WARFARE ETHICS IN SUNZI'S ART OF WAR? HISTORICAL CONTROVERSIES AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

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Contemporary English and Chinese scholars alike have interpreted Sunzi’s Art of War as advocating amoralism in warfare. That charge has a long history in pre-modern China and has not been fully refuted. This essay argues that the alleged amoral Machiavellianism is more appropriate for ancient Qin military thought than for Sunzi. The third chapter of Sunzi’s treatise contains a distinctive moral perspective that cannot be found in the military thought of the state of Qin, which succeeded in defeating all other states in the Period of the Warring States. Such a moral perspective contains both ad bellum and in bello norms. I submit that my interpretation of Sunzi’s warfare ethics can provide an important resource for the People’s Liberation Army of China to construct full-scale just war ethics that is similar to Western understandings.

KEY WORDS: Sunzi (Sun Tzu), Art of War, Machiavellianism, amoral realism, Clausewitz, Shang Yang, Henry Sidgwick, Michael Walzer, Michael I. Handel, last resort, proportionality, People’s Liberation Army (PLA)

I. Introduction: Is Sunzi’s Art of War Amoral?

The Art of War by Sunzi (i.e., Master Sun; previously transliterated as Sun-tzu), supposedly composed in ancient China’s late Spring and Autumn Period (770–475 BCE), is well known throughout China and the rest of the world. More than 20 English translations have been published. It continues to be studied in military strategy courses in China and some Western countries including the United States. In most American professional military education systems, reading parts of Sunzi’s Art of War is a regular practice in core courses on strategic theory, in conjunction with reading Clausewitz.

From a military ethics perspective, the question arises whether or not this treatise is simply a manual about strategies and tactics without any ethical dimension. Does the world’s first treatise on war teach that everything is permissible in securing victory and that morality and immorality have no place in warfare? Some contemporary interpreters (English as well as Chinese) take the affirmative view. For example, A.I. Johnston argues that in this text ‘the ends clearly justify the means’, and that ‘there are parallels with Machiavelli’s view of morality and war’ (Johnston 1995: 70). It allegedly embodies certain realpolitik or parabellum axioms similar to those in Western strategic thought. According to our common understanding of a ‘realpolitik’ point of view, the phrase
‘warfare ethics’ is an oxymoron. As Niccolo Machiavelli states in his *Discourses on the First Decade of Livy*:

For when the safety of one’s country wholly depends on the decision to be taken, no attention should be paid either to justice or injustice, to kindness or cruelty, or to its being praiseworthy or ignominious. On the contrary, every other consideration being set aside, that alternative should be wholeheartedly adopted which will save the life and preserve the freedom of one’s country (qtd. in Reichberg et al. 2006: 257).

Some Chinese interpreters of Sunzi take the same view. A People’s Liberation Army (PLA) officer and professor at the National Defense University writes in his book-length exposition of Sunzi’s military thought, ‘This is the greatest contribution of Sunzi to the history of warfare, viz., warfare is warfare, which is a life-and-death struggle. The talk of morality is out of place in this sphere of life’ (Ma 2008: 160; trans. mine).6

This is an important issue that merits in-depth examination. In Section II, I put the issue in historical perspective and point out that such an amoral reading of Sunzi’s *Art of War* has predecessors in Chinese history and has not been convincingly refuted. In Section III, I offer a moral hermeneutics of the text on the basis of past exegetical scholarship and with the aid of Western warfare ethics. I further point out that the alleged ‘amoral realism’ is more suitable for ancient Qin military thought and practice than for Sunzi. In Section IV, I submit that there are both *ad bellum* and *in bello* norms in Sunzi’s military thought. In Section V, I point out that the issue at hand is not just an academic one. I submit that my interpretation of Sunzi’s warfare ethics can provide an important resource for the PLA to construct *ius in bello* just war ethics that are similar to Western definitions. An amoral reading of Sunzi’s *Art of War*, on the other hand, can provide ammunition for the PLA to ignore *ius in bello*.

