1. The knowledge lacuna and implications

A good decision is based on knowledge and not on numbers.

Plato

To know what you know and what you do not know, that is true knowledge.

Confucius

CAUSAL EFFECT IN REALITY

It has come as a surprise that only a handful of Western politicians and business or organisational leaders to date have been aware that a great deal of conflict and contention between them and their Chinese counterparts is attributable to the misunderstandings associated with different strategic mind-sets. A 2014 article in the Wall Street Journal entitled ‘Misunderstanding China: how did Western policy makers and academics repeatedly get China so wrong?’, written by Michael Pillsbury, a senior consultant to the US Defense Department, highlights the gravity of this chasm.1

The Middle Kingdom – potentially the most formidable opponent we have ever faced – remains as much of a mystery as ever … Why does doubt and conjecture still shroud a nation that for six decades we have studied, worked against, then allied with, then clashed with again? … The answer that I’ve come to after studying the Chinese for 40 years is that the problem is not China, but us. For six decades we Westerners have looked at China through our own self-interest.2

In his 2015 book The Hundred-Year Marathon,3 Michael Pillsbury further addresses differences in mentalities between the Chinese and US governments and their potential consequences. The lack of understanding of the Chinese strategic mind in the West is also reflected in the failure of Western readers to appreciate a consummate interpreter of the Chinese strategic mind in the West: Dr Henry Kissinger, Harvard Professor of History and a senior US statesman,
whose book *On China* is one of the few Western works to provide some insight into how strategic intentions might be misunderstood between American and Chinese politicians and military personnel. With the benefit of Kissinger’s specialist knowledge of Chinese culture and his guidance for politicians, the US government has had a long period of congenial and mutually productive relationships with China. However, instead of being appreciated in the West, Kissinger has been criticised by some Western media for somehow misinforming or misguiding the US government, as his interpretation of the gap between US and Chinese strategic thinking was not fully understood by those lacking his particular insight. As a reputable and knowledgeable historian, Kissinger was able to ‘read’ Mao Zedong’s and Zhou Enlai’s minds and comprehend their strategic intentions. He expediently advised the US government that China would not be a threat to the USA but a solution to US–Asian problems, and both countries would share interests in guarding jointly against Russian threats to both China and Europe.

What has happened in the military field is an apposite starting point for looking at the effects of strategic thinking, as military strategies drive and inspire business strategies. ‘Corporate strategy is heavily influenced by its roots in military strategy.’ It has been observed that the principles of military strategy in modern warfare can be applied to the business arena.

The case of warfare, including the search for a theory of war by Clausewitz, has been utilised to illustrate the endeavour in the West to develop a theory of strategy. The Korean War is a classic case where its occurrence was based on misunderstandings and miscalculations on the governments of both China and the United States. No consensus has been reached yet on how and why it had happened. As early as 1967, Michael Elliott-Bateman stated in his book *Defeat in the East*:

In October 1950 the Chinese struck at the United Nations forces nearing the River Yalu and forced a rout on the United Nations that dwarfed the headlong retreat of the previous July, in spite of the complete Chinese inferiority in the recognized essentials of warfare – firepower, air support and armour … The very failure to understand the significance of Mao’s theories resulted in the French defeat in Indo-China; is resulting in the American failure in South Vietnam.

The initial setbacks experienced by the United Nations forces in the Korean War resulting from Chinese intervention may be attributable to the misreading of Chinese strategic thinking by US politicians in general and General Douglas MacArthur, then the Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command, in particular. MacArthur reassured President Harry Truman that ‘the Chinese would not attack; that victory is
imminent’ and he expressed his conviction that even in the unlikely
event of a Chinese intervention, ‘now that we have bases for our Air
Force in Korea, if the Chinese tried to get down to Pyongyang there
would be the greatest slaughter.’ Chinese action in the Korean War was
anticipated entirely from a Western perspective, such that if China had
had a democratic leadership system, as did the USA, MacArthur’s
anticipation would have been justified, as most Chinese military and
political leaders then shared MacArthur’s view. Mott and Kim (2006)
write:

Anticipating heavy casualties from superior U.S. firepower, Mao’s generals
generally opposed intervention. In refusing to command China’s Korean
expeditionary force, Lin Biao noted that U.S. firepower surpassed Chinese
firepower by twenty times. Limited to light infantry weapons, with neither
counterbattery nor counterair capabilities, any Chinese forces sent to Korea
could not counter U.S. firepower and airpower directly.

