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Jacqueline Newmyer, "The Revolution in Military Affairs with Chinese Characteristics," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33:4 (2010): 483–504.

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Jacqueline Newmyer provides an excellent overview of how the Chinese military discovered the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), and how it is apparently trying to adapt the RMA to its own purposes. She correctly traces the origins of the contemporary information technologies-led RMA back to Soviet Marshal Nikolai V. Ogarkov's writings on "the military-technological revolution," and to subsequent analyses by American analysts (particularly Andrew Marshall, Andrew Krepinevich, and Eliot Cohen) in the 1990s (485-486). These analysts argued that rapid innovations in information technologies (IT) over the past couple of decades have permitted militaries to transform their warfighting capabilities to such an extent that they constituted a "paradigm shift in the nature and conduct of military operations," and as such were viewed as a "discontinuous" or "disruptive," change in the character, concept, and mode of warfare.¹

Newmyer also correctly notes that the Chinese basically spent most of the 1990s absorbing the so-called lessons of the IT-led RMA by translating, studying, and assessing the writings of these American analysts, basically with an eye toward adapting this particular RMA to the unique requirements and capacities of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). This is actually quite common in the case of "late innovators," who generally rely heavily upon "international knowledge sourcing from global industry leaders" (in this case, the U.S. military).² This "RMA with Chinese characteristics" eventually became known as "warfare under informationalized conditions" (498).³ Informationalization, according to the Chinese 2004 *White Paper on National Defense*, involves improvements to the military's C4ISR (command, control, communications, computing, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) infrastructure, as well as the modernization of PLA hardware with high-tech upgrades or wholly new equipment.⁴

Where Newmyer seems to part company with most other analysts who are studying the Chinese RMA is the weight she puts on the PLA's use of informationalization as a tool of information denial directed against a prospective enemy. For her, informationalization is mainly about offensive information warfare (OIW) – such as attacks on computer networks and in cyberspace, as well as strikes against sensors (such as satellites) and information nodes (such as command posts) – in order to disable or degrade the enemy's C4ISR system such that either he is deterred from fighting or, once at war, that his resolve to fight is weakened to the brink of capitulation (488-490).

¹ Richard O. Hundley, *Past Revolutions, Future Transformations*, RAND Research Brief (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1999), 1; "Transformed: A Survey of the Defense Industry," *Economist*, 20 July 2002, p. 7.

² Dieter Ernst, *Late Innovation Strategies in Asian Electronics Industries - A Conceptual Framework and Illustrative Evidence*, East-West Center Working No. 66, (Honolulu: East-West Center, March 2004), p. 2.

³ The terms is also translated as "informationalization," "informationization" or informatization" (486).

⁴ "Chapter III. Revolution in Military Affairs with Chinese Characteristics," *China's National Defense in 2004* (Beijing: State Council Information Office, 2004).

Furthermore, she argues that this type of “paralysis combat” is quite in keeping with China’s traditional strategic culture. In this regard, she goes back to the “Warring States” period (c. 450-221 BC) and writings of Sun Tzu (*The Art of War*) to assert that “informationalization” enjoys a long tradition in Chinese strategic thinking. At one point, for example, she asserts

What is the connection between the current regime in Beijing’s approach to the RMA and China’s strategic tradition? The answer lies in the endurance of certain fundamental philosophical and political views that are reflected in the tradition and continue to shape the regime’s behavior around war and peace (491).

Later, she puts it more boldly: “In sum, the Chinese strategic tradition may be said to present a dynamic, intelligence-based approach to competitions with other powers” (493). To the Chinese, a critical component of warfare has always been the gathering of information about the enemy. More importantly, it has also involved denying the enemy good information about the Chinese, through secrecy, obfuscation, disinformation, and misdirection – in other words, active and passive OIW.

This argument strikes this reviewer as having a few flaws. First of all, given the overriding importance she attaches to information denial and OIW, Newmyer seems to devalue, if not downright ignore, the element of Chinese military informationalization that stresses the acquisition of high-tech weaponry and the modernization of the PLA armed forces. It is critical to note that the other side of the IT-led RMA coin is *precision-strike*, enabled by technological advances in microelectronics, sensors, propulsion, stealth, materials, etc. (hence the term often also used to describe the current RMA, the “reconnaissance-strike complex”). Newmyer acknowledges recent efforts by the Chinese to acquire such precision-strike weaponry, particularly an antiship ballistic missile, but this seems to be buried in vague discussions of “assassin’s mace” weapons, which are never really addressed (489).

More important, finding a direct causal link between a 2,000-year-plus “strategic tradition” and modern concepts of the “informationalized RMA” is a bit of a stretch. For one thing, the discussion of this strategic culture and its impact on warfighting concepts is so broad and vague that it could probably serve to inform just about *any* operational strategy of the PLA. Sun Tzu has been used by the Chinese to rationalize the “People’s War” doctrine – perhaps the antithesis of informationalized warfare – as much as Newmyer uses it to defend the latter. Overall, it is difficult to see how one can draw a link between Sun Tzu and “joint, integrated military operations” (496).

Secondly, one does not need to go back 2,000 years or to read Sun Tzu’s maxims on warfare (many of which were simplistic and open to wide interpretation when it comes to application) to appreciate the value of information in warfighting. Nearly all great generals have recognized the need for good intelligence, and certainly spying is the world’s second oldest profession. Clausewitz wrote at length on this issue, although he recognized its limitations (the “fog of war”) and therefore the folly of relying *too much* on gathered information.

Overall, when it comes to the impetus behind the Chinese adoption (and adaptation) of the IT-led RMA, technology – and in particular the PLA’s continuing technological inferiority vis-à-vis the U.S. military – has probably been much more of an influence than any historical Chinese

strategic culture. Even concepts of disinformation – or what Newmyer calls “uncertainty” (500) – and asymmetric response also could be driven more by current technological capabilities (and the lack thereof).

At the end of her article, however, Newmyer presents a thought-provoking argument for how the Chinese, in the mistaken belief that their own particular brand of “informationalized RMA” (whether or not its roots are historical, cultural or technological), could actually undermine their security by creating false illusions of deterrence capability, particularly when it comes to the United States. She notes, first of all, that the Chinese could “misjudge what display of threat or force is sufficient to break American will,” and that they subsequently could “find themselves unprepared for resiliency in the face of what had been envisioned as a *fait accompli*” (502). Second, given their “engineering” of their warfighting responses, the Chinese could “fail to foresee” (502) how conflict with America could escalate, and thirdly, that they could fail to see how war might veer off into unexpected directions for which they are unprepared. These observations raise very ominous concerns about how Chinese triumphalism concerning their rising military power and their new strategies of informationalized warfare could have disastrous consequences. Hopefully, Newmyer will expand on this thesis in her future research; it is certainly well warranted.

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