

**Strategic Liminality in the U.S.-China Security Dilemma: How Conflicting
Philosophies of World Order Can Establish Points of Productive Cooperation**

by

Morgan Thomas

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in Political Science

Examining Committee:

Paul Evans, Public Policy and Global Affairs
Supervisor

Arjun Chowdhury, Political Science
Supervisory Committee Member

Supervisory Committee Member

Additional Examiner

Additional Supervisory Committee Members:

Supervisory Committee Member

Supervisory Committee Member

Abstract

During the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China held in October of 2017, General Secretary Xi Jinping stated that “the military should make all-out efforts to become a world-class force by 2050 and to strive for the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”¹ The nature of what Xi means by such a rejuvenation is up for debate and will be the question driving this analysis. The main objective of this thesis is to home in on the ideational influences that Xi Jinping factors into his strategic calculus as they derive meaning from conceptions of world order. The first chapter of this thesis examines a few of the narratives and philosophical discourses that shape and influence both Chinese and American understandings of world order.

I have analyzed Xi Jinping’s speeches through an interpretative discourse analysis to parse out points of continuity and discontinuity in Chinese military strategy as it stems from tradition. As Western strategists, more specifically American security policy makers, attempt to make sense of Xi Jinping’s intentions, I argued that concepts of world order play a growing role in Chinese strategic narrative, preferences and culture. Following the work of Alastair Johnston and Andrew Scobell, I contended that the PRC employs a bifurcated strategic culture in which Confucian benevolent virtue is partnered with a *realpolitik* strand, both of which stem from Chinese history and visions of a proper world order.

This thesis lastly examined security policy implications and the proper steps the Pentagon should take given the strategic situation at hand. The extent to which U.S. security officials wish to gauge and understand China’s kinetic military action as it follows PRC grand

¹ Zhao Lei, “PLA to be world-class force by 2050,” *China Daily*, October 27, 2017

strategic rhetoric matters greatly for future Sino-American relations. For strategic diplomatic negotiations to occur over highly contested flash-points in the Indo-Asia-Pacific, the US needs to recalibrate its understanding of Chinese strategic culture and intentions as they are influenced by historical and philosophical assessments.

Lay Summary:

China's economic rise has necessitated Beijing to reinforce and craft a fighting force able to protect its interests and, if necessary, win wars. This thesis argues that China's military buildup and America's responding uncertainty can be better understood through an assessment of how both Washington and Beijing form their strategic preferences and culture out of past experiences of war. Moreover, by looking at deployment of military forces as an indicator of what each state views as a proper world order, each side can better understand one another's intentions. This requires an examination of the philosophical and tactical elements that make up what Alastair Johnston has referred to as China's strategic culture. Though the U.S. and China maintain diverging ideas about a "true" order of things, such a disagreement need not manifest in direct war fighting. Escaping the strategic uncertainty requires, instead, a dialogue on "first order" questions that seem most relevant to both American and Chinese strategic preference.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, and independent work done by the author, Morgan O. Thomas.

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Dedication

To Lisa and Richard Thomas, my most loving and supportive parents, the youth of Kinmen Island, and those working diligently to bridge the intellectual gaps between the United States and China.

They were firmly convinced that his true goal, whatever he might tell them, would always lie in what he did not tell them. And they themselves, when they spoke, said many things, but never said what their true goal was.

-Leo Tolstoy²

Chapter 1: Introduction

The United States is suffering from a grand strategic malaise. Hal Brands lamented that, “there are growing doubts about whether this strategy and its intellectual pillars remain as robust as they were a quarter-century ago.”³ With a blunted military power projection capability and a dwindling arsenal of soft power recognition, the U.S. feels contested in myriad international domains. Of particular concern to American defense officials is the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and General Secretary Xi Jinping’s efforts to modernize the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) capabilities and reframe its command and control structures. The 2018 American National Defense Strategy (NDS), for example, articulates that “the central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security is the *reemergence of long term, strategic competition* by what the National Security Strategy classifies as revisionist powers. It is increasingly clear that China and Russia want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model—gaining veto authority over other nations’ economic, diplomatic, and security decisions.”⁴ In particular, the U.S. Defense community appears worried about a China that can interrupt American access and ability to

² Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 340.

³ Hal Brands, Peter Feaver, William Inboden & Paul D. Miller, “Critical Assumptions and American Grand Strategy,” *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments*, 2017; p. 9.

⁴ United States Department of Defense, “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America,” (Washington D.C.: USGPO, 2018), p. 2.

conduct military operations and maritime trade central to upholding a world order from which Washington benefits. The NDS goes on to maintain that:

As China continues its economic and military ascendance, asserting power through an all-of-nation long-term strategy, it will continue to pursue a military modernization program that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future.⁵

America appears to be shifting to a debate over guiding principles that constitute a vision of world order contested between peer competitors.⁶ The classical realist Hans Morgenthau articulated two core points of contention between the U.S. and China on the basis of world and regional order in the Pacific. He stated that “China has been for at least a millennium a great power of a peculiar kind in that her outlook upon, and with the outside world have been different from those of other great powers.”⁷ With two highly divergent conceptions of how the world ought to be ordered at the upper echelons of their defense departments, the US and China are both materialistically and ideationally at odds. I argue that these diverging conceptualizations of world order serve to elevate tensions in the Sino-American security dilemma and act as justifications for an inevitable kinetic conflict.

Because many Western countries such as the US are implicitly influenced in their conceptions of order by a tradition of Western philosophy, whose arguments I will examine later, American officials are often quick to jump to the conclusion that China is a revisionist power, seeking to upend the liberal order in its entirety. This assessment is only partially true. A closer look at Chinese political philosophy tells a different tale, one in which China seeks pragmatic

⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

⁶ For example, see David B. Larter and Mark D. Faram, “Mattis eyes major overhaul of Navy deployments,” *Navy Times*, May 7, 2018. Also, shifting command and control in PACOM, see Tara Copp, “INDOPACOM, it is: US Pacific Command gets renamed,” *Military Times*, May 30, 2018.

⁷ Hans Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy For the United States* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1969), p. 189. Italics are the author’s.

and realistic answers to maintaining observable order while discarding elements Beijing deems inconsistent with the trends of history toward human progress. This contestation of ideas has the potential to, paradoxically, ease tensions between Beijing and Washington if taken seriously. As Paul Evans articulates “China needs explaining. This in turn will depend upon an open policy process that again mobilizes intellectual talent and practical expertise to give us a chance at getting global China right.”⁸

The military element of a conflict between the two states is far from assured. Instead, emphasis should be placed on a battle of ideas and concepts of how both countries will jockey for influence in a changing world. In fact, such a debate should be encouraged as it will bind both states intellectually and enforce the fact that each state’s strategic teleology is not mutually exclusive. That is, following the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, China and American strategic ennoblement must be drawn together in a liminal or middle-ground for reflective criticism geared toward an explanation of each state’s historical assumptions about order. Attempts to justify the validity of each side’s strategic claims as scientific or objective will serve only to silo China-American understanding of each other and exacerbate the ongoing security dilemma. In short, if order is the ultimate desire, both sides must seek understanding through an admission that neither side can transcend the perpetual historical process toward order and truth. As F.S.C. Northop puts it, “the two civilizations (the East and West) are shown to supplement and reinforce each other. They can meet, not because they are saying the same thing, but because they are

⁸ Paul Evans, *Engaging China: Myth, Aspiration, and Strategy in Canadian Policy from Trudeau to Harper* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), p. 102.

expressing different yet complementary things, both of which are required for an adequate and true conception of man's self and his universe.”⁹

Behind grand strategic language and security policy lies a landscape of historical and philosophical factors which feed into Chinese strategic preferences and use of military force. Alastair Johnston's and Andrew Scobell's work, for example, explores the ideational and historical influences on strategic culture and preferences. The **first section** of this paper will outline the ways in which ancient Chinese concepts of world order (*shijie zhixu*-世界秩序) affect, contextualize, and mold Xi's strategic thought and security policy.¹⁰ The chapter will explore various philosophical ideas about the nature of world order, justifications for warfare, and the manner in which such conceptions can serve as probative, explanatory variables for understanding strategic behavior and preferences between Washington and Beijing. By homing in on specific components in Chinese notions of world order and grand strategic logic, I will lay the groundwork for understanding whether or not such ideas play a supporting narrative role in on contemporary Chinese defense policy. I will assess the ideational effect of Chinese strategic culture on military modernization and deployment by examining the mechanisms and processes that contribute to a larger development of Chinese power maximizing behavior and understanding a trans-historical Chinese strategic culture.¹¹

⁹ F.S.C. Northop, *The Meeting of the East and West: An Inquiry Concerning World Understanding* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1946), p. 454-55.

¹⁰ J. Thomas Wren and M.J. Swatez, “The Historical and Contemporary Contexts of Leadership: A Conceptual Model,” in ed. J. Thomas Wren, *The Leader's Companion: Insights on Leadership Through the Ages* (New York: Free Press, 1995), p. 249.

¹¹ Alan M. Jacobs, “How Do Ideas Matter?: Mental Models and Attention in German Pension Politics” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2. (February 2009); Alan Jacobs, “Process Tracing the Effects of Ideas,” in ed. Andrew Bennett & Jeffrey Checkel, *Process Tracing From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

The **second chapter** will then explore Xi Jinping's speeches, particularly those mentioning China's great rejuvenation (*guojia fuxing*, 國家復興), the China Dream (*zhongguo meng*, 中國夢; 亞洲夢), and how China seeks to ensure its security (*guojia anquan*, 國家安全) through its own grand strategy (*da zhanlu*-大戰略). I have selected these speeches in a chronological fashion to assess the extent to which Xi's ideas have changed over time. In this section, I will parse out how ideational variables of a proper Chinese world order as explained in the first chapter are present or absent in Xi Jinping's speeches and rhetoric. Do defense policy and military capabilities follow Xi's purported grand strategic philosophy? In other words, do trans-historical ideas actually have a causal impact on how and why Xi Jinping uses PLA military assets? The importance of such an analysis rests in the conclusion of whether or not PLA deployment, movement, and use of force follows Xi's rhetoric. This study concludes that Xi's speech and Chinese defense policy promoting sophistication in PLA logistics, construction, and deployment diverge. The finding may point to continuity in Chinese strategic pragmatism rooted in Warring States Era stratagem.