However, in the Chinese leadership structure of the time the ultimate
decision maker was Mao Zedong, whose motivations, logic and strategic
theories went disregarded by the UN forces. David Halberstam notes:

The Chinese decisions in the weeks following Inchon were essentially those
of one man, Mao Zedong … Here Mao’s domination of the politburo was
crucial. The other members were seemingly peers, but he was first among
non-equals. He was the embodiment of the new Chinese leadership, and they
knew it and deferred to him.

Mao Zedong had a different interpretation of the US involvement in the
Korean War: ‘As far as Mao was concerned, the United States was
re-entering the Chinese civil war.’ ‘By sending troops to Korea and the
fleet to the Taiwan Strait, the United States had, in Chinese eyes, placed
two stones on the wei qi board, both of which menaced China with the
dreaded encirclement.’ Mao Zedong was not afraid of confronting more
powerful opponents. Throughout his military life, Mao led Chinese
armies to fight opponents who were much stronger and better equipped
than they were; and under Mao’s own theories and ethos, his armies
mostly prevailed. ‘Starting out with so little, he [Mao] had been
unusually successful during those long years of the civil war – most of
his judgments, however bloody and difficult, had turned out right.’

On 6 August 1946 Mao Zedong met with American writer and
journalist Anna Louise Strong and made this statement:

The atom bomb is a paper tiger which the US reactionaries use to scare
people. It looks terrible, but in fact it isn’t. Of course, the atom bomb is a
weapon of mass slaughter, but the outcome of a war is decided by the people, not by one or two new types of weapon.\textsuperscript{25}

Furthermore, at the earlier stage of the Chinese intervention in the Korean War, UN forces made inadequate preparation for the Chinese ways of fighting – notably mobile and guerrilla warfare.\textsuperscript{26} In other words, if Mao’s strategic thinking had been studied and understood, the outcomes of a number of West–East wars might have been different, resulting in completely different international political and economic landscapes. Kissinger comments:

Even today Sun Tzu’s text reads with a degree of immediacy and insight that places him among the ranks of the world’s foremost strategic thinkers. One could argue that the disregard of his precepts was importantly responsible for American’s frustration in its Asian wars.\textsuperscript{27}

The purpose of this discussion of the Korean War is to examine the consequences of difference in strategic thinking between the USA and China. It does not involve a judgement on either the morality of the war or the overall political and military implications. Some have expressed the view that the Korean War had an effect on China’s isolation from the West\textsuperscript{28} and resulted in the loss of the opportunity to unite Taiwan\textsuperscript{29} with the People’s Republic of China, let alone the human cost involved in the loss of a huge number of Chinese lives and the consumption of an inestimable quantity of resources in a country that subsequently became increasingly hostile to China. Zhang (1995) writes:

According to Chinese statistics, the CPV [Chinese People’s Volunteers] had lost a total of 390,000 troops – 148,400 dead, 21,000 captured, 4,000 missing in action, and the remainder wounded. The CPV consumed approximately 5.6 million tons of war materials including 399 airplanes and 12,916 vehicles. The People’s Republic spent more than 6.2 billion renminbi on the interventions.\textsuperscript{30}

Robert Farley (2014) observes:

The legacy of the war complicated China’s international situation. In part because of the memory of Chinese intervention, but also in combination with China’s domestic politics, the United States managed to keep the PRC isolated from the international system into the 1970s.\textsuperscript{31}

Over 50 research-based Chinese-language books describe and illustrate most of the battles and military campaigns of the Korean War, generally in a positive light, with political and military implications favouring the
Chinese government. ‘For China, the war represents a remarkable victory over imperialism in the face of overwhelming odds. It introduced the People’s Republic of China to the international system with a (literal) bang.’\textsuperscript{32} Zhang (1995) notes that Chinese leaders believed that the intervention strengthened the security of a new China. ‘We fought our way back to the 38th parallel and held firmly at the parallel.’ Mao explained. ‘If … [our] front lines had remained along the Yalu and Tammen rivers, it would have been impossible for the people in Shenyang, Anshan, and Fushun to carry on production free of worry.’ Chinese leaders also believed that the CPV had so devastated American military strength that a general war between China and the US was delayed.\textsuperscript{33}

No matter how the Korean War is evaluated, it has proven to be a humanitarian disaster from which both sides should learn lessons, not least about what to avoid in the future.

