demonstrably false, with those originating from the military most egregiously so. First, let us assess China’s claim that the US has essentially sparked an arms race, forcing the PLA to develop (“purely defensive”) IW capability in response. Swaine rightly brings up the classical security dilemma - how to distinguish offensive weapons from defensive ones? Information warfare, especially anonymized forms of network warfare such as DDOS attacks, have perhaps the least distinction between “offense” and “defense” of any kind of military action. Moreover, the decades of PLA discourse analysed in previous chapters of this essay are strong evidence to the contrary - though undoubtedly inspired by the Gulf War, the PLA aggressively pursued IW of its own accord, especially to solve particular security problems unique to China (i.e. Taiwan). With regard to the battle over who “owns” the internet, PLA writers have also neglected to do their homework. Though ICANN originated in the US, it does not control network content or provide connections, and it is regulated by several international

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 9.

NGOs. Moreover, as Chinese IW scholars have critiqued the placement of most of the internet's root DNS servers (critical infrastructure which resolves hostnames and "guides" users to websites) in the United States, they have been busy *building their own network* of root servers to achieve exactly the same (illusory) stranglehold.¹⁵⁶

Within DOD-PLA relations, the PLA's categorical and absolute denial of current offensive IW efforts are similarly suspect, given that they are nearly all based on the defense that "IP addresses can be faked" (thus making it impossible to attribute network attacks and absolving China of responsibility). Swaine's private correspondence with Mulvenon indicates that "The U.S. government has presented [to Beijing] highly detailed technical evidence of the Chinese origins of intrusions...[including] very precise attribution of a number of high-profile intrusions" that does *not* rely on IP addresses, erasing this alibi.¹⁵⁷ Mulvenon would know, given his position as Vice President of Defense Group, Inc., a private sector firm contracted by the DOD to examine cybersecurity breaches. PLA attempts to explain the known components of its IW programs as "purely defensive" also fall by the wayside, given the May 2011 formation of a "Cyber Blue Team" that regularly participates in PLA military exercises.¹⁵⁸ Our previous examinations of Jiang and Hu's array of secret IW projects seems to suggest that the non-falsifiable idea of "defense-only" has been retroactively applied to offensive programs, quite in line with the "Cult of Defense."

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 15.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 27. Taken from Swaine's footnote 84.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 9.

Swaine's survey of CPC and PLA commentary on modern network warfare is both a cogent rhetorical analysis and a worthy bookend for our lengthy study. Cutting through the cacophony of warrantless debate over IW doctrine and development, a chorus of voices comes into focus - the "Chinese Cult of Defense", with the PLA as its point of origin, remains committed to operate under its *parabellum* interpretation of an anarchic world while telegraphing traditional preferences for harmony and defensive restraint. In Swaine's words:

The apparent unanimity of support within China for the official position suggests it is unlikely that internal debates exist over this issue that could possibly provide an opening for a change in the Chinese position. As a result, it is very likely that little significant progress will occur in at least the near to medium term in developing a common international approach to cybersecurity, and that Beijing will continue to develop and utilize cybercapabilities against other states, for both national security and economic purposes.¹⁵⁹

We take issue with only one aspect of Swaine's conclusions - his decision that a relative lack of apparent doctrinal debate equals little possibility for change. We have already established that our perceived lack of debate could be quite far from the truth - indeed, the policy of strategic ambiguity established under Hu Jintao is perhaps designed to convince erstwhile researchers that China's IW debates are all but over.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 16.

Instead, we should be more careful. Realizing that the potential for ancient concepts to be dredged up and brought to bear in the “battle over notions” (visible or not) remains high, we should not foreclose the potential for Chinese IW doctrine to radically shift in a new direction. For this precise reason, further rhetorical analysis and attempts to penetrate the veil of strategic ambiguity are vital. For the time being, firmly convinced that offensive use of IW is just (*yi zhan*), effective (*shashoujian*), and appropriately Chinese (*quan bian*), the ascendant fourth generation of PLA writers and and thinkers under Xi Jinping will continue to keep an information war to defend China’s *wangluo zhuquan* well within the realm of possibility. Without appreciating the potential for strategic culture to continually influence policy, we could very well miss the warning signs that this possibility is becoming reality.

VIII: Patterns and Implications

Having analytically traversed 60-plus years of PLA rhetoric in roughly as many pages, we may now take a moment to catch our breath and reflect on the goals of this study. With a discerning eye towards the more influential speakers and thinkers of the PLA, what rhetorical trends have we observed? How did our lengthier and more focused study shed new light on existing scholarship, such as Ferguson's own thesis? Let us begin at the beginning, reviewing our findings.