II. Moral Controversies on Sunzi in Pre-Modern China

As illustrated in the previous section, a realpolitik way of reading Sunzi’s *Art of War* is not a new phenomenon. Since the time of Xunzi, and especially since the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC–9 CE) in which Confucianism was established as the state ideology, there has been a Confucian tradition of denouncing this text on moral grounds. One major reason for the negative reaction is Sunzi’s programmatic statement in Chapter 1: ‘[The Military] is the Way (Tao) of deception [gui, 謊]’ (Sun Tzu 1994: 168).8 An additional statement in Chapter 7 reinforces this view: ‘Thus the army is established by deceit [zha, 詐]’ (ibid.: 198).9 His *Art of War* was thus deemed a text that would corrupt morality very much in the way Machiavelli’s *The Prince* was denounced in Europe during its early reception.10 In Confucianism, soldiers and generals alike need to cultivate virtues. To suggest that the quintessence of the military is all kinds of immoral tricks would require military men to cultivate vice on a daily basis.11 It was Xunzi who first set up the antithesis between the Confucian way of *ren* and *yi* (benevolence and righteousness, i.e., morality) and Sunzi’s way of *gui* and *zha*.12 More and more arguments against Sunzi’s thought were eventually presented; hence the two-thousand-year history of interpretation of Sunzi’s *Art of War* in pre-modern China is a history of denunciation as well as appreciation.

It is impossible to summarize this complex history of interpretation and evaluation of more than 2000 years in this short article.13 In this section, I will focus on the Song Dynasty
(960–1279 CE) for a number of reasons: (1) The Song Dynasty was constantly at war with its northern nomad neighbours, and the number of military writings surged tremendously as a result. In fact, the imperial government organized an encyclopaedic project of editing known as *Wujing Zongyao* 《武經緯要》 (*A Comprehensive Summary of Military Classics*), which was finished in 1043 CE. (2) A large number of commentaries on Sunzi’s *Art of War* were published during this period. The interest in this military text and its exegesis was so great that the highly regarded and very influential *Eleven Schools of Glosses on Sunzi* was edited and published in c.1161 CE (Yang 1999). (3) This dynasty was famous for the emergence of neo-Confucianism. A number of neo-Confucian scholars were very critical of Sunzi, though neo-Confucian defenders of Sunzi were not lacking. Hence, both eulogy and denunciation of this treatise reached a climax during this period (R. Yu 2001: 127). (4) It was in this dynasty that the *Seven Military Classics* were canonized (1078 CE) and became the military bible for education and examination, bringing the level of military strategy education to a new height. Sunzi’s short treatise is placed first in the canon.

Other than Chen Shidao (陳師道) and Gao Shisun (高似孫), the leading neo-Confucian critic of Sunzi in the Song Dynasty was Ye Shi (葉適), whose arguments are more sustained and eloquent and can be paraphrased as follows:

1. Deceptiveness in warfare is but an expedience and should not be made the norm and quintessence of the military. The norm for the military should be the cardinal virtues of ren and yi, and deceptiveness should be condemned as *prima facie* wrong. Though it is sometimes morally permissible to resort to a *prima facie* wrong tactic, that permissibility is an exception, not a norm. Morality is not to be ignored in military affairs.

2. There is too much talk of *li* (利 utility, benefits, or interests) in Sunzi’s *Art of War*. Since the time of Mencius, Confucianism has been emphasizing moral appropriateness or righteousness/justice (*yi*，義) over *li*. Hence, the Military Strategist tradition is deemed incompatible with the Confucian tradition.

3. Warfare is part of statecraft, and statecraft should be guided by ren and yi, i.e., governance by virtues. To extol Sunzi’s *Art of War* to the status of a military bible is to have a constricted moral-political vision.

4. For Confucians, *Sima’s Art of War* 《司馬法》, another ancient Military Strategist text that explicitly grounds warfare ethics on the political ethics of ren and yi, is a better guide.

In short, this neo-Confucian philosopher also tacitly accused Sunzi’s *Art of War* of advocating amorality in warfare.