There was nothing good about the last Sino-American War, not even the ‘peace’ that resulted from it. The experience of this war, now nearly forgotten on both sides, should serve as a grim lesson for policy makers in both Washington and Beijing. The Korean War was anything but accidental, but miscalculation and miscommunication both extended and broadened the war beyond its necessary boundaries.\textsuperscript{34}

Through the eyes of veteran historian and statesman Dr Henry Kissinger, we may see the gulf in strategic thinking between Chinese and US politicians. It is his view that many Sino-US conflicts started off on the wrong foot, each side taking actions based on erroneous assumptions about the other side’s strategic thinking. Kissinger writes:

Through the lens of Western strategic analysis, most of Beijing’s military undertakings in the first three decades of the Cold War were improbable and, on paper at least, impossible affairs\textsuperscript{35} … China and the United States were approaching a clash by misinterpreting each other’s strategic design.\textsuperscript{36}

On 27 May 1960, Bernard L. Montgomery, British field marshal and allied commander during the Second World War, met with the late Chinese leader Mao Zedong; a meeting that included a conversation on the topic of China’s development ‘50 years on’ and starting with the question and judgement:

China probably needs 50 years to get everything in shape … What will China’s future be by then? … I have the idea that when a country turns very strong, it should be very careful, so as not to carry out aggression. Just take a
look at the United States, people will get to know … The historical lesson is that a country tends to be aggressive when it is very powerful.37

This view was largely regarded by Mao Zedong, and indeed by the Chinese media, as a case where a Western logic was applied to the Chinese, ignoring Chinese tradition and history. Kissinger remarks: ‘The United States is more focused on overwhelming military power, China on decisive psychological impact. Sooner or later, one side or the other would miscalculate.’38

The disconnection between Western and Chinese thinking is also reflected in the failure of the Western popular predictions of ‘the coming collapse of China’39. Apparently China disappointed the criers of her downfall and surmounted the menace through the implementation of appropriate fiscal, monetary and social policies, resulting in sturdy economic growth and contributing to the recovery of the global economy as these predictions have been made primarily from a Western perspective. Notable for its re-emergence is a 2015 prediction, the ‘collapse of the Chinese political regime’:

The endgame of Chinese communist rule has now begun, I believe, and it has progressed further than many think. We don’t know what the pathway from now until the end will look like, of course. It will probably be highly unstable and unsettled. But until the system begins to unravel in some obvious way, those inside of it will play along – thus contributing to the facade of stability.40

This view through a Western lens is even more wide of the mark, failing to understand the effect of the Chinese government’s anticorruption campaign, which is considered by the Chinese populace as a positive action.

In the domain of business, when the chief executive of German-based Q-Cells, the world’s market leader in solar panels before 2010, was asked about competitive threat from Asia, he easily dismissed such a possibility, disregarding the competitiveness of Asian contenders. The company was later outsold and outdone by a Chinese company, resulting in Q-Cells’ collapse.41 Chin-Ning Chu, president of Asian Marketing Consultants, Inc., writes:

In my professional life as a representative for Western companies doing business in Asia, I am constantly frustrated by the inability of Eastern and Western minds to meet … The underlying cause of misunderstanding is not language itself but how we think; Asians and Westerners think as differently
as they speak. I once heard Donald Frisbee, CEO and Chairman of Pacific-Corp, say, ‘If I could just understand how the Asian thinks, I would know how to deal with him.’

It has been advocated that, in order for German companies to out-compete the Chinese, they should become ‘Chinese’ themselves. A kind of ‘modern parable’ has been created by British lawyers to highlight the differences between Chinese and British business thinking. The story goes like this.