The PLA under Mao Zedong established enduring rhetorical trends, with the chief among them being the doctrine of people's war (*renmin zhanzheng*). Mao's cosmopolitan strategic background lent PW a strong realist bent, coupled with a Marxist-Leninist preference for violent revolution and class struggle. As a result, just war (*yi zhan*) initially came to be defined as virtually any war conducted against a stronger adversary, while the ancient idea of winning the battle without fighting at all (*buzhan er quren zhi bing*) was disparaged as an inaccurate representation of history. While preemptive measures were frequently deemed necessary, Mao also established the "Chinese Cult of Defense", which *nominally* favored diplomacy over war (*xianli houbing*). Fortunately, wars against class enemies were always defensive, and therefore just. Defeating a superior enemy (*yi ruo sheng qiang*) was achieved through a doctrine of absolute flexibility (*quan bian*) and adherence to protracted guerrilla warfare. Though strategic culture was frequently subordinated

to the *parabellum* paradigm during this period, some concepts (such as *quan bian*) were used as legitimating and foundational ideas, rather than simply reinterpreted.

Deng Xiaoping's PLA modernized Mao's doctrinal ideas only so far as were necessary, preferring to inflate the "Cult of Defense" and provide Chinese forces more flexibility. By 1985, Mao's ideas about nuclear conflict with the Soviets (*zaoda, dada, dahezhanzheng*) were reputed, and the PLA focused on the potential for border conflicts as per the new doctrine of local war (*jubu zhanzheng*). Deng emphasized speedy conflict over protracted PW, with RRU units formed to take advantage of critical first battles. This extension of Mao's thinking was relevant because it showed the enduring power of cultural concepts like *quan bian* to drive doctrine in their own right – Deng did not direct the PLA to modernize exclusively because of a changing security situation, but also because he wanted to push *quan bian* to new levels for its own sake. Outwardly, the PLA concentrated on projecting a peaceful image, recycling and reinforcing Mao's *xianli houbing*. New terms like active defense (*zhudong fanyu*) and defensive counterattack (*ziwei huanji*) managed to rationalize purely offensive actions (such as invading Vietnam in 1979) as defensive, utilizing Mao's definition of *yi zhan*. Finally, language created to justify a war opposing Soviet hegemony (*fandui baquanzhuyi*) was repurposed to indicate the United States as unjust.

Jiang Zemin's tenure as CMC Chairman was initially marked by the Gulf War, which touched off a flood PLA publications announcing an RMA (*junshi geming*) was in progress. Doctrinal heterogeneity was brewing, as the newly-coalesced RMA

school openly critiqued PW and LW or LWUMHTC advocates for failing to keep up with the times, often using elements of strategic culture to do so. IW (*xinxi zhan*) also definitively enters the vocabulary of PLA writers, attaining for the first time what Pillsbury called an “analytical focus.” RMA writers begin raiding DOD documents for definitions, as COSTIND held landmark meetings establishing IW as the root of the RMA and information dominance (*zhixinxi quan*) as the goal. The historic first publication of a PLA white paper in 1998 reveals that the “Cult of Defense” is still entrenched; it declares military modernization subordinate to economic prosperity and reiterates Mao’s no-preemptive-strike policy (*ren bu fan wo*). At the same time, the visionary Wang Pufeng urges exactly that, with his preference for active offense (*zhudong jingong*) over active defense as a way of employing *quan bian*. Wang also urges the PLA to begin obfuscating and hiding information from its enemies. IW becomes a uniquely attractive option to China, with its potential for synthesis with the “rich strategies of the east” (*dongfang moulue*). He proves definitively that China’s strategic culture can shape policy when influential military leaders take up its cause, by using terms like *quan bian* and *junshi geming* to craft a call to action.

By Hu Jintao’s ascension as paramount leader, the RMA school had taken center stage, with 4th-generation leaders replacing many PW and LW advocates. RMA writers dig up an ancient concept (*shashoujian*) and marry it to IW, thus creating a doctrine with widespread cultural relevance and appeal (and proving our thesis). Jiang’s outgoing act is to throw in with the RMA leaders and establish secret

programs to operationalize *shashoujian*, demonstrating the legitimacy the term comes to command and the way in which it will shape PLA attitudes towards IW. 21st-century IW is also framed as a neat solution to a decades-old propaganda war with Taiwan. As for the “Cult of Defense”, its cloaking effect on *parabellum* rhetoric intensifies. PLA journals yield guarded language and ambiguous terms like “potential energy” (*shineng*). By 2012, China’s eighth defense white paper comes out sounding like an entitled echo of its 1998 predecessor. Though still portrayed as peaceful, China now demands the right to utilize the PLA abroad, while reviving anti-hegemonic (*baquanzhuyi*) language to take a swipe at the US and shift blame for a potential conflict away from China.