Via ideational process tracing, we are able to test the validity of the claim that Xi Jinping is pursuing military modernization and expansion because of China's past strategic preferences and notions of a proper world ordering structure. As Jacobs maintains, *cognitive constructs are relatively resistant to change*, and we should therefore, "see evidence of relative stability over time in both actors' ideas and in the choices that are hypothesized to result from them."¹² This method of understanding, is not dissimilar from the work of a historian, whose task it is to

¹² Jacobs, "Process Tracing the Effects of Ideas," p. 57.

inquire into the past and elucidate why something occurred.¹³ What this chapter confirms is not dissimilar from Johnston and Scobell’s bifurcated understanding of Chinese grand strategy rooted largely in pragmatic military deployment and justified on moral philosophical grounds.

In the **final chapter**, I will offer an examination of the extent to which concepts of world order are continuous in both Xi’s rhetoric, the deployment of military assets and how China justifies its military presence. Specifically, I will provide a case study analysis of PLA Naval (PLAN) capabilities in relation to burgeoning Chinese militarization of its littoral and global waters. Making note of the continuities and divergences in Chinese historical strategic preferences, I will examine the extent to which Xi Jinping’s speeches justify PLA “active defense” policy on the basis of traditional ideas of world order and the imperative to maintain harmony. I have selected key actions within the maritime war fighting domain such as the observable expansion in Chinese island building in the South China Sea, investments in commercial port infrastructure abroad, defense budget allocation to specific offensive weapons capabilities such as nuclear powered aircraft carriers, and the quality and success of such technological research and development (R&D) for PLAN power projection.¹⁴

To conclude, the thesis will provide suggestions for how American defense officials can understand better Chinese intentions and defuse the ongoing security dilemma between Washington and Beijing. The analysis will underscore that cooperation and knowledge sharing between the two states ought to begin with a discussion of first-order questions about the

¹³ Andrew Bennet & Jeffrey T. Checkel, “Process Tracing: From Philosophical Roots to Bet Practices,” in ed. Andrew Bennett & Jeffrey Checkel, *Process Tracing From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 3-38, p. 7.

¹⁴ Mike Yeo, “China to Develop Its First Nuclear Powered Aircraft Carrier,” *Defense News*, March 1, 2018.

changing nature of leadership in global affairs.¹⁵ If the Pentagon can gauge more accurately the causal mechanisms driving Chinese statecraft and defense policy, American officials will be better equipped to come to points of understanding with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).¹⁶

¹⁵ Michael Green, *By More Than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in Asia Pacific Since 1783* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), p. 428.

¹⁶ Georg Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group-Affiliations* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1955).

Chapter 2: Philosophies of World Order and Teleology: How Ideas Shape National Defense Policy and Grand Strategy

The order that is most real is the order that is most unchanging—and that is not necessarily the order that is most easily seen.

-Jordan B. Peterson¹⁷

The structural power shift within the current liberal world order makes more likely a military conflict between states. The CCP, though working within the international Bretton Woods system, is crafting its own webs of international investment through infrastructure development projects to influence global power structures.¹⁸ Beijing's sense of how the world could be better ordered is fueling a tectonic movement away from US geostrategic hegemony.¹⁹ Indeed, Chinese developmental and security models offer alternatives to the liberal, Western made world order based heavily upon the Westphalian state system, democratic values, and the free exchange of goods.

China's growth and development are elements of what Chinese leadership refers to as the "China Dream." For Xi, this vision "embodies the long-cherished hope of several generations of the Chinese people, gives expression to the overall interests of the Chinese nation and the Chinese people, and represents the shared aspiration of all the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation."²⁰ Chinese interests are expanding beyond Beijing's traditional, regional sphere of influence. As analyst Tom Miller notes, the China Dream is "in the first place a domestic vision,

¹⁷ Jordan B. Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2018), p. 13.

¹⁸ China Power Team, "Where is China targeting its development finance?" *Center for Strategic and International Studies: China Power Project*. December 8, 2017.

¹⁹ Ye Zicheng, *Inside China's Grand Strategy: The Perspective from the People's Republic of China* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011).

²⁰ Xi Jinping, *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2014), p. 38.

but it is also intimately bound up with China's place in the world."²¹ Xi's ideas, in the very least, provide a sense in which the Chinese people are on a trajectory toward reestablishing themselves as a new center of world order. Key to concretizing such an ambition is both a strategic calculus that places a priority on the security of China's developmental interests (*fazhan liyi* - 發展利益). China is compelled for philosophic reasons to bring harmony to international affairs and set things right all under heaven (*tian xia* - 天下).²²

The CCP heeds the words of new strategic thinkers and advisors such as Wang Huning (王滄寧), Yan Xuetong (閻學通), and Liu Mingfu (劉明福) who advocate the development of PLA forces to solidify China's dream of national rejuvenation by 2049.²³ Wang Huning has been referred to as the "brain behind three supreme leaders:" Hu Jintao, Jiang Zemin, and Xi Jinping.²⁴ Part of China's development, for Wang, is the modernization and expansion of the PLA. Liu as well, for example, maintains that China must "wake up," and revitalize its "national spirit," to "reestablish the will to make China the global leader."²⁵ The great rejuvenation of China, Liu says, requires martial spirit, and the development of China's military so that no other power will seek to contend against China's rise.²⁶ Thus, the ongoing Chinese military

²¹ Tom Miller, *China's Asia Dream: Empire Building Along the New Silk Road* (London: Zed Books, 2017), p. 8.

²² See Chinese concepts of ritual and propriety (*li*-禮), Xue Li and Cheng Zhangxi, "What Might a Chinese World Order Look Like," *The Diplomat*, April 13, 2018.

²³ Edward Wong and Yufan Huang, "Col. Liu Mingfu on the U.S. and China as Rivals," *The New York Times*, October 8, 2015.

²⁴ Jane Perlez, "Behind the Scenes, Communist Strategist Presses China's Rise," *The New York Times*, November 13, 2017.

²⁵ Liu Ming Fu, *The China Dream: Great Power Thinking & Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era* (New York: CN Times Books, 2015), p. 20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

modernization process is but a component of reinstating Chinese formidability to achieve global respect and maintain order.

However, in the absence of what realists often refer to as an equality of power, the window of opportunity for bargaining, concessions, and other alternatives to war closes. If a state calculates that upholding a commitment to bargaining is less useful than the attempted destruction of a peer competitor, the state will increasingly consider the use of force as a viable option to secure its interests and safety. Following the logic of strategy, China is trapped in a paradox of whether or not it should risk pursuing its developmental interests abroad at the expense of creating heightened tensions with regional states and, more destabilizing, the US. As Edward Luttwak warns, “China’s leaders fully intend to persist in pursuing incompatible objectives: very rapid economic growth, *and* very rapid military growth, *and* a commensurate increase in global influence.”²⁷ From this, a conflicted strategy emerges in which China seeks to protect its growing developmental interests while also gradually expanding them, necessitating militarization for the purpose of “active defense,” (*jiji fangyu* - 積極防禦) of growing strategic, core interests.²⁸

Indeed, the Pentagon is reshaping American grand strategy to account for China’s rise and is anxious given the changing tides in global power structures. As Robert Powell points out, “large shifts in the distribution of power can lead to bargaining breakdowns and war. These shifts

²⁷ Edward N Luttwak, *The Rise of China vs. the Logic of Strategy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 95.

²⁸ Christopher H. Sharman, “China Moves Out: Stepping Stones Toward a New Maritime Strategy,” in ed. Phillip C. Saunders, *Center for The Study of Chinese Military Affairs: Institute for National Strategic Studies, China Strategic Perspectives, No. 9* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2015), p. 3.; See also Dean Cheng, “China’s Newest Defense White Paper Suggests Fundamental Change in Perspective,” *Heritage Foundation*, Updated July 6, 2015.

arise in the case of preventive war from underlying changes in the states' military capabilities because of, for example, differential rates of economic growth or political development."²⁹ His observation is particularly problematic in the case of the US-China relationship. Lyle Goldstein, a scholar of US-China military relations, warns that "given the strength of both powers, a military conflict today between China and the United States could resemble not so much the 'limited' Korean War but the even graver tragedy of World War I."³⁰

Given Powell's and Goldstein's assessments, it is necessary to assess how China goes about forming conceptions of participation in world order, how national interests emerge out of such historical ideas, and the manner in which the Chinese attach value to strategic vision. As Kevin Rudd noted, "the reality is that any country's worldview is as much the product of its domestic politics, economics, culture and historiography, as it is the product of the number of guns, tanks and bullets held by ourselves, and by those around us."³¹ When endogenous ideas within a state about the validity and truth of its conception of world order is disturbed, leaders feel anxious and are less willing to cooperate with the exogenous force enacting dissonance. But this process of reflection is not condemned only to breakdowns and preference for resolution via war fighting.

Political philosopher Eric Voegelin points out that, "when the order of a society flounders and disintegrates, the fundamental problems of political existence in history are more

²⁹ Robert Powell, "War as a Commitment Problem," *International Organization*, Vol. 60., No. 1 (Winter, 2006), pp. 169-203, p. 188.

³⁰ Lyle Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway: How to Defuse the Emerging US-China Rivalry* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015). p. 2

³¹ Hon. Kevin Rudd, "Understanding China's Rise Under Xi Jinping," *The Sinocism China Newsletter*, March 17, 2018.

apt to come into view than in periods of comparative stability.”³² To better understand political order, we must be aware of how politics shift in the absence of order and whether or not historically embedded ideas about use of force actually influence a country’s willingness to deploy or utilize its military when chaos rears its head. The next section will outline key literature on how ideas shift in this “middle ground” between order and disorder, rejecting a sort of strategic positivism.

1.1. Order and Chaos in Chinese Civilizational Society: Virtue and Unruliness

A great number of Western philosophers have explored the manner in which political action reflects specific value judgments about the nature of being and societal order. In other words, the state, as an object of analysis serves as a symbol of how humankind works through a dialogue on the relationship between social order and truth. These points of inquiry serve as a starting point for how we might understand Chinese historical consciousness, but also expose a very different Chinese understanding of history as a process of intuitive renewal and decay.³³

Political philosopher Eric Voegelin defines *order* as “the structure of reality as experienced as well as the attunement of man to an order that is not of his making.”³⁴ States, for Voegelin, embody and express some form of a narrative that expresses a “true” historically constituted order of things that symbolizes the merit of their societal progress.³⁵ Hans-Georg

³² Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), 2.

