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China, Fragile Superpower

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Chinese states were using “all elements of national power” several millennia ago.)

The reader can conclude from this work that Chinese military thought places deception on an equal level with fire and maneuver. In this it differs from Western military thought, which fundamentally considers deception as “unsportsmanlike” and relegates it to the operational and intellectual fringes. Deception and unorthodox approaches afford ways for the inferior to defeat the superior force. The “stronger” force, as judged by conventional military standards, is not necessarily more likely to win in battle. Rather, the force that applies the orthodox and the unorthodox in a way that fits the situation better is more likely to prevail. The book abounds with examples of how a little deception or unconventional application can have a great effect on outcomes.

The relationship between military operations and statecraft is another fundamental thread through this book. Subversion of an enemy state begins well before military conflict, and ideally it makes conflict unneeded. Bribery, assassination (both physical and character), dissension, and distraction are all basic tools of statecraft, as well as of war. Fundamentally, Chinese thought makes no real distinction between the two.

The final chapters address the ongoing renaissance of traditional Chinese military thought in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). The once-despised classic works are now widely used in PLA institutions.

Several years ago, two PLA officers published a book, *Unrestricted Warfare*, that describes unconventional approaches for defeating a superior force. In light of Sawyer’s new work, Western

scholars should reinterpret *Unrestricted Warfare*. Rather than being an exception to PLA military thought, it may well reflect current, core thinking.

Sawyer argues that “China has a lengthy heritage of conceiving and implementing systemic programs for subverting other states.” It would be interesting for scholars of contemporary Chinese diplomacy to compare the “active measures” stratagems outlined in the book against current U.S.-China events.

This book reads well. A dynastic chronology helps place the events in historical (Chinese, if not world) context. However, maps would have greatly assisted understanding.

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Shirk, Susan. *China, Fragile Superpower: How China’s Internal Politics Could Derail Its Peaceful Rise*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007. 336pp. \$27

According to Susan Shirk, China suffers terribly from the “wag the dog” syndrome. Shirk argues rather persuasively that China is saddled with a host of internal problems, ranging from widespread social unrest to rampant political corruption, that have sharply intensified insecurities among Chinese leaders with respect to their hold on power. Such perceptions of vulnerability have in turn heightened Chinese sensitivities to slights by Japan, Taiwan, and the United States, slights that accordingly threaten to arouse potentially uncontrollable national passions and, in the process, stimulate regime-toppling impulses at home. For Shirk, this volatile

nexus of domestic and foreign pressures means trouble for regional stability in Asia. As Chinese citizens increasingly scrutinize Beijing's relations with the outside world, the Chinese Communist Party can ill afford to look soft on hot-button foreign policy questions. The party's obsession with internal stability thus compels Beijing to guard vigilantly against foreign insults to China's national honor—a critical source of the regime's legitimacy. Consequently, more than ever before, Beijing is primed to overreact to external crises and trigger confrontations that might otherwise have been averted by more temperate responses.

Overall, Shirk makes a compelling case about this peculiar dilemma that Beijing confronts. Although the proposition that the international community ought to be more concerned about China's weaknesses rather than its strengths is not new, her coverage of its domestic challenges is quite informative. In particular, Shirk provides a useful framework for understanding Beijing's internal priorities—leadership unity, social harmony, and tight control of the military—that would be instantly recognizable to those familiar with Clausewitz's famous “paradoxical trinity.” The analysis of China's prickly ties with Japan, Taiwan, and the United States, however, covers well-trodden ground, material that has been widely documented in other studies.

As a former deputy assistant secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Shirk writes with authority on U.S. diplomatic encounters with the Chinese during the Clinton administration. Her extensive interviews with Chinese policy makers, senior military officers, scholars, students, and “netizens”

not only attest to the unusual degree of access she has accumulated during her tenure but enliven the narrative with fascinating vignettes.

Nevertheless, this study is hobbled by an apparent reluctance to revisit basic assumptions about the regime itself, which, after all, the author contends, is fragile. Shirk does not render crucial judgments about the viability of China's regime-sustaining strategies, vaguely observing that “[Beijing] may be capable of surviving for years to come so long as the economy continues to grow and create jobs.” Thus the validity of the book's findings rests almost entirely on the premise that the Chinese Communist Party in its current form will endure indefinitely. The analytical consequences of this unwillingness to explore alternative futures are evident from the author's boilerplate policy prescriptions for the United States, including an injunction that Washington must live with China's repressive domestic policies.

But what if Shirk's cautious optimism about the regime's longevity is wrong? This unsettling question awaits another forward-thinking China watcher.

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Alexander, Yonah, ed. *Counterterrorism Strategies: Successes and Failures of Six Nations*. Dulles, Va.: Potomac Books, 2006. 283pp. \$24

Zimmermann, Doron, and Andreas Wenger, eds. *How States Fight Terrorism: Policy Dynamics in the West*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2006. 269pp. \$55

Since the attacks of 11 September, a kind of conventional wisdom about