On the other side, appreciators and apologists of Sunzi during that period included experts on Sunzi such as Shi Zimei (施子美), Zheng Youxian (鄭友賢), and neo-Confucian philosophers such as Zhang Shi (張栻) and Huang Zheng (黃震). Their defences of Sunzi, especially those of Huang Zheng and Zheng Youxian, can be paraphrased as follows:

1. Deceptiveness (*詭詐 gueizha*), when properly understood, is not the same as evil deceitfulness (*奸詐 jianzha*); Sunzi advocates only the former in combat situations, but not the latter as a way of life.

2. Utility, benefits, and interests (*li*，利) are not incompatible with righteousness (*yi*，義), especially when national interests are at stake. There are times in warfare when a calculative mentality is indispensable.

3. Sunzi’s *Art of War* and *Sima’s Art of War* are mutually complementary rather than antithetical to each other. Hence, the Military Strategist and Confucian traditions can be
mutually illuminating. (In fact, at the time, quite a number of commentaries on Sunzi's *Art of War* were written with Confucian moral idioms.)

In short, these apologists point out the compatibility and even complementarity between Sunzi's *Art of War* and Confucian ethics. However, they stopped short of pointing out the moral dimension of Sunzi's strategic thought. Since the charge of amorality in warfare has not been fully refuted it persisted beyond the Song Dynasty. This essay attempts to give a definitive reply to this charge, but before it does so, two more historical clarifications are in order.

A solution to the very intense debate during the Song Dynasty was the creation of a canon of pre-eminent texts known as the *Seven Military Classics*. Sunzi's *Art of War* was placed first in the canon to be followed by six other famous texts, including the very *Confucian Sima's Art of War* mentioned above. In that way, both the greatness and limitations (hence the need for complement) of Sunzi's *Art of War* were acknowledged (R. Yu 2001: 115). Another solution was to provide an unbiased and informed understanding of Sunzi's text by furnishing the best annotations available at the time, hence the appearance of the *Eleven Schools of Glosses on Sunzi*, which is still a standard reference for today's readers and to which I will refer consistently in my analysis below.

The thoughtful exegeses and interpretations therein, together with the eloquent ‘Supplementary Glosses’ added later by Zheng Youxian (Zheng 1991: 316–29), have provided replies to many of the charges hitherto levelled against Sunzi.

The first argument against Sunzi's defence mentioned above deserves elaboration. In the *Analects* (IX.29, XI.28), the three cardinal virtues are *zhi* (wisdom), *ren* (benevolence), and *yong* (courage). Persons of *ren* and *zhi*, in particular, are on several occasions extolled in parallel (IV.2, VI.23). ‘Wisdom’ in the *Analects* is closer to *phronesis* (practical wisdom) than to *sophia* (speculative wisdom), hence the emergence of the ideal of a sage. While this attention to the virtue of wisdom is inherited only by some subsequent Confucians, it is widely accepted in Chinese society (cf. Raphals 1992).

This understanding of wisdom includes resourcefulness, as articulated by the expressions ‘witty and very resourceful’ (足智多謀) and ‘clever strategy’ (智略, 智謀). Down through the ages, as reflected in a number of idioms, Chinese people have accepted that a military leader need be both brave and astute (智勇雙全), that in some combat situations ‘the only way to take the enemy position is by strategy, not by forceful attack’ (只可智取, 不可強攻), and that battle on the highest level is a battle of wits (鬥智). In short, when Sunzi emphasizes the use of deceptive tactics in warfare, he is emphasizing the nourishment of the virtue of wisdom without excluding other virtues. Some critics of Sunzi worry that the calculative mentality of employing deceptive devices may encourage vices when carried over to ordinary life. When one becomes accustomed to cheating his opponents, one may start to cheat on his family, friends, and employers. A reply to this legitimate doubt is that one needs to be vigilant of the discontinuity between military and civilian life. The configuration of cardinal virtues for a virtuous commander is different from that of a virtuous civilian. Shrewd, astute, resourceful, and tricky wisdom has a prominent place in the former, but not in the latter. Despite our metaphors, life is *not* a battlefield; the mission in life is not to pursue one’s enemies and conquer the hostile people around us. As long as Sunzi's *Art of War* is only a bible on the battlefield and not in professional and daily life, we can put the charge of moral corruption to rest.
will offer a proper moral interpretation of the text and explain why the current amoral readings are wrong.