³³ Northrop, *The Meeting of the East and West* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1946).

³⁴ Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2006), p. 101. He refers to this as man’s relation to the cosmos. Perhaps a juxtaposition to *tian xia*, or all under *heaven*.

³⁵ Ian Johnson, *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2017); See too political theory of Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy and Others Studies* (New York: The Free Press, 1959).

Gadamer, a philosopher of hermeneutics, also makes note of the existence of a *historically effected consciousness*, whereby “understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as a participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated.”³⁶ A society’s perceived *telos* or universal *geist* crafts specific, geopolitical and domestic assumptions about what is best for a nation and perhaps for the world.

In what Leo Strauss refers to as a form of *politeia*, society is participating in “an activity which is directed toward some goal.”³⁷ Undergirding the notion of “order” is some sense in which humans, as participants in a shared society, form a knowledge relationship with the validity or truth of a social structure or system. These elements of order imply that there exists a form of continuity in civilizational *logos* and an understanding of a nation’s specific philosophical, cosmological ideas in relation to outside peoples.³⁸ The philosophical conceptions of order and chaos provide a barometer for the CCP’s determination to maintain harmony under specific historical pressures that make Chinese grand strategy distinct by its own experiences. China’s interpretation of its history and its situatedness in time is indeed bound by similar reflexive capacities that Voegelin, Strauss, Gadamer, and Kissinger bring up, but the observable means by which China pursues order is much different. Maintaining order (*ling- 令*) as opposed to disorder (*bu zhi - 不治*) in the ancient Chinese conception presumes its own monistic *telos* different from “the West” even if the pathways to reestablishing observable “harmony” are diverse.

³⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London & New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 295.

³⁷ Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy and Others Studies* (New York: The Free Press, 1959), p. 34.

³⁸ Voegelin’s conception of cosmions or little worlds. Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, p. 154.

Henry Kissinger speaks to this point by maintaining that “[w]orld order describes the concept held by a region or *civilization* about the nature of just arrangements and the distribution of power thought to be applicable to the entire world.”³⁹ China, under Xi Jinping, is placed in a conflicted position as the PRC is forced to come to terms with an understanding of itself as both a historically constituted civilization and a state within the European made Westphalian State System. Traditionally, Chinese emperors sought to fulfill the mandate of heaven (*tian ming* - 天命), an indicator of the extent to which a ruler’s authority was justified by observable social harmony. Kissinger clarifies further that the “Emperor was treated as a figure of cosmic dimensions and the linchpin between the human and the divine. His purview was not a sovereign state of ‘China’—that is, the territories immediately under his rule—but “All Under Heaven,” of which China formed the central, civilized part: ‘The Middle Kingdom,’ (*zhongguo* - 中國) inspiring and uplifting the rest of humanity.”⁴⁰ As the Middle Kingdom, or the central states, the ruler over China had the imperative to chastise the incorrigibly wicked, unruly, and those who lacked virtue (*xiao ren* - 小人) to sustain harmony. In other words, China’s “goodness,” and virtuous culture would attract foreigners (*waiguo ren* - 外國人) to the correct, benevolent Chinese way of being (*dao* - 道).

There is a moral philosophical and historical battle of ideas bound up in the contestation of order between Washington and Beijing, both ambivalent about their leadership roles in the international space. As Aaron Friedberg states, these divisions “amplify the imperatives of power

³⁹ Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York, Penguin Books, 2014), p. 9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

politics, making the Americans even more suspicious and aggressive in their attitudes toward China.”⁴¹ Beijing’s idea of “order,” indeed, renders much differently than an American one that demands the prerequisite of democratization and uninterrupted access to Pacific maritime trade routes. For the Chinese, it is America that is the true disturber of civilizational order that must be reestablished. And this realization is one that may in fact necessitate a restructuring of international institutions or, if pushed far enough, the use of military force to set things right in a chaotic world (*boluanfanzheng* - 撥亂反正) based on a moral imperative to maintain harmony.

1.2. Historical Trends in Ancient Chinese Grand Strategy and Use of Military Force

An investigation of Chinese history stretching back to the rise of the Zhou dynasty over the Shang (1046-256 B.C.E) and the strategic thinkers (*bingjia* - 兵家) that emerged during the late Spring and Autumn Period (771-476 B.C.E) show that Chinese rulers and officials struggled between a decision to employ cultural uprightness (*wen* - 文) or martial prowess (*wu* - 武) to achieve political and geostrategic ends.⁴² Indeed, Ancient Chinese notions of just war and its conduct reflected a philosophical interpretation of truth and power as both manifested in war and statecraft. In reference to the Zhou Sage Kings Wen and Wu, Chinese military culture (*junshi wenhua* - 軍事文化)⁴³ is made up of myriad intellectual traditions which flow into a layered doctrine of when and why martial force should be used to resolve disputes and maintain order in

⁴¹ Aaron Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), p. 134.

⁴² Outlined in Jiang Tai Gong (姜太公), *Six Secret Teachings* (太公六韜), in ed. Ralph D. Sawyer, *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

⁴³ Johnston also notes that the Chinese notion of a “strategic value system,” (*zhanlue jiazhi guan* - 戰略價值觀) could be more fitting in the Western understanding of Chinese strategic culture.

Chinese society. In this section, I've selected reigning ideas as observable causal mechanisms from different philosophical schools, each of which had distinct notions about the relationship between order and its maintenance by use of force.

During the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, political and social ordering of the Zhou dynasty began to shift and decay. A reconceptualization of violence and combat led to a change in the ruling hierarchy and state formation. Historian David Graff underscores that “as the power of the Zhou kings waned. . . war became an increasingly dominate feature of the cultural and political landscape.”⁴⁴ Indeed, the late Spring and Autumn period saw a distinct pivot from the old ways of the Eastern Zhou warrior aristocracy who revered the honor of limited war. As historian Mark Edward Lewis further clarifies, “this new organization and interpretation of violence allowed the Warring States Chinese to develop a new understanding of the structure of human society and of the natural world.”⁴⁵ When “total war” emerged, the traditional aspects of noble and virtuous war fighting disintegrated in the wake of the garrison state whose sole purpose was to consolidate and project power over neighboring states. Rulers now cared most of all for the survival and preservation of their state. Self preservation and the anarchic interstate structure of the Warring States Era placed a higher value on a political philosophy known as Legalism.

The emerging Legalist ideas on warfare influenced by the work of Shang Yang (商鞅), Han Feizi (韓非子), Wei Liao Zi (尉繚子), Wu Zi (吳子) and Guan Zhong (管仲), coined the reigning paradigm on just war doctrine of the time. Their ideological domination came, in part,

⁴⁴ David Graff, “The Chinese Concept of Righteous War” in *The Prism of Just War*, ed. Howard Hensel (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 195.

⁴⁵ Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York, 1990) p. 53-54.

due to the self-preservationist attitudes of the Warring States period which selected and preferred such stratagems. Lord Shang of Qin, for example, advocated the consolidation of military force with the purpose of defeating, conquering, and absorbing rivaling states into the Qin sphere of influence.⁴⁶ Lord Shang's ideas, encapsulated in the book that bears his name (*Shang Jun Shu* - 商君書), emphasized the virtue of the strong over the weak and the martial indoctrination of the entire Qin state. Graff summarizes Legalist conceptions of just war well, stating that "wars were to be waged for more than defensive purposes; aggression leading to territorial aggrandizement and the enhancement of state power was a positive good, and any strong state that failed to wage aggressive war upon its neighbors could hardly avoid decadence and dismemberment."⁴⁷ In turn, a state could only survive with a robust economy and a strong military (*fuguo qiangbing*-富國強兵).⁴⁸ Such was the Chinese iteration of offensive realism and just war for the maintenance of societal order in the face of burgeoning chaos.

Nonetheless, strains of Confucian philosophy of war can be found in the works of numerous strategic thinkers of the late Spring and Autumn Era and Warring States period. Stratagem of the period coming out of the 100 Schools of Thought (*zhuzi baijia* -諸子百家) such as the works of Jiang Taigong (姜太公), the Sima Fa (司馬法), and Sunzi Bingfa (孫子兵法), reflected the growing complexity of civil-military affairs and the manner in which the emperor was expected to maintain order all under heaven. For adherents of Confucian doctrine, the use of

⁴⁶ Edward L. Dreyer, "Continuity and Change," in ed. David A. Graff & Robin Higham, *A Military History of China* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2012), p. 23.

⁴⁷ David Graff, "The Chinese Concept of Righteous War" in *The Prism of Just War*, ed. Howard Hensel (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 197.

⁴⁸ Ralph D. Sawyer, *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p. 191.

military force was justified only in the event that petty people proved incorrigibly wicked and needed to be disciplined for their vulgarity. More simply put, war was acceptable *as long as the moral blame could be attached to the enemy*. If order all under heaven was to be harmonious, commanders had the imperative to set things right on the battlefield. When chastising one's enemy, Confucian texts implore commanders to either fight limited wars or obtain victory through means other than fighting. War itself was indicative of the ruler's inability to maintain order under heaven and was thus a sign of decaying virtue and strategic weakness. Indeed, followers of Confucian doctrine were quick to assert that commanders should not take joy in battle. War was "a necessary evil."⁴⁹

As these different ideas about the nature and conduct of war converged, the emerging paradigm of the righteous war (*yizhan* - 義戰) contained elements of both Confucian virtues of restraint and Legalist *realpolitik* military posturing and organization. Both strands produced a distinct *will* and a definition of a *right* cause for use of force. The Chinese military arm has continued to refer back to both the Confucian and Legalist strands of strategic preference, harnessing the orthodox use of military force (*zheng*- 正) alongside the unorthodox (*qi*-奇) in battle, the spiritedness of the Chinese people (*qi*-氣), all while focusing force on the enemy's emptiness (*kong*-空) rather than its fullness (*shi*- 實) to take advantage of the strategic configuration of power (*shi*-勢).⁵⁰ As these causal process observations show, Chinese ideas

⁴⁹ Edward L. Dreyer, "Continuity and Change," in ed. David A. Graff & Robin Higham, *A Military History of China* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2012), p. 22.