An English businessman and a Chinese businessman compete in the same field of business in China, and soon a dispute arises between them and needs to be settled in the local Chinese law court. Different approaches to preparing the case are adopted by the two businessmen. Instead of spending money on lawyers, the Chinese businessman unsparingly plies the judge of the court with gifts and entertains him lavishly. In contrast, the Englishman prepares the case in a serious manner and employs the best and most expensive lawyers with a sense of confidence in winning the case. To his astonishment, the judge rules in favour of the Chinese businessman. The same two businessmen also carry out the same business in England, and again a legal problem emerges that needs to go to court. It is an English court with an English judge this time. The Englishman acts in the same way as before and feels confident that the court will find in his favour. The Chinese businessman again sends plentiful gifts and holiday vouchers to the judge until the day of trial arrives. Once again, to the Englishman’s surprise, the judge adjudicates in favour of the Chinese businessman. The Englishman is in utter disbelief as he has known that what the Chinese businessman has done would not be acceptable in the UK. The Englishman abandons his fight and asks the Chinese businessman to tell him the secret of his winning the legal battle.

Thoroughly nonplussed, the English businessman says: ‘I can understand how you won the case in China by doing what you did, but I just do not comprehend how you can try to influence the judge in the UK like that and get away with it. How did you do it?’ The Chinese businessman confides that the gifts sent to the English judge have been sent in the Englishman’s name.

During the period of the London 2012 Olympics, the badminton event was the source of a controversy of unusual magnitude for such a usually peaceful sport. Chinese and other Asian players were deliberately losing the matches. This astonished the Western audience, who failed to understand what was going on. This action, perplexing as it was to the Western audience, reflected a winning strategy designed by a Chinese
coach, who did not have any sense of wrongdoing – to him it was just a 'strategy' to win gold medals.

THE UNAWAKENED ACADEMIC WORLD

The real-world events in the West that I have described above may to a large extent be attributed to the academic realm, which has provided and continues to provide inadequate research, knowledge and teaching on Chinese thinking for the benefit of Western political, military and business decision makers.

In the academic world of both social and natural sciences, Western theory and methodology prevail. In the last decade, it has been recognised in the West that research on management and organisation has been dominated by North American and European scholars, and there has been a lack of local indigenous research in the international context in general and in China in particular. This phenomenon has been ascribed to a dearth of self-confidence on the part of Asian researchers. The analysis based on economic power also sheds light on why Chinese management research, including context-sensitive research, often assumes a Western perspective.

As far as natural sciences are concerned, there is little doubt that they belong to the Western world, as they are the products of Western logical thinking. The Western worldview is characterised by the development of an ideal based on theory, followed by subsequent application. Such an outlook has witnessed marked success in natural sciences, but has often met challenges or frustration in the field of social studies. As for social sciences, a tradition of distinctively Chinese philosophical and military thought has existed for over 2000 years.

Chinese culture has been essentially a culture of the humanities, while modern Western culture has been predominantly occupied with the development of science. In scientific studies there is an emphasis upon recent developments. A dictum for the scientist is, 'the more up-to-date the more acceptable' … But in the humanities the corresponding dictum, 'the more recent the more acceptable', can no longer hold.

In the late 1910s Mao Zedong, the founding father of the People’s Republic of China, had an opportunity to study in France, as other Chinese leaders such as Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping had done. He rejected the idea on the basis that it was true that the West was much more ‘advanced’ than China, but the ‘advancement’ was primarily reflected in natural sciences and technology; in the areas of humanities, it
might not be true. It was Mao’s vision that Western and Chinese traditions would share half the world in the future. Systems such as those expressed in *I Ching*, Confucianism, Taoism and Mohism have largely been ignored by mainstream research interests, becoming a narrowly confined domain of specialist inquiry in the West. Marina Čarnogurská (1998) writes:

Western philosophers have long used reason to minimise the philosophical value of classical Chinese texts, because those works are, in contrast to Western demands on the intellectual level and content of philosophical texts, written most ‘unphilosophically’. … Chinese philosophical texts seem empty of any theoretical ontology, epistemology or formal logic to which philosophers in the West are accustomed in their own philosophical works.

Research indicates that, while US management theories may not be shared by European and Asian countries, the managerial practices of modern Chinese business leaders are influenced by Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism and legalism, as well as communism. From antiquity the Chinese have mostly been interested in ‘social phenomena’ or ‘social studies’ because of their firm embrace of the doctrine of the unity of men and nature. Stuart Schram (1967) has noted value clashes between the Chinese and occidentals:

The high value which the Chinese place on their own culture has been a subject of exasperation and puzzlement to Europeans ever since they began their efforts, a century or so ago, to ‘civilize’ the Middle Kingdom by a judicious combination of gunboats, trade, and missionaries … More significant and more distinctive, is the traditional Chinese attitude according to which theirs has been the only genuine civilization, and the Chinese empire co-extensive with the civilized world.