III. Moral Dimensions of Sunzi’s *Art of War* vis-à-vis Amoral Military Thought and Practice of Qin

I am not aware of any modern scholarship that interprets Sunzi’s *Art of War* with the aid of ethics. In this section, I offer a moral hermeneutics of the text with the aid of Western warfare ethics and on the basis of rigorous exegesis informed by the long commentary tradition. This short treatise is very concise; many instructions are given pithily with little elaboration or explanation. As a result, eminent exegetes in the long commentary tradition are indispensable for a sympathetic reading.

Prudential reasoning runs through the entire text quite obviously. The reader is advised to exercise great caution and self-restraint in both initiating and conducting a war.  

We should try to avoid war as much as possible with the backing of a credible deterrent force, but if war is unavoidable we should conduct it as prudently as possible, relying on smart strategies and tactics rather than a display of maximum force. The resulting balance of benefit and harm must be meticulously assessed before any military movement is made. Contemporary Chinese interpreters, both civilian and military, characterize Sunzi’s stance on war as *shen zhan* (慎戰, i.e., exercise great caution and self-restraint in war matters), which is largely correct. (Yu 2006: 56–63, Chinese Academy of Sunzi’s *Art of War* 2007: 153, Ma 2008: 71–5, G. Li 2009: 97–8).

There are a few moments throughout the text in which the author’s prudentialism displays distinct moral sensibilities. The most important is the very famous and often misunderstood part of Chapter 3, ‘*Mou Gong*’ (謀攻 ‘Planning Offensives’ or ‘Strategic Attack’). The chapter begins with this observation:

In general, the method for employing the military is this: Preserving the [enemy’s] state capital is best, destroying their state capital second-best. Preserving their army is best, destroying their army second-best. Preserving their battalions is best, destroying their battalions second-best. Preserving their companies is best, destroying their companies second-best. Preserving their squads is best, destroying their squads second-best. For this reason attaining one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the pinnacle of excellence. Subjugating the enemy’s army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence. (Sun Tzu 1994: 177).

This passage articulates a preferential order of strategies in five different combat situations. In all five cases, the much-preferred option is to win by committing as little violence and carnage to the enemy as possible. To win by resorting to brute force to crush, rout, and slaughter the enemy is only second best. Sunzi then concludes that the pinnacle of military excellence is to defeat the enemy while avoiding all-out violent combat. We should note that even though the text itself puts it starkly, in reality preservation and destruction represent not a dichotomy but are a matter of degree. In between Sunzi’s best and second-best options lie a number of grey options. Hence, in actual practice Sunzi’s military instruction regarding enemy personnel and properties would be to preserve as much as possible and to destroy as little as possible, i.e., to inflict as little damage and as few casualties as possible. Indeed, to subjugate the enemy’s army without any fighting is the
true pinnacle of excellence, but we should not unleash maximum violence when the
pinnacle is deemed not within reach.31

At this point, Sunzi has not yet articulated the rationale of his preference of ‘preservation over destruction’, which I will analyse in the next section. To begin with, it is noteworthy that such advice goes against the military wisdom of that age. During the Period of the Warring States, the governing thought was that it was too much trouble and a tremendous danger to keep a large number of POWs. They were not trustworthy enough to be incorporated into one’s army; to assure subsequent military successes, it was more prudent to destroy enemies and POWs than to preserve their lives (Li 2010a: Ivi), which was almost the norm in Chinese warfare during that time (Li 2010a: 52, n.6).32 General Bo Qi of Qin re-affirmed as much before burying 400,000 surrendered Zhao soldiers alive: ‘The Zhao soldiers are fickle. We will have trouble in the future if we do not annihilate them now’ (Sima 1959: 2335; trans. mine).