⁵⁰ See, for example, the Chinese employment of A2/AD capabilities. Richard A. Bitzinger, "Third Offset Strategy and Chinese A2/AD Capabilities," *Center for New American Security*, June 13, 2016.

about strategic culture and history is layered, diverse and often used in conjunction with one another.

Though Chinese grand strategic pragmatism through an interpretation of the *bingjia* texts implies that bloodless victory and estimated preservation (*quan*-全) of one's forces is the preferable route to victory, the actual projection of military force is never to be cast aside, especially when China's domestic sovereignty was threatened by instability and disorder. To the contrary, Chinese strategic culture, as it is influenced by theories of righteous war, is far from pacifistic.⁵¹ We can thus think of Ancient Chinese conceptions of just war as having an almost double meaning which can be molded to fit the needs of the ruler and the commander in their objective to achieve order.

1.3. A Bifurcated Grand Strategic Culture Emerging from Historic Notions of Order and Structure

The study of strategic culture places an emphasis on how states invoke historic guiding principles, philosophies of statecraft, and the manner in which such states imagine an ideal order within society. As China's economic interests become more global, Xi Jinping must strike a balance between Beijing's global economic development and the extent to which the PLA will be needed to secure trade routes and ports while reassuring other actors that China's military modernization means them no harm. As John Lewis Gaddis points out in his work *On Grand Strategy*, "expanding means may attain more ends, but not all because ends can be *infinite* and

⁵¹ This idea is fleshed out more in Andrew Scobell, *China's Use of Military Force: Beyond the Great Wall and the Long March* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 34.

means never can be.”⁵² This tensional balance Gaddis refers to is the essence of a state’s proportional grand strategy. In striking this balance, a state seeks to harness its capabilities and assets to achieve its historically constituted vision of order. Material means must be used to achieve a more intangible, abstract political order of things rooted in moral uprightness, virtue, and reflection on the good. The convergence of the material and the ideational attributes of a state come to manifest in a state’s strategic culture.

Alastair Johnston, a scholar of Chinese history and strategic behavior defines strategic culture as the:

consistent and persistent historical patterns in the way particular states (or state elites) think about the use of force for political ends. That is, different states have different predominant sets of strategic preferences that are rooted in the “early” or “formative” military experiences of the state or its predecessor, and are influenced to some degree by the philosophical, political, cultural, and cognitive characteristics of the state and state elites as these develop through time. Ahistorical or “objective” variables such as technology, capabilities, levels of threat, and organizational structures are all of secondary importance: it is the interpretive lens of strategic culture that gives meaning to these variables.⁵³

In his work titled *Cultural Realism*, Johnston expounds upon the philosophical influences that shape the Chinese use of force, maintaining that there is, “in the Chinese case, a long term, deeply rooted, persistent and consistent set of assumptions about the strategic environment and about the best means for dealing with it.”⁵⁴ On the one hand, discourse on Chinese statecraft is dominated by a pacifistic, Confucian consensus in which war is justified only under limited and morally acceptable circumstances. On the other, there is what Johnston refers to as the *parabellum* paradigm, or a realpolitik preference for decisive victory over an adversary in the event of a security dilemma. He finds through an examination of ancient Chinese texts known as

⁵² John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018), p. 21.

⁵³ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), *Cultural Realism*, 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

the *Seven Military Classics* (*wujing qishu* - 武經七書) that Chinese statecraft favors the use of military force to resolve security problems when the option is available and necessary to fulfilling strategic objectives. In contrast to arguments put forth by structural realists, Johnston argues that it is not only pressures generated by the anarchic structure of the international order or analysis of relative capabilities that push the Chinese to act in a realist manner. Rather, China pursues power maximization for historically contingent reasons that stem from how the Chinese assess warfare as a viable tool to reach political goals and perceptions of external and internal threats. The reigning parabellum paradigm, “assumes that conflict is a constant feature of human affairs, due largely to the rapacious or threatening nature of the adversary, and that in this zero-sum context the application of violence is highly efficacious for dealing with the enemy.”⁵⁵

The Chinese have their own narrative of strategic exceptionalism and national pride that emerges out of a five thousand year civilizational history stretching back to the neolithic age. Xi Jinping, as the central leader of Chinese economic and military power projection, is harnessing these analogical references to the past to construct a grand strategy that allows for a distinctive flexibility (*quanbian* - 權變), giving China a pool of strategic choices for each emerging threat contingencies to Beijing’s security.⁵⁶ The danger of China’s strategic culture is that PLA intentions are becoming largely indeterminate by the reigning interplay between Confucian and Legalist paradigms. Andrew Scobell, a researcher at RAND Corporation, terms this ambiguity in China’s strategic culture as the “Cult of the Defensive.”⁵⁷ He writes that:

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁵⁶ Idea of historical analogy for the purpose of strategic posture brought out in Hal Brands and Jeremi Suri, *The Power of the Past: History and Statecraft* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016); Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, p, 127.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

In the twenty-first century, Chinese leaders will likely continue to view the world in Realpolitik terms while at the same time perceiving Chinese strategic culture as Confucian or pacifist and defense minded. Paradoxically, the Cult of Defense produces a Beijing ready to employ military force assertively against perceived external threat or internal threats all the while insisting that China possesses a cultural aversion to using force, doing so only defensively and solely as a last resort.⁵⁸

For both Johnston and Scobell, Chinese elites and military officials take seriously the Confucian narrative which continues to influence PLA doctrine and pedagogy, but a resounding lineage of Legalist strategic thought remains present. Given the tumult of the Warring States Era partnered with a collective memory of internal disorder at the hands of inner Asian nomads, Western powers, and the Japanese, Xi Jinping will most likely employ the use of force pragmatically and pointedly to reinstall a harmonious order with Chinese characteristics. Xi's strategic deployment of the military is reasonable, then, for both historical and structural reasons.⁵⁹

The Post-Deng era has indeed necessitated a shift in Chinese strategic posture from that of isolation to active participation in global affairs. Nonetheless, there exist numerous continuities in method and use of force for strategic ends. Out of traditional Chinese strategic thought, Xi seems to select from both realpolitik and Confucian paradigms, and this alludes to a highly complex and layered Chinese grand strategy moving forward. Yan Xuetong in his commentary on Chinese history and statecraft points out, that “in the twenty-first century, China faces the historic test of success or failure in its rise to becoming a super power. . . a study of pre-Qin interstate political philosophy may provide guidance for Chinese foreign policy *as well as for the world.*” He goes on to write that, “from this point of view of the world as a whole, we can

⁵⁸ Scobell, *China's Use of Military Force*, p. 193.

⁵⁹ Eric Hyer, *The Pragmatic Dragon: China's Grand Strategy and Boundary Settlements* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), pp. 5-6.

reflect on how China's rise can provide benefit to the stability of the international order and the progress of international norms."⁶⁰ If Yan's claim is in fact true, we should thus be able to recognize direct references or convergences in thinking from the leader of China himself. In the following section, I will assess the extent to which Xi cites and prefers, implicitly and explicitly, traditional Chinese stratagems in his speeches on Chinese defense and security.

⁶⁰ Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 203-204.

Chapter 3: Xi Jinping On Order and Statecraft: A Layered Global Chinese Strategy

The essence of the army and the state lies in investigating the mind of the people and putting into effect the hundred duties of the government

-Huang Shi Gong⁶¹

Teasing out the policy implications of Xi's speeches leads us to trace similarities and dissimilarities in ancient, Warring States Era Chinese thought with the present. In one sense, Xi takes very seriously reinvigorating historic elements of the Chinese political and grand strategic thinking in pursuit of the "Chinese Dream." In another way, however, Xi vies for a new, globally involved China whose people serve as an exemplar of a stable world order. A major component of Xi's aspiration is reordering and giving sound structure to the global system, with China providing the rational center. I have selected speeches that span Xi's tenure as President of China (2012-Present) to add temporal variance, thus providing more causal process observations to test the continuity of Xi's ideas.⁶² Moreover, by selecting documents dealing with both military modernization specifically and China's global vision, I seek to parse out where Xi's preferences have changed and stayed the same. I find that Xi's rhetoric and preferences in his speeches point to a divergence from both ancient Chinese Warring States stratagems and recent CPC leadership such as Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin. As part of what Elizabeth Economy has referred to as Xi's Third Revolution following that of Mao Zedong (毛澤東) and Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平), the general secretary is now postured to centralize and wield party power at home while maintaining an open Chinese market initiated under Deng during the 1970s and 80s.⁶³ Economy points out the centennial reestablishment of Chinese sovereignty and centrality, stating that:

⁶¹ Huang Shi Gong, "Three Strategies of Hung Shi Gong," in ed. Ralph Sawyer, *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p. 293.

⁶² Please see Appendix A for a list of speeches and corresponding publishing and translation information.

⁶³ Elizabeth Economy, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

China is shifting from an emerging or regional power to a major power, or even a superpower. He is attempting to realize sovereignty claims in the South China Sea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan; expand China's economic, political, and security presence globally through the Belt and Road Initiative; and reform international institutions and norms to reflect China's values and priorities more directly. As I see it, this is very much a reflection of how Xi sees the world, with China's centrality in the global system. In this respect most of all, Xi is a revolutionary leader of China.⁶⁴

Xi's emerging foreign and defense policy is, indeed, intertwined with conceptions of an emerging global system, just as Chinese strategic culture has historically been. But a point of contention is the extent to which Xi's speeches actually reflect this policy change toward a more assertive Chinese military presence abroad.

2.1. Xi's Revolutionary Leadership and New Ideas of Proper World Order

Since 2012, Xi Jinping has given numerous speeches pertaining to China's strategic aspirations and the means by which Beijing hopes to achieve such objectives. Of particular concern to Xi are the long string of historical injustices and chaos the Chinese nation has weathered at the hands of outside powers and domestic warlord-ship. Jeffrey Bader recounts Xi Jinping's upbringing, pointing out that "he emerged from the experiences of privilege and suffering with a firm faith in the necessity of a strong Communist Party to govern China, an aversion to chaos and social instability, a commitment to China's economic growth based on acceptance of the role of markets, and demand for respect for China internationally."⁶⁵ Xi has thus set out to remake China and compose a new harmonious world order in which Chinese could have a say in writing the rules of the game, and perhaps facilitate a more peaceful international community.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Economy, "Ideology, reform and China's 'Third Revolution': a conversation with Elizabeth Economy," *China Economic Review*, May 7, 2018.