Gordon Redding (1980) has also observed:

That there are fairly large-scale differences in cognitive processes is often a matter of surprise to Westerners viewing Oriental people and vice versa. The problem is an inherent inability to step outside one’s own world view and see the possibility of an alternative. And yet the literatures in psychology, philosophy and anthropology which examine the Chinese are full of references to such a difference, and references moreover which are consistent. In the West, in the field of psychology, there has until recently been a universal acceptance that the fundamental reasoning processes in all cultures are identical, and in areas of strategy and management, the universal ‘Western cognition or logic’ or typically ‘analytic thinking’, instead of the ‘holistic thinking’ that is the dominant cognitive mode in
China, has prevailed. 'Most strategy research, by its very nature, is more atomistic than holistic, focusing on just a few variables at once.' In the area of philosophy, 'few efforts have been made to study typically Chinese ways of reasoning.' The lack of cross-cultural research on strategic thinking 'probably also reflects the implicit assumption by most that theories on strategic thinking are universally applicable.' This tendency in the Western social-science world has created barriers to the development of cross-cultural understanding at its fundamental level between the West and China. If Western and Chinese peoples were never to interact with each other, this would be a non-issue. However, when each people have to communicate or deal with the other, their minds should be more or less on the same page to avoid misunderstanding. Research in the field of military and political studies has revealed that the Chinese strategic mind-set is influenced by China's ancient military thought and culture, differing from that of the West.

For a long time, the West has courted China as an attractive market and endeavoured to gain a share of it. Thus the balance of the need to understand the strategic mind leans towards the West; that is to say, it is more important for the West to delve into Chinese cognition than vice versa. Willy Brandt, former German chancellor, offers pithy support to such a statement: 'If I'm selling to you, I speak your language. If I'm buying, dann müssen Sie Deutsch sprechen (then you must speak German). There is also evidence that, in international mergers and acquisitions, Chinese businesses have paid dearly for their failures in understanding Western business strategic thinking.

In general, there has been a dearth of literature on the understanding of Chinese strategic thinking, and academic articles on the topic in top journals are few and far between. An important question arises: since the understanding of the Chinese strategic mind seems so critical for business, military and diplomatic relations with China, why have there been such limited initiatives on the part of Western society in developing knowledge of this field? It is notable that in-depth research into Chinese military strategic thought has been limited, with the attention primarily focusing on Sun Tzu's *Art of War*. Johnston (1995) observed:

There is little direct debate over the Sun Zi text because there has been so little written on the topic in the Sinological community. The research in the 1980s through 1990s has generally not focused on the intellectual or philosophical content of ancient Chinese military thought.

The lack of attention to, or the failure to understand, Chinese strategic thinking in the field of military studies was noted in the 1960s, and it was
to this that the French defeat in Vietnam in the 1950s was attributed. Elliot-Bateman (1967) notes:

Vietminh regular troops were training in China around this period. The war in Vietnam then followed the pattern so clearly illustrated in Mao Tse-tung’s speeches and communiques, and these were available in the West ... It should not have been too difficult for the French to have realized this and to have sought a counter to the new problems by initiating an intensive study of Mao’s methods of warfare demonstrated against Chiang Kai-Shek and against the Japanese.67

It would be unfair to say that among British and American armies there had, at the time, been a total neglect of Mao’s works, which were evidently collected by some senior officers. The plain fact is that it would be no small undertaking to understand Mao’s strategic thinking within his treatises, which are ultimately embedded in ancient Chinese military and philosophical thought, as explained by Elliot-Bateman:

But why are Mao’s doctrines not already understood when considerable attention has been drawn to this necessity in books and articles over the past ten years? Certainly many people have read Mao’s works and also Giap’s, indeed volumes of both are to be found in many an Army officer’s bookcase as a sort of professional symbol. Yet these are seldom read but for the first twenty pages or so ... Thus Mao remains a mystery.68

Similarly, in the business field, to have a good command of knowledge of Chinese strategic thinking, one should have a fair understanding of Chinese philosophy, history, sociology, psychology, politics, economics and strategy, reflecting the Chinese holistic outlook on the world. The opposite is also true, in that in China few understand Clausewitz’s On War,69 Jomini’s Art of War70 or du Picq’s Battle Studies.71 In China

the study of war is fundamentally a study of society; that war is not a military activity in a social vacuum, but a social phenomenon with characteristics and peculiarities rooted in man’s social and economic nature and in man’s historical background.72