An overview of the military history of that period can help put Sunzi’s advice into context. Sunzi himself lived in the late Spring and Autumn Period (770–475 BCE), which was followed by the Period of the Warring States (475–221 BCE). Compiled by his followers, The Art of War was probably in circulation only in the latter period. It was an age of a multistate, unstable world that saw frequent conflicts over control of land and people; ‘killing fields’ were aplenty (Ames 1993: 4). As the book of Mozi states in its famous chapter on ‘Condemning Offensive Warfare’:

Nowadays, kings, dukes, great officers and feudal lords of the world are not like this… When they enter the border regions of a state, they cut down its grain crops, fell its trees and forests, break down its inner and outer city walls, fill in its ditches and pools, seize and kill its sacrificial animals, burn down its ancestral temples, slaughter its people, destroy the old and weak, and move away its valuable utensils. [The soldiers] advance rapidly and fight to the limits, saying: ‘the highest [honor] is to die in battle; the next highest is to kill many of the enemy; the least is to suffer injury oneself…’ (Mozi 2010: 185).

Mozi may have over-generalized in his sweeping condemnation of warfare immorality, but historians have not disputed the brutal destruction caused by rampant warfare in this period of Chinese history.

The Seven Powers in particular were involved in ceaseless contention for supremacy during that period, and wars of annexation were frequent and intense. The state of Qin, by virtue of the big reform by Prime Minister Shang Yang, became richer and its military force more formidable. Shang Yang advocated the complete militarization of the state and promoted warfare in such a way that people ‘on perceiving war, behave like hungry wolves on seeing meat . . . Generally, war is a thing that people hate; he who succeeds in making people delight in war, attains supremacy’ (Shang 1928: 286; Chapter 18, ‘畫策 Policies’). Eventually, Qin became the most powerful state among the Seven Powers. Furthermore, Shang Yang put into place a strictly enforced system of punishment and reward in military expeditions. One criterion for promotion was the number of heads of slain enemies turned in.33 In other words, Qin adopted a policy of mass slaughter, putting ‘the destruction of armies on such a scale that rival states would lose the capacity to fight’ (Lewis 1999: 640).34 Qin eventually conquered the other six states, enforced Pax Qina (Pax China) in the region,35 and established the Qin Dynasty. Modern scholarship tends to agree that among the various reasons for Qin’s rise to a superpower was the fact that its people had ‘a reputation for ruthlessness in war’ (Bodde 1986: 47). As two scholars explain:
For the 130-year period of 364–234, the *Shiji* records fifteen major battles or campaigns in which Qin was involved... The combined casualties thus allegedly inflicted by Qin on all its rivals during the entire 130-year period amount to 1,489,000 (Bodde 1986: 99; pinyin adjusted).

On the whole, Qin is recorded to have killed more than 1.5 million soldiers of other states between 356 and 236 BC. While these numbers are likely to be exaggerated and should be treated as reflecting the magnitude of battle deaths rather than absolute figures, they nevertheless reflect Qin’s ruthless brutality in its pursuit of domination (Hui 2005: 87).

The most infamous incident of this long series of campaigns was the battle at Changping in 260 BCE after which General Bo Qi of Qin putatively buried 400,000 surrendered soldiers of Zhao alive (Sima 1959: 2335, cf. Lewis 1999: 640).

In short, it is important to note that Qin’s military success was built partly on a military tactic entirely contrary to Sunzi’s advice of ‘preservation over destruction’. The state’s military strategy, and probably the military thought of Shang Yang, was clearly amoral; for Qin, there was no concern for war conduct other than what guaranteed military success.36 There was no scruple to restrict violence and human suffering on either side, and no mercy was to be shown to enemy soldiers, whether captured or surrendered. There was no self-imposed restraint or limit on the use of lethal violence to serve national interests. A warfare amoralist would only act dictatorially by storming and bullying one’s way to victory single-mindedly. Fully determined to get one’s way swiftly, one would impose one’s will on others with high-handed force.

This was part of Qin’s formula for success. From such an amoral viewpoint, Sunzi’s recommendation of ‘preservation over destruction’ is too troublesome and cumbersome to implement. As always, ambitious individuals and powers do not like moral advice.37 To annihilate the enemy is neat and tidy, resolute and decisive, and can surely avert future troubles such as mutiny. For a ‘realist’, living in a harsh world full of hostility and conflict, terrorizing opponents into submission through brutal force is simply prudent, and long years of war can be compared to an extended gladiatorial combat. Because ‘mors tua, vita mea’, no war conduct should be ruled out ahead of time as morally inappropriate.