⁶⁵ Jeffrey A. Bader, "How Xi Jinping Sees the World. . . and Why," ed. *Brookings Institution: Order from Chaos Project*, February, 2016. p.

Xi maintained soon after his election that “in the future, China will ‘forge ahead like a gigantic ship breaking through strong waves and heavy winds,’” citing the poems of Mao.⁶⁶ His reference alludes to an emerging Chinese capability to vocalize and defend its national interests while also maintaining sustained growth in standard of living. The president continued his speech by speaking to this point, “everyone has an *ideal*, ambition, and dream. We are now all talking about the Chinese Dream. In my opinion, achieving the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since the advent of modern times.”⁶⁷ His rhetoric is reminiscent of a great telos of return, or a distinctly “Chinese” vision that will establish a productive, nationalistic fervor and perhaps benefit the rest of the world.⁶⁸

Xi sees China’s economic rise and globalization as a potential mutually beneficial exchange or a “win-win” (*shuangying*-雙贏) opportunity for the international order. Moreover, for Xi, the process of forming interconnected and interdependent markets has an indelible truth linked to its observable benefits. Indeed, the thirteenth point of his speech given at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (NCCPC) was the following:

The dream of the Chinese people is closely connected with the dreams of the peoples of other countries; the Chinese Dream can be realized only in a peaceful international environment and under a stable international order. We must keep in mind both our internal and international imperative, stay on the path of peaceful development, and continue to pursue a mutually beneficial strategy of opening up. We will uphold justice while pursuing shared interests, and will foster new thinking on common, comprehension, cooperative, and sustainability security. We will pursue open, innovation, and inclusive development that benefits everyone; boost cross cultural exchanges characterized by harmony within diversity, inclusiveness, and mutual learning; and cultivate ecosystems based on respect nature and green development. China will continue its

⁶⁶ Xi Jinping, “Achieving Rejuvenation is the Dream of the Chinese People,” in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China, Volume One* (Beijing: The Foreign Language Press, 2014), p. 37.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶⁸ Xu Xiaqun, *Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and Individualism in Modern China: The Chenbao Fukan and the New Culture Era, 1918-1928* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2014).

efforts to safeguard world peace, contribute to global development, and uphold international order.⁶⁹

At the World Economic Forum Xi made this point clear maintaining that China, when considering whether or not to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), “came to the conclusion that integration into the global economy represents a historical trend. To grow its economy, China must have the courage to swim in the vast ocean of the global market.”⁷⁰ Xi’s ideas for a new globalized economy stem from Deng’s reform and opening to new international markets in the late 1970s, due in large part to China’s partial embrace of liberal economic thinkers such as Milton Friedman.⁷¹ Julian Gerwitz points out that the post-Deng era of Chinese economic engagement, “was not a sign of failure or submission to foreign hegemony but, rather, a signature achievement that helped to define a ‘golden age’ of openness and intellectual flexibility in China.”⁷² For China under Xi, world order will be permanently grounded in its guiding traditions, but Beijing will not be afraid to integrate foreign ideas and power projection capabilities for their own purposes.

In turn, Xi’s ideas about globalization and China’s place in the world can also be derived from ancient Chinese strategic principles discussed in the first section. Philosophic notions of strategic flexibility, adaptation, and fluidity transpose into Xi’s global posture and aspirations.

⁶⁹ Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” (speech, Beijing, October 18, 2017), 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China: 2017.

⁷⁰ Xi Jinping, “Davos 2017 - Opening Plenary with Xi Jinping, President of the Peoples Republic of China,” *World Economic Forum*, January 17, 2017.

⁷¹ The Chinese sometimes refer to this ideational resource gathering as “Chinese learning for fundamental principles, and Western learning for practical application” (*Zhong xue wei ti, xi xue wei yong*- 中學為體，西學為用) Julian Gerwitz, *Unlikely Partners: Chinese Reformers, Western Economists, and the Making of Global China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), p. 5.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 272.

Later in his speech at the World Economic Forum, he proclaimed that China took “a brave step forward to embrace the global market. We have had our fair share of choking in the water, and we have encountered whirl pools and choppy waves. But we have learned how to swim in this process. It has proved to be the right strategic choice.”⁷³ He went on to conclude that “world history shows that the road of human civilization has never been a smooth one, and that mankind has made progress by surmounting difficulties. No difficulty, however daunting, will stop mankind from advancing.”⁷⁴ The global order and civil society Xi describes is one in which man is a successor, inheritor, but also a builder.⁷⁵ In this sense, as Stenslie and Gang point out, “Xi appears as more visionary and strategic thinker than his predecessors Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin, neither of whom articulated any grand vision guiding a rising China.”⁷⁶ Through articulating such a vision, Xi seeks to reassure actors on the global stage that China can contribute to a coherent and responsible vision for a future world order.

The Davos Speech elucidates a Xi who is a staunch proponent of innovation, market reform, opening, progressive humanism, and global community. Xi’s recent speech at the Boao Forum for Asia also emphasized China’s gradual break from isolationism. On April 10, 2018, Xi gave the opening keynote speech titled “Openness for Greater Prosperity, Innovation for a Better Future” which underscored the benefits of regional cooperation, interconnectedness and resilience.

⁷³ Xi Jinping, “Davos 2017 - Opening Plenary with Xi Jinping, President of the Peoples Republic of China,” *World Economic Forum*, January 17, 2017.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Idea of man participating and actively creating out of History, José Ortega y Gasset, *Man and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1958), p. 161.

⁷⁶ Stig Stenslie and Chen Gang, “Xi Jinping’s Grand Strategy: From Vision to Implementation,” in ed. Robert S. Ross and Jo Inge Bekkevold, *China in the Era of Xi Jinping: Domestic and Foreign Policy Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2016), p. 131.

He asserted that:

Over the last four decades, the Chinese people have blazed a path of socialism with Chinese characteristics through determined exploration with a pioneering spirit. The Chinese people have both a keen awareness of national realities and a global vision. We champion independence and self-reliance while embracing openness and win-win cooperation. We uphold the socialist system while sticking to the direction of reform to develop the socialist market economy. As we ‘cross the river by feeling the stones,’ we have strengthened top-level planning.⁷⁷

His notion of the Chinese people, their history, and position in the global order is firstly characterized by a form of Chinese exceptionalism that builds ironically upon many of the classical liberal ideas absorbed from foreign European and American powers during the Deng Era. Secondly, it assumes a historical dialect that can be controlled, understood, and maneuvered through tight, central planning. Through a Hegelian lens, we see, as Xi alludes to, that “the state is born of conflict and is, in its turn, the theater and the origin of numerous potential conflicts. This is true of the state because it is true of man himself.”⁷⁸ Indeed, through reform and flexibility, Xi describes the Chinese people as a “truth-seeking nation with an open mind. . . driving forward as masters of their nation and real heroes.”⁷⁹ From this line, one gets the sense in which Xi believes he and the Chinese people can best history through a scientific approach and put a rational saddle on trends influencing structural shifts in the international space. Xi attempted to validate this logic further by referring to Chinese history. He stated that “an ancient Chinese classic teaches that heaven has its own law and those who embrace it will prosper. China's reform and opening-up meets its people's aspiration for development, innovation and a

⁷⁷ Xi Jinping, “Keynote Speech: Openness for Greater Prosperity, Innovation for a Better Future,” (speech, Boao, April 10, 2018), Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference: 2018.

⁷⁸ Pierre Hassner, “Georg W. F. Hegel,” in ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, *History of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 734.

⁷⁹ Xi Jinping, “Keynote Speech: Openness for Greater Prosperity, Innovation for a Better Future,” (speech, Boao, April 10, 2018), Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference: 2018.

better life. It also meets the global trend toward development, cooperation, and peace.”⁸⁰ In contrast to ancient Chinese notions of heaven’s “way” as ever-changing and mysterious, Xi embraces humanity’s capacity to predict and know history’s intention.

Through multilateralism, infrastructure development, and partnership, Xi hopes, all roads will lead to Beijing as the rational leader of the emerging world order. China, Xi concludes, will “take an active part in reforming the global governance system. By doing so, we will be able to build a new type of international relations and promote a community with a shared future for mankind.”⁸¹ Following the Davos and Boao speeches, achieving the Chinese Dream is only possible if the Party is able to provide social benefits to the people, show observable signs of continued economic vitality, and serve the welfare of the global community. But China must also continue investing in military capabilities able to defend China’s sovereignty and its “developmental interests” and “core interests” (*hexin liyi*-核心利益). In turn, China’s expanding market interests and the extent to which Beijing is able to defend its investments are inextricably linked.

China must also be able to justify and validate the truth of its social stability, progress, and structural model oriented toward crafting a better world order under heaven.⁸² Xi aims to do this by consolidating ideational and administrative power, attempting to build philosophical and domestic cohesion within.⁸³ By establishing such political continuities, Xi seeks to serve the

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Xi Jinping, “Full text: China’s new party Chief Xi Jinping’s speech,” *BBC*, November 15, 2012.

⁸³ See for example, Meng Jie, “Xi’s Thought Enshrined in China’s Constitution,” *Xinhua*, March 11, 2018; Chris Buckley and Keith Bradsher, “China Moves to Let Xi Stay in Power by Abolishing Terms Limit,” February 25, 2018.

Chinese people by reminding them of where their civilization has been and where it is going. Nonetheless, even if Xi's diplomatic rhetoric diverges somewhat from ancient Chinese *bingjia* stratagem, favoring a more Confucian reference, Xi also wields Legalist teachings in his pursuit of a more capable military force.

2.2. Rich State, Strong Army: The Nexus of Morality and National Security in Xi's World Order

The Chinese idiom, or *chengyu* (成語), *tao guang yang hui* (韜光養晦), can be traced back to Deng Xiaoping's insistence that China ought to conceal its capabilities and bide its time for strategic purposes, but mostly for the country's preservation. This saying seems to be much less relevant in the era of Xi, as China is visibly investing in new weapons system R&D, military infrastructure, and is operating beyond its traditional littoral and continental areas.⁸⁴ Xi's speech at the 19th Communist Party of China (CPC) National Congress on October 18, 2017 makes clear that the Party yearns for an assured decisive victory against any adversary through its quest to build a "powerful military with Chinese characteristics."⁸⁵ Xi continues to make very clear the need for a strong PLA to make possible the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. He maintained that, "with a view to realizing the Chinese Dream and the dream of building a powerful military, we have developed a strategy for the military under new circumstances, and have made every effort to modernize national defense and the armed forces." An opportunity to reshape the global order does, indeed, provide Xi with new strategic "circumstances," in which China can emerge and realize the Legalist standard of a wealthy state and a strong army, *fuguo qiangbing*.⁸⁶ As Xi

⁸⁴ Tate Nurkin, "China's Advances Weapons Systems," *IHS Markit: Jane's*, May 12, 2018.