It would be difficult to delve into Chinese strategic thinking without taking a holistic approach. In the West, academic research has become increasingly ‘analytical’ in nature, and, some might say, unsuited to practical application in the real world. In order to have papers published in top journals, researchers need to be highly focused on a narrow area with multivariate statistical analyses. In 2014, a group of faculty members from the marketing department of a top European business school
carried out a research project on the publication distribution of marketing faculty members by UK business schools. A surprising result was that a researcher from a top UK business school took the crown with an amazingly large number of top-ranking journal articles; but equally surprisingly, few of the marketing staff members at the business school who attended the seminar at which the outcome of this project was presented had ever heard of the researcher’s name or any of his/her publications. There is a paradoxical pattern and trend: to have a great impact on managerial practices, research outcomes need to be published in a top journal; to have the paper published in a top journal, the research should be highly quantitative or ‘academic’ (often meaning ‘impractical’). ‘The more math an author throws at a problem, the less her audience understands her and the more they respect her. Your skill at logic and math places you the pecking order of science.’ Addressing the Prussian Academy of Sciences in Berlin on 27 January 1921, Albert Einstein raised and answered a pertinent question:

At this point an enigma presents itself which in all ages has agitated inquiring minds. How can it be that mathematics, being after all a product of human thought which is independent of experience, is so admirably appropriate to the objects of reality? … In my opinion the answer to this question is, briefly, this:— As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality.

Similar views have been expressed by Carl von Clausewitz, an influential military theorist, in his famous treatise On War, and by François Jullien, a French historian and philosopher, in his book entitled A Treatise on Efficacy between Western and Chinese Thinking. In other words, brilliant and outstanding young researchers have to engage in ‘academic’, quantitative and highly focused research to advance in their academic careers, with the consequence that few top brains are involved in publishing papers aiming at strategic practitioners.

Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel have borrowed the idea of a poem, ‘The Blind Men and the Elephant’ by nineteenth-century American poet John Godfrey Saxe, and likened the current research on strategy formation to the situation of ‘blind men’, identifying ten schools of thought on aspects of strategy.

Everyone, in a sense, is narrow and overstated. Yet in another sense, each is also interesting and insightful. An elephant may not be a trunk, but it certainly has a trunk, and it would be difficult to comprehend elephants without reference to trunks.
This is a natural consequence of analytical-thinking-based research. On a similar line of thinking, we may also see another pattern of limitation for analytical-thinking research by comparing Western research on strategic management with the health condition of a man. Taking an anatomical comparison, we may associate research on strategy with, say, ‘brain’, marketing with ‘heart’, human resources with ‘lung’ and organisation with ‘liver’ and so on. If the man is completely healthy, the strategy researcher would attribute it to right business strategy (healthy brain), the marketing researcher to marketing strategy (healthy heart), the human-resource researcher to human-resource strategy (healthy lung) and organisational researcher to organisational factors (healthy liver). Of course, a healthy person would have a complete range of properly functional organs, although one may be better than another. However, from a strategic thinking or holistic perspective, the fundamental and foremost factor is that the healthy person would have the right ideas about a healthy lifestyle – eating healthy food, regularly doing exercise and keeping an optimistic and upbeat spirit. Although the functional organs are important, thinking in an appropriate way about how to lead a healthy life is the cornerstone of good health.

To understand Chinese social issues one must examine them from a holistic perspective, which often involves multidisciplinary and qualitative studies. Some US- and European-educated Chinese academics have designed research projects on decision making in Chinese enterprises or by Chinese entrepreneurs, but failed to reveal the inner workings of Chinese strategic thinking, mostly because they have banked on Western strategic frameworks. Such is the situation in which the understanding or education of Chinese business remains dominated by Western perspectives. Martin Jacques, author of *When China Rules the World*, notes:

> It is impossible to understand or make sense of China through a western prism. As China becomes a great power and, over the next two decades, steadily usurps America as the dominant global power, we will no longer have any alternative but to abandon our western parochialism and seek to understand China on its own terms. But the shift in mind-set that faces us is colossal.78