Though hampered by a lack of data on the Xi Jinping era, some trends are already clear. Endeavoring to cast Chinese cyberspace as sovereign territory (*wangluo zhuquan*), China hits upon a rhetorical device with which to oppose Western values of internet freedom. The idea of cyber-sovereignty becomes ideological ammunition in the battle to wrest control over key internet resources away from the United States, improving China’s chances at peacetime information dominance. Though PLA and PRC rhetoric are nearly indistinguishable by this point, some military writers go beyond the party line to remind the US that China is aware of the American “weak spot” on IW. In multiple ways, the “Cult of Defense” is used to construct a new image of China as a defenseless and peace-loving nation beset by a hypocritical US IW campaign. The Cult claims that the US started an arms race to which China had to respond, though PLA rhetoric proves China had an ulterior

motive (Taiwan). Denying responsibility for the cyberattacks perpetrated against the DOD in 2013, it also refuses to acknowledge clear evidence that China is at least as offensive in its IW usage as the United States.

Ferguson's analysis, though limited in scope, makes predictions consistent with our study. First, in order to satisfy the requirements of the "Cult of Defense" but maintain an offensive potential, "the definition of a just war may expand to include those offensive actions taken to protect Chinese cyberspace, with or without provocation."¹⁶⁰ The weaponization of *wangluo zhuquan* is precisely this definitional expansion, continuing the trend of reinterpretations of *yi zhan* we have seen under every Chairman of the CMC. Second, in the future China "could simply act when necessary to eliminate a source of IW threat beyond China's borders, and find a means to justify the action after the fact."¹⁶¹ Again, *wangluo zhuquan* seems geared specifically to justify this type of preemptive war against an enemy violating China's cyber-sovereignty. Third, "when China develops the remainder of its IW capability...it will use it."¹⁶² In 2013, 11 years after Ferguson published, China had sufficiently developed and subsequently deployed network-based warfare to steal US military secrets. Going forward, new IW methods are highly likely to be tested - especially with the case of Taiwan, where the PLA believes it has a higher rate of success.

¹⁶⁰ Ferguson, 51.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 49.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 51.

Despite our study having independently confirmed that these predictions still hold true, Ferguson drew one conclusion that we have an obligation to refute. That would be her assertion of a largely unidirectional relationship between strategic culture and the PLA debate about security. In this view, the RMA caused changes to the canon of Chinese strategic culture, *not* the other way around – PLA authors only utilized terms drawn from the traditional strategic culture to explain their arguments or hide their offensive nature. Ferguson makes a serious misstep in stating that the expansion of PLA IW capabilities necessary for her predictions to come true would “require a conscious effort to change Chinese culture from one that reveres the theoretical to one that reveres technology.”⁴ Yet we have emphatically demonstrated that a reverence for technology is not mutually exclusive with a reverence for ancient strategic theory - the PLA continued to revive, reinterpret and be guided by strategic culture *even as* it made Ferguson’s predictions come true. The strategic classics and the works of the first paramount leaders had multiple roles to play, and were not shoved aside in favor of technological modernization wholesale.

In addition to serving the function of ‘shrouding’ new *parabellum* policies in familiar rhetoric, terms like *quan bian* and *yi ruo sheng qiang* exercised power in their own right that ultimately pushed China to study and utilize IW *where it might not otherwise have done so*. Take the case of *shashoujian*, for example: a two thousand year old legend about a mace-wielding general became a vehicle through which IW attained widespread recognition and respect. Such elements of the strategic canon affect the *way* in which China pursued and will continue to pursue

IW as a weapon or stratagem (*bing*). If we accepted Ferguson's conclusion, we might well expect China to adhere tightly to the US path of IW development, all the while spouting traditional axioms for no reason other than to disguise its 'copycat' policy. This is not what we observed – in fact, we saw the power of rhetoric drive doctrine more than once. With the case of *shashoujian*, for example, a unique mixture of cultural components – “winning the battle without fighting”, the perceived efficacy of the *shoujian* as weapon – drove policy and won an ideological battle within the PLA. Jiang Zemin eventually wholeheartedly converted to an ardent supporter of IW as a result of these references to strategic culture, going so far as to cut funding to other programs in favor of explicitly funding special *shashoujian* programs.

Rather than Ferguson's model, this study proves that we should embrace a cyclical relationship between Chinese strategic culture and technological development, wherein ancient and modern texts alike do not necessarily lose their capacity to be relevant as a result of the RMA. Because of the continued force carried by culturally-linked rhetoric and the reverence that PLA authors still show for the classics, we should continue to look first to their discourse as a predictor of trends in doctrine. Critical security should remain a valuable model for evaluating the impact of those trends. Ultimately, our study proves that strategic culture is inextricably involved in the PLA's debate about information warfare, at once shaping and being shaped by the continuing battle over notions. Though the war god's face has become indistinct, his voice can guide us to the truth - if we have the rhetorical tools to listen.

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