⁸⁵ Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," (speech, Beijing, October 18, 2017), 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China: 2017.

⁸⁶ See also Xiang Bo, "People are the creators of history," *Xinhua*, March 20, 2018.

himself stated in 2012, to achieve national renewal, “we must strive both to enrich the country and build a strong national defense and powerful military.”⁸⁷ The PLA will “carry on its great traditions, build on past merits, so as to forge ahead to fulfill the historical responsibilities they shoulder.”⁸⁸ The historical responsibilities (*lishi zeren* - 歷史責任) Xi refers to, come out of a deep-seeded Chinese civil-military culture, going back to Lord Shang’s doctrine which vied for a “People’s Army,” or an army that could be mobilized and win wars in the interest of society. Under the “new circumstances” (*xin xingshi*-新形勢) brought about by reform under Deng, however, the Chinese are forced to look beyond their traditional borders to ensure the incremental development of Beijing’s national defense and moral reach.

PLA forces, in order to realize the Chinese Dream, must also act in congruence with the political and theoretical standards of the Party. Xi pushed this point forward, stating during the twelfth National People’s Congress (NPC) that “we should ensure that the military and the local people work together to promote material advance, and cultural and ethical progress, as well as social harmony.”⁸⁹ Five years later, during the thirteenth NPC, Xi reiterated China’s willingness to engage its military, and harness the spirit and creativity of its people for battle on the instance of infringement on Chinese interests, citing the influence of Sun Zi and Han Feizi on Chinese strategic flexibility.⁹⁰ Implementing joint operational capability with a leaner and faster PLA, Xi stated that, “we will act more quickly to put into place the system of world-class armed forces

⁸⁷ Xi Jinping, “Build Strong National Defense and Powerful Military Forces,” in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* (Beijing: The Foreign Language Press, 2014), p. 240.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁸⁹ Xi Jinping, “Building People’s Armed Forces That Follow the Party’s Commands, Are Able to Win and Exemplary in Conduct,” in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* (Beijing: The Foreign Language Press, 2014), p. 243.

⁹⁰ Xi Jinping, “Speech delivered by Xi Jinping at the first session of the 13th NPC,” *Xinhua*, March 21, 2018.

with Chinese characteristics. We will create a modern combat system with distinctive Chinese characteristics.” The “Chinese characteristics” (中國化， 中國特色) Xi refers to, at least in his speeches, are derived from the pragmatics of traditional Legalist stratagem. In the spirit of the Wei Liao Zi (尉繚子), written by a purported student of Lord Shang, Xi stated that the “proper execution of orders is the making of a majestic military.”⁹¹ To produce order and maintain it will require a Chinese military that can fight and win in a calculated and sustained manner and fulfill the political goals of the CCP. “A military is built to fight,” Xi said, and “our military must regard combat capability as the criterion to meet in all its work and focus on how to win when it is called on.”⁹²

In 2015, Xi moved to reform PLA command/control structures while promoting modernization efforts and innovation to create a favorable strategic posture for Chinese developmental interests. The 2015 Chinese Military Strategy white paper states clearly that:

In the new circumstances, the national security issues facing China encompass far more subjects, extend over a greater range, and cover a longer time span than at any time in the country’s history. Internally and externally, the factors at play are more complex than ever before. Therefore, it is necessary to uphold a holistic view of national security, balance internal and external security, homeland and citizen security, traditional and non-traditional security, subsistence and development security, and China’s own security and the common security of the world.⁹³

As the Chinese Military Commission (CMC) works toward its reform goals, Xi’s notion of maintaining order manifests a connectivity in the growth of Chinese interests and global military

⁹¹ Xi Jinping, “Strengthen and Improve the Political Work of the Military,” in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China, Vol. II* (Beijing: The Foreign Language Press, 2017), p. 437. Here, Xi is referring to a section in the *Weiliaozi* that emphasizes the military as the representation of an emperor’s strength.

⁹² Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” (speech, Beijing, October 18, 2017), 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China: 2017.

⁹³ Chinese Ministry of National Defense, *China’s Military Strategy*, (Beijing: State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, 2015).

presence. Thus, if the “Chinese Dream” of a new world order is to be achieved, the PLA must be combat ready at all times and “all men and women in uniform should study military affairs, wars and strategy, in order to understand the laws of modern war.”⁹⁴ Xi’s political statements on strategy and military affairs reflect more and more a preference for Legalist, pragmatic use of force.

2.3. Conclusions

Xi acts as a conduit between the past and the future. As Xi stated in respect to the “China Dream” and national rejuvenation, “both embody the ideals of the Chinese people today, and represent our forefathers’ glorious tradition of untiring pursuit of progress.”⁹⁵ His speeches on strategy adapt traditional thought for practical, material means, which, in turn leads to a future-oriented third revolution in Chinese leadership style. By reading Xi’s speeches, it becomes clear that China has much more than regional aspirations, and is reevaluating its place in the world as an arbiter of peace and order for the entirety of humankind. Structurally, Xi’s speech differs from the ancients in that he realizes there is more to the world than the activities within Chinese borders. But, Xi selects for the pragmatic elements of ancient Chinese strategy and tactics, especially in the military context. Most of all, Xi seems to uphold the principle of inevitable change in history’s trajectory.

Though Beijing insists that it approaches geostrategic goals in a particularly Chinese way that rejects “universal values,” (*pushi jiazhi* - 普世價值) and upholds subjective statecraft, the

⁹⁴ Xi Jinping, “Continue to Strengthen Our Military,” in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China, Vol. II* (Beijing: The Foreign Language Press, 2017), p. 454.

⁹⁵ Xi Jinping, “Address to the First Session of the 12th National People’s Congress,” in *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China, Vol. I* (Beijing: The Foreign Language Press, 2014), p. 40

logic of Xi's "China Dream" does not follow.⁹⁶ China's grand strategic conflict is due to the fact that there are both endogenous ideational influences to Chinese strategic culture coming from China's intellectual heritage discussed in the first section, and exogenous pressures coming in the wake of Deng's opening to international exchange to the West. We can observe through traces in Xi's speeches that, though he references ancient Chinese strategy, Xi does not place emphasis on them directly and seeks to draw a new path forward for China. Xi, indeed, appears to adopt a conception of modernity that invokes an ambitious China, moving toward a new "idea" of China.⁹⁷ The following section will examine two cases to test the extent to which key reforms in China's security apparatus, command/control, and doctrine follow Xi's speech material and/or ancient Chinese strategic thought.

⁹⁶ Joseph Fewsmith, "The Challenges of Stability and Legitimacy," in ed. Robert S. Ross and Jo Inge Bekkevold, *China in the Era of Xi Jinping: Domestic and Foreign Policy Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2016), p. 111.

⁹⁷ Evan Osnos, *Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), p. 8.

Chapter 4: Observable Policy Implications in the Maritime Domain

The last section established that Xi is seeking to implement military modernization to account for China's shift from a purely continental power to a nation that can project force over long ranges.⁹⁸ Both ancient and recent Chinese history give China a reason to bolster its power projection capabilities and reinforce defensive lines, especially against threats coming from the maritime domain.⁹⁹ If Xi's speeches and deployment of the military tell one thing, it is that he is much less risk averse than previous Chinese leaders.¹⁰⁰ And as projects such as the "One Belt, One Road Initiative" (OBOR, *yidai yilu*- 一帶一路), securing maritime routes and developmental infrastructure investments give Beijing a massive incentive to assure access to its growing interests overseas.¹⁰¹

In 2008 and 2015 Beijing published two important documents on its salient military strategy. From the *China Military Strategy* white paper, the PLAN seeks to address "the need for China to become a world-class maritime power, capable of defending national security interests globally."¹⁰² Emerging PLAN operational and strategic foci (*zhanlu qianyan*-战略前沿) are thus

⁹⁸ Robert Farley, "Making the PLAN: A Concise History of the People's Liberation Army Navy," in ed. Donovan C. Chau and Thomas M. Kane, *China and International Security: History, Strategy, and 21st-Century Policy* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014), p. 99.

⁹⁹ Harold W. Rood, "China's Strategical Geography and Its Consequences," in ed. Donovan C. Chau and Thomas M. Kane, *China and International Security: History, Strategy, and 21st-Century Policy* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014), p. 13.

¹⁰⁰ Scott Kennedy, "Surviving March Madness," *Center for Strategic and International Studies: The Freeman Chair China Report*, April 2018.

¹⁰¹ Bennet Seftel, "Best Of: China Ramps Up Navy to Challenge U.S. Dominance," *The Cipher Brief*, May 4, 2018.

¹⁰² Bernard Cole, *China's Quest for Great Power: Ships, Oil, and Foreign Policy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2016), p. 51.

telling of a desire to offset potential enemy capabilities.¹⁰³ In light of the stratagem of the ancients, we can observe that many of the components that make up China's diplomatic and economic strategies are also points of potential military power projection. The Maritime Silk Road Initiative and defense infrastructure construction in the South China Sea serve as observable traces where ideational justification bolsters material development in China's shifting conception of world order.

3.1. The String of Pearls: Dual Use Ports, and Chinese "Active Defense" Posture through the Maritime Silk Road

Following the goals outlined by OBOR and the China Dream, the CMC is establishing heightened military presence abroad to protect and hold maritime choke points and ports around the world.¹⁰⁴ Militarizing these areas is proving necessary for Beijing to mitigate risk on the one hand, but could also be used to reinforce defense objectives.¹⁰⁵ Indian and American analysts have dubbed this strategy a Chinese "String of Pearls," in which the container vessels and PLAN fleet assets can move freely while also projecting power over competitors.¹⁰⁶ A recent observable manifestation of increasing Chinese naval presence abroad is the logistical "support base" at Djibouti. The key African port serves as an entryway for Chinese infrastructure development and to establish Chinese markets abroad. Initially, PLAN vessels on the Horn of

¹⁰³ Keith Crane et al., *Modernizing China's Military: Opportunities and Constraints* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2005), p. 192.