Social psychologist Richard Nisbett has made a similar comment on this point: ‘Many people in Eastern countries believe with some justice that the past five hundred years of Western military, political, and economic dominance have made the West intellectually and morally arrogant.’79

Recent years have witnessed US state officials and army officers making efforts to understand the Chinese strategic mind-set through the ancient board game of *wei qi*, commonly known as ‘go’ in the West,
realising the importance of comprehending Chinese thinking in order to grapple with Chinese opponents in international affairs.\textsuperscript{80} It is recognised that many Chinese political and military decisions in an international context have been made by adopting a \textit{wei qi} perspective\textsuperscript{81}, which has tended to be misread or misunderstood by Western political or military decision makers. As Kissinger remarked:

And in China’s conflicts with both the United States and the Soviet Union, Mao and his top associates conceived of the threat in terms of a \textit{wei qi} concept – that of preventing strategic encirclement … It was in precisely these most traditional aspects that the superpowers had the most difficulty comprehending Mao’s strategic motives.\textsuperscript{82}

However, it would still be a formidable task to understand the Chinese strategic mind by reading Sun Tzu’s \textit{Art of War} or Mao Zedong’s military works alone, as mentioned earlier by Elliot-Bateman, because the strategic mind behind the strategies described by the authors is culture-bound.\textsuperscript{83} One extreme example is the development of traditional Chinese medicine (‘TCM’), which has been practised for over two millennia in China, with proven effectiveness against a wide range of illness and disease. Effective as it undoubtedly is, it has never been understood or accepted in the West because of the extreme difficulty in the apprehension of its pathologies, which are embedded in Chinese thinking. On the Western diagnostic and therapeutic approach, a physical disorder is often recognised by symptoms such as headache or stomach pain and physical signs such as skin complaints, examined directly with scientific instruments and tests, then treated with drugs, surgery, physiotherapy, plaster or salve. Following the traditional Chinese remedial approach, by contrast, a doctor would normally first seek the cause of the symptoms by taking a holistic view, generally employing four diagnostic methods: interrogation, inspection, auscultation and olfaction, and pulse-taking and palpation.\textsuperscript{84} The condition is then often treated using different methods such as herbal medicine, cupping, breathing technique therapy, plaster, acupuncture and massage. In addition, a herbal prescription for treating a particular complaint normally consists of about ten different herbs, each of which addresses a separate dimension of the complaint. While Western medicine is quite effective in the treatment of acute diseases, mostly outperforming traditional Chinese medicine, this is not true for many chronic diseases, where traditional Chinese medicine is generally slightly superior to Western medicine in terms of alleviating the symptoms and effecting a permanent cure.
NOTES

1. The author, Michael Pillsbury, is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and a consultant to the US Defense Department, and his view is a good indication of the lack of knowledge about the Chinese strategic mind in the West, but in the following, explanations will be provided as to why this has been the case.


13. Ibid., pp. xii–xiii.


15. Ibid.

16. Li, Q.S. (2010), Guo Men Liang Jian: Kang Mei Yuan Chao Ji Shi (Unsheathing Sword at the Gate: Korean War Documentation). Beijing: People’s Publishing House. The commander of the Chinese army in the Korean War was Pen Dehuai, but the initial candidates for the position that Mao Zedong had in mind were Su Yu and Lin Biao, who both rejected the position on ‘health’ grounds.


19. Ibid., p. 338.

20. Ibid., p. 341.


22. Ibid., p. 131.
The Chinese strategic mind

23. Ren, Z.G. (2013), Wei Shen Mo Shi Mao Zedong? (Why has Mao Zedong been Chosen: history cannot get around him, the present cannot pass around him, the future cannot go around him ... ?). Beijing: Guang Ming Daily Publisher.
32. Ibid.
36. Ibid., p. 132.
47. Leung (2012), op. cit., note 44.
The knowledge lacuna and implications

67. Ibid., p. 16.
74. Clausewitz (1942), op. cit., note 68.
32

The Chinese strategic mind

83. This will be explained in Chapter 3, which deals with the nature of strategic thinking as a cultural phenomenon.
84. Nowadays, hospitals and doctors specialising in traditional Chinese medicine in terms of diagnosis and treatment also rely on scientific instruments and methods such as X-rays and blood tests, in addition to the traditional four methods.