¹⁰⁴ See Fig. 3.1, Devin Thorne and Ben Spevack, "Harbored Ambitions: How China's Port Investments Are Strategically Reshaping the Indo-Pacific," *C4ADS*, April 17, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ Luis Simon, "Demystifying the A2/AD Buzz," *War on the Rocks*, January 4, 2017.

¹⁰⁶ Tom Miller, *China's Asian Dream*, p. 163.

Africa posed little military threat to US interests in the region. Rather, the strategic move implied a new willingness to open Chinese markets to the world, engage in UN peacekeeping missions, and participate in counter-terrorism and counter-piracy operations. US officials, however, now display a worry about the PLA working to establish a foothold in Africa, denying American access to the region and, in some cases, posing a real kinetic threat to US military assets.¹⁰⁷

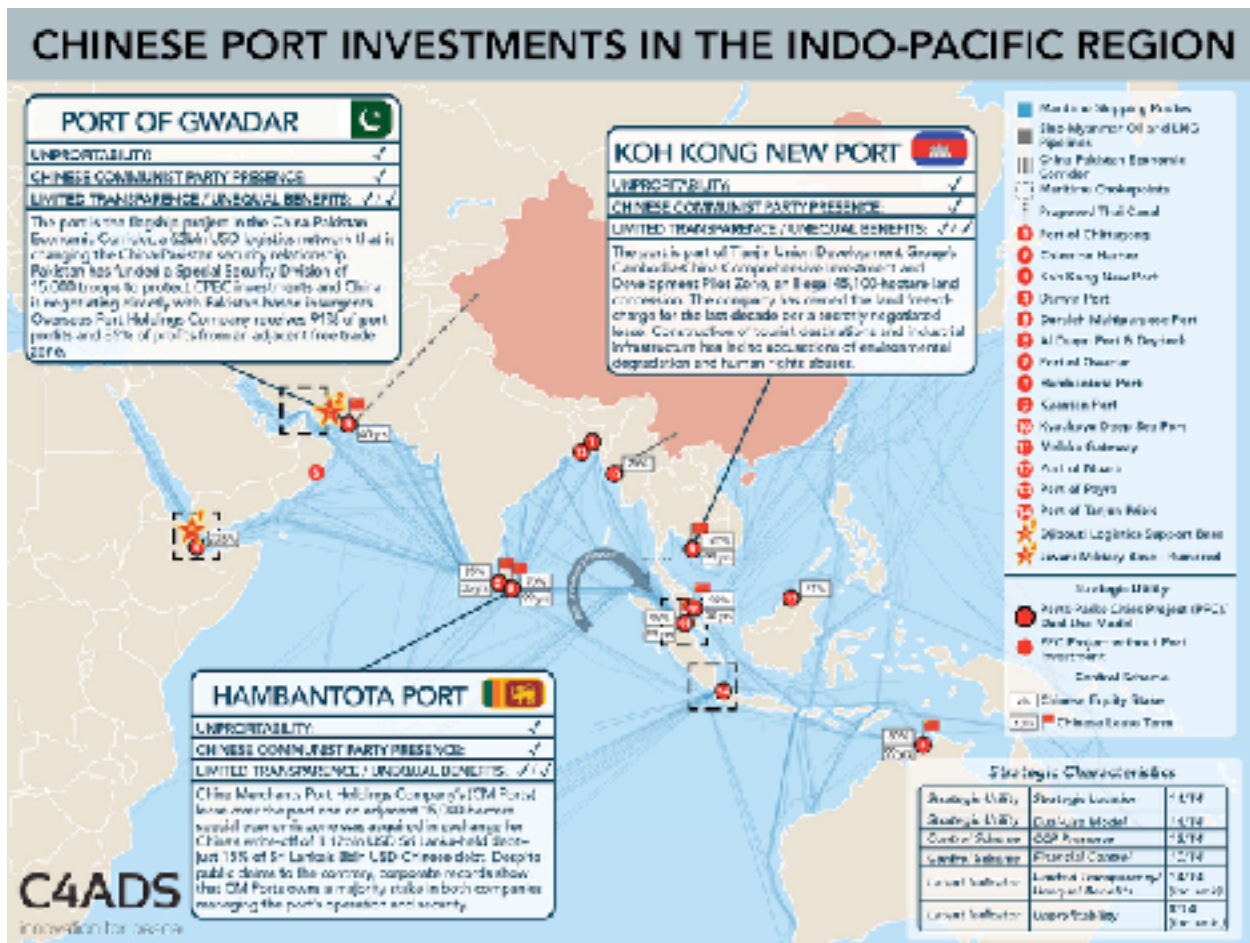


FIG 3.1

¹⁰⁷ Ryan Browne, "Chinese lasers injure US military pilots in Africa, Pentagon says," CNN, May 4, 2018.

Another potential point of tension is the Pakistani deep port at Gwadar, a location part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The Gwadar port serves as a chokepoint off of the Gulf of Oman and into the Straits of Hormuz where Beijing's Maritime Silk Road will meet the continental trade routes poised to transport goods through Xinjiang. The Chinese, at this point, have invested \$62 billion in the project, and are aware of the threat posed by terrorism to their trade routes and logistics hubs. Reports have suggested that China is also seeking building rights for a military base and airfield upgrades 80 kilometers west of Gwadar at Jiwani.¹⁰⁸ With a joint operational air and sea facilities, China can assure maneuverability of its forces and securitization of ports against adversaries from the land and sea.

Given the observable implications emerging through China's dual use logistics sites, US military leadership seems to be understanding Chinese strategic maneuvering and intentions in a more offensive realist posture that seems very much in line with the Legalist strategy of calculated use of force.¹⁰⁹ The ports give the Chinese Navy staying power in the South Pacific and North Africa, allowing China assurance that supply lines will remain intact.¹¹⁰ Using the fluid utility of infrastructure development and logistic hubs, the Chinese can project strategic power without posing a direct observable threat to other states. Following the Legalist line of thought present in the *Seven Military Classics*, the PLA is amassing strategic leverage through its dual use emplacements and maneuvering to achieve their own freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region. Though current Chinese presence is not undertaking kinetic use of force against

¹⁰⁸ Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "A New China Military Base in Pakistan," *The Diplomat*, February 9, 2018.

¹⁰⁹ Devin Thorne and Ben Spevack, "Harbored Ambitions: How China's Port Investments Are Strategically Reshaping the Indo-Pacific," *CSAADS*, April 17, 2018.

¹¹⁰ Keith Johnson and Dan De Luce, "One Belt, One Road, One Happy Chinese Navy," *Foreign Policy*, April 17, 2018.

adversaries, the deployment of military assets for the purpose of deterrence and “active defense” falls in line with Sun Zi’s prescription to preserve one’s forces and utilize the strategically unorthodox to one’s advantage. That is, a commander ought to harness the fog of war rather than fear it.

3.2. The South China Sea

A second observable environment in which Xi Jinping is seeking to expand and solidify Chinese influence is the South China Sea (SCS), which is inextricably bound up within the Maritime Silk Road and Beijing’s reading of larger strategic trends. To keep control over Chinese SLOCs that run through the Straits of Malacca, Beijing is maintaining a large trade and military presence in the region.¹¹¹ To solidify economic and strategic presence in the SCS, China is constructing transport and military infrastructure on the features and laying de facto claim to the territory on the basis of historically delegated boundaries espoused by Beijing’s “nine-dash line” which is rooted in not only PRC history, but the ancient Chinese past.¹¹²

The features that make up the Paracels, Spratlys, and Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea fuel an ongoing arbitration dispute between claimants of the territory under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Such states include Brunei, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan, and China. Since 2014, the Chinese have built over 3,000 acres of artificial island, while constructing port facilities, radar installations, cruise missile

¹¹¹ China Power Project, “How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Accessed May 21, 2018.

¹¹² Marina Tsirbas, “What Does the Nine-Dash Line Actually Mean?” *The Diplomat*, June 2, 2016.

systems, surface to air systems and airstrips.¹¹³ The U.S. in turn has deployed a number of Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS) to contest Beijing's claim to the SCS features, and to demand clarity in Beijing intentions. Officials from China's Ministry of Defense continue to situate SCS security policy within the larger "active defense" strategy. Senior Colonel Ren Guoqiang maintained that:

It is the *natural right* of a sovereign state for China to station troops and deploy necessary territory defense facilities on the relevant islands and reefs of the Nansha Islands. It is conducive to safeguarding the state's sovereignty and security, ensuring the freedom and security of navigation channels in the South China Sea, and maintaining regional peace and stability. It is not directed against any country. . . China will unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development, pursue a national defense policy that is defensive in nature and a military strategy of active defense.¹¹⁴

Paradoxically, China's attempts to stabilize relations in the region only serve to ratchet up insecurity and uncertainty further. As Kant reminds us, armies are like a clinched fist, and "incessantly menace other states by their readiness to appear at all times prepared for war; they incite them to compete with each other in the number of armed men, and there is no limit to this."¹¹⁵

In respect to the South China Sea, there exists a massive "information gap" that is indicative of Beijing's larger dualistic tactical practice to partner the orthodox and unorthodox for strategic purposes.¹¹⁶ Both the SCS example and the Maritime Silk Road deep ports serve as concrete examples of Xi's bifurcated, pragmatic grand strategy. Xi may not consistently reference the Seven Military Classics in his OBOR and SCS combined strategies, but the

¹¹³ US Department of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017," (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2017), p. 24

¹¹⁴ Yao Jianing, "China has every right to deploy necessary military equipment on Nansha Islands," *China Military Online*, April 10, 2018. Emphasis the author's.

¹¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace, and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*, p. 87.

¹¹⁶ Ely Ratner, "Exposing China's Actions in the South China Sea," *Council on Foreign Relations*, April 6, 2018.

deployment of military force and construction of dual use infrastructure tell a different tale that stands in stark contrast to Chinese pacifism and peaceful development. As these cases show, the US and China are embroiled in a performative language game about proper means of construction of order, exacerbating the security dilemma between to the two powers. Identifying proper routes toward stability in the maritime domain will therefore require more than military and legal accessions, and will instead necessitate a discussion on how history and strategic culture latently play into how both sides perceive their interests in the region.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Utility of historical engagement and dialogue made particularly clear in the work of Michael Oakeshott, *On History and Other Essays* (Liberty Fund, Inc., Indianapolis, 1999), p. 180.

Conclusion: Embracing the Disorder of Things: War as the “Disunion of Minds” and the Natural Divergence in Strategic Philosophy and Statecraft

This man of which we speak will seek to impose order and lineage upon things which rightly have none. He will call upon the world itself to testify as to the truth of what are in fact but his desires.

- Cormac McCarthy¹¹⁹

Hugo Grotius wrote in *The Rights of War and Peace* that the ancient Greeks thought of war as a duel, a “Disunion of Minds,” between states that make up the web of global society.¹²⁰ For Grotius, war was an “instrument of right.”¹²¹ States quarrel on the basis of rational, material desires or needs. But so to do they fight for the integrity of their understanding of order, being, and justice. Kissinger notes that “in building a world order, a key question inevitably concerns the substance of its unifying principles.”¹²² Moreover, the “result is not simply a multipolarity of power but a world of increasingly contradictory realities.”¹²³

In a conflict of ideas and the steps leading to a country’s decision to use kinetic force, intentions and perspective matter. These intentions, or the will of a state, are constituted historically, and serve to form implicit strategic preferences. The justifications for war thus vary from state to state and civilization to civilization, based largely in conceptions of what is right and the particular “good” composition of social order. Just war and the intentionality bound within a state’s commitment to fight is rooted in a will to protect the most sacred notions of truth, virtue, and the historicity of society’s corresponding common goal. Here, a philosophy of life

¹¹⁹ Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 293.

¹²⁰ Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace: Book I* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), p. 135.

¹²¹ Jon Miller, “Hugo Grotius,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring, 2014).

¹²² Kissinger, *On World Order*, p. 363.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 365.

and strategy intersect and intertwine. It is within this “in-between,” strategic liminality, that must be considered if policymakers are to get correct China’s dualistic strategic behavior. The ideational element of Xi’s strategic thought is one of both rational praxis and philosophical idealism.. Eric Voegelin puts the essence of my observation well, maintaining that:

Existence is not a fact. If anything, existence is the nonfact of a disturbing movement in the In-Between of ignorance and knowledge, of time and timelessness, of imperfection and perfection, of hope and fulfillment, and ultimately of life and death. From the experience of this movement, from anxiety of losing the right direction in this In-Between of darkness and light, arises the inquiry concerning the meaning of life.¹²⁴

This thesis aimed to show why ideational continuities and interpretation of reality matter in understanding how China chooses to use force and the manner in which Beijing justifies military deployment. If ideas about order serve as a key causal mechanism driving a wedge between Sino-American relations, policy makers need to take more seriously an assessment of parsing out what constitutes and defines a prospective Chinese world order and the means by which they have historically sought to obtain, know, and solidify such an order.

Kissinger points out that even as military to military communications have increased, new forms of track II diplomacy are being implemented, and high level strategic talks continue to be held, “groups in both countries claim that a contest for supremacy between the United States and China is already underway.”¹²⁵ However, the “Sino-U.S. relationship should not be considered a zero-sum game; nor can the emergence of a prosperous and powerful China be assumed in itself to be an American strategic defeat.”¹²⁶ The U.S. should not, for example,

¹²⁴ Eric Voegelin, *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*, ed. Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), p. 142-43.

¹²⁵ Henry Kissinger, *On China* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 231.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 539.

continue to exclude China from naval exercises such as the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC), and exacerbate key points of uncertainty in the strategic relationship.¹²⁷ Rather, the questions that must be addressed in the dilemma are not so much material as ideational, representative of the parts that make up Xi's conception of a just world order.

Knowing and understanding the relationship between Chinese strategic language and observable tactical level maneuvering is more a proactive than reactive task for the United States and cannot be one guided by latent hostility. Goldstein's "cooperation cycles" provide a starting point by which Beijing and Washington might begin coming to agreement through key points of concession. In other words, the Trump administration will need to "meet China halfway," and update prior notions of American preeminence to count for the shifting balance of power in the Indo-Asia-Pacific.¹²⁸ Goldstein is right to make note of the observable power shift and its destabilizing side effects, but the engagement process with China will also require an element of in-depth intellectual discourse.

China must be engaged on a deep philosophical level to disallow ambiguity on the tactical level that inevitably translates from meta-strategic ideas, if Xi in fact oscillates between the strategic bifurcation of Legalist praxis and civilizational righteousness embedded in Confucian thought. A way the U.S. and China might do this is through the collaboration and exchange of high level officials and scholars to discuss more plainly the *modus operandi* of each state's grand strategy. The particulars of tactics need not be revealed, nor should the two nations agree on some common policy trajectory, but future talks must be focused on getting at the deep

¹²⁷ Bill Gertz, "Pentagon Blocks China From Joining Naval Exercise," *The Washington Free Beacon*, May 23, 2018.

¹²⁸ Lyle Goldstein, "Does America Really Need to Fear China," *The National Interest*, April 25, 2018; Robert Ross, "Keeping Up with China's PLAN," *The National Interest*, April 15, 2018.

level questions that make up both American and Chinese first-causal conceptions of world order. In the words of Oswald Spengler, there must be an interaction between “the world as happening,” and “the world as history;” Between the “man of action,” and “the man of contemplation,” to engage the diverging philosophic conceptions of world order as they are distinguished by Chinese and American thought.¹²⁹ One might think of this policy building block as hybrid reflexivity, or an interdisciplinary framework in which the relationship between truth, order, destiny, history and policy is elucidated through pointed dialogue, not simply “trust building.” There must be, on the other hand, a discussion about the “reality of things” not as mere the rhetorical, archetypal, or symbolic significance they might have to a state’s grand strategy. In short, as Mircea Eliade sought to do in his text *Cosmos and History*, policymakers must actively attempt to understand the “deep meaning” or the “constituting metaphysics” bound up within the “symbols, myths, and rights,” that are habituated into our language.¹³⁰ For it is within the layers of strategic language, discourse, and their historicity that tactical ambiguity arises.

The reconciliation of two teleologies and two diverging epistemic conceptions of order rendered in grand strategic preference, will most likely be disorderly, an amalgamation of the organic and inorganic as China and the US continue to engage one another in contested spaces.¹³¹ Warfare of the minds must be the focus of future battles between Beijing and Washington, pressing for a spiral of reassurance and collaboration rather than pure transaction. In

¹²⁹ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Volume I, Form and Actuality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), p. 153.

¹³⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 3.

¹³¹ Ian Easton, *The Chinese Invasion Threat: Taiwan’s Defense Strategy Asia* (Arlington: Project 2049 Institute, 2017), p. 250.

addition to Goldstein’s cooperation spiral prescription, Xi and the Trump administration might commit to a contractual form of explanation and understanding of strategic intent. This proposal underscores what Eric Voegelin terms as man’s “obligation to understand his condition.” And “part of this condition is the social order in which he lives. . . . This order has today become worldwide.”¹³² From these notions of order, meaning emerges and defense policy follows. Constructing strategic dialogue and exchange, in turn, will require both Beijing and Washington to face the demanding task of articulating the continuities in deeply held ideas about world order and strategy. Only by doing this can both countries “coevolve” and maintain order that both undeniably benefit from.¹³³ Such is the distinction between appeasement and engagement.

¹³² Eric Voegelin, *Order and History, Volume One: Israel and Revelation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), p. xiii.

¹³³ Kissinger, *On China*, p. 544.

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Appendix A: Chronological List of Xi Jinping's Speeches and Corresponding Notes

-“Speech at the Politburo Standing Committee Member Meeting.” Given on November 15, 2012 at the Great Hall of the People. Translated by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC); <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-20338586>.

-“Achieving Rejuvenation is the Dream of the Chinese People.” Given on November 29, 2012 at exhibition titled “The Road to Rejuvenation.” Translated and Published by the State Council Information Office (國務院新聞辦公室) and the Party Literature Research Office of the CPC.

-“Build Strong National Defense and Powerful Military Forces.” Given on December 8 and 10, 2012 at an inspection visit to the Guangzhou Military Command. Translated and Published by the State Council Information Office (國務院新聞辦公室) and the Party Literature Research Office of the CPC.

-“Building People’s Armed Forces That Follow the Party’s Commands, Are Able to Win and Exemplary in Conduct.” Given on March 11, 2013 at the plenary meeting of the People’s Liberation Army delegation during the First Session of the 12th National People’s Congress. Translated and Published by the State Council Information Office (國務院新聞辦公室) and the Party Literature Research Office of the CPC.

-“Address to the First Session of the 12th National People’s Congress.” Given in March, 2013 at the First Session of the 12th National People’s Congress. Translated and Published by the State Council Information Office (國務院新聞辦公室) and the Party Literature Research Office of the CPC.

-“Strengthen and Improve the Political Work of the Military.” Given on October 31, 2014 at a military conference on political work. Translated and Published by the State Council Information Office (國務院新聞辦公室) and the Party Literature Research Office of the CPC.

-“Davos 2017 - Opening Plenary with Xi Jinping, President of the Peoples Republic of China.” Given on January 17, 2017 at the World Economic Forum at Davos. Translated and Published by the World Economic Forum; <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/full-text-of-xi-jinping-keynote-at-the-world-economic-forum>.

-“Continue to Strengthen Our Military.” Given on August 1, 2017 at the rally marking the 90th anniversary of of the founding of the PLA. Translated and Published by the State Council Information Office (國務院新聞辦公室) and the Party Literature Research Office of the CPC.

-“Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.” Given on October 18, 2017 at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. Translated by Xinhua editors. Published by China Daily News; http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf.

-“Speech delivered by Xi Jinping at the first session of the 13th NPC.” Given on March 20, 2018 at the First Session of the 13th National People’s Congress. Translated by Xinhua editors. Published by China Daily News; <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/articles/184/187/127/1521628772832.html>.

-“Keynote Speech: Openness for Greater Prosperity, Innovation for a Better Future,” Given on April 10, 2018 at the Bo Ao Forum for Asia Annual Conference. Translated by An Baijie. Published by China Daily News; <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201804/10/WS5acc515ca3105cdcf6517425.html>.