Contrary to an amoral realist, Sunzi advocates self-imposed restraint and limits in the employment of lethal violence. For Sunzi, even if we are living in a gladiatorial world, we should try to disable the opponent and force the enemy to submit ingeniously. At the point of the previously quoted message, Sunzi has not yet straightforwardly explained his reason for his preference of preservation over destruction, i.e., the minimization of violence and casualties. However, as the chapter is entitled ‘Strategic Attack’, the view of Sunzi the strategist can be compared with that of a Sidgwickian utilitarian as analysed by Michael Walzer:

Sidgwick’s twofold rule seeks to impose an economy of force. It requires discipline and calculation. *Any intelligent military strategy, of course, imposes the same requirements.* On Sidgwick’s view, a good general is a moral man. He keeps his soldiers in check, keyed for battle, so that they don’t run amuck among civilians; he sends them to fight only after having thought through a battle plan, and his plan is aimed at winning as quickly and as cheaply as possible (Walzer 1977: 130; emphasis mine).

I submit that Sunzi is an excellent example of a good general as understood by Walzer.
IV. Ad Bellum and In Bello Norms in Sunzi

Sunzi’s passage in Chapter 3 of The Art of War continues as follows:

Thus the highest realization of warfare is to attack the enemy’s plans; next is to attack their alliances; next to attack their army; and the lowest is to attack their fortified cities.

This tactic of attacking fortified cities is adopted only when unavoidable. Preparing large movable protective shields, armored assault wagons, and other equipment and devices will require three months. Building earth-works will require another three months to complete. If the general cannot overcome his impatience but instead launches an assault wherein his men swarm over the walls like ants, he will kill one-third of his officers and troops, and the city will still not be taken. This is the disaster that results from attacking [fortified cities].

Thus one who excels at employing the military subjugates other peoples’ armies without engaging in battle, captures other people’s fortified cities without attacking them, and destroys other people’s states without prolonged fighting. He must fight under heaven with the paramount aim of ‘preservation’. Thus his weapons will not become dull, and the gains can be preserved. This is the strategy for planning offensives (Sun Tzu 1994: 177).

The first paragraph above again sets down in no uncertain terms the ranking of strategic options when inter-state conflict arises. While a country should resolve this conflict aggressively, there are four levels of ‘attack’. The first and most desirable is mental or psychological war, aimed at thwarting the enemy’s plans and frustrating their strategies. The second is diplomatic effort, aimed at isolating the enemy, fomenting coalitional strife, and enlarging one’s own alliances. The third is armed conflict, and the least desirable is full assault of fortified cities. This tactic should be adopted with great reluctance and as a last resort (不得已, translated as ‘is adopted only when unavoidable’ above) due to the high casualty rate. This is an ad bellum norm. When a conflict arises, the first option is to resolve it non-violently and restrain one’s military impulse. It is noteworthy that though Art of War is a manual for military success, it does not glorify war, nor does it advocate an aggressive use of military brute force. If a country can resolve the conflict via the first two options, it can realize the ideal of ‘subjugating the enemy’s army without fighting’, which is set down in the previously quoted passage and reiterated in the last paragraph above. In short, Sunzi’s overall advice is that by means of creative non-violent combat, one can outwit one’s opponents without actual military violence and win with preservation rather than the destruction of enemy lives and properties. This is the pinnacle of military excellence. When one does need to resort to violence, a virtuous commander ‘destroys other people’s states without prolonged fighting’. In other words, he will try to reduce the carnage as much as possible. Once again, it is not overwhelming brute force that one should rely on; smart and efficient tactics and stratagems to subdue one’s enemies are still the norm.

The exegetes in the classical Eleven Schools of Glosses are of two minds on Sunzi’s advice to inflict minimum violence on the enemy. On one hand, some exegetes understand it prudentially by a benefit calculus. Sawyer follows this interpretation and explains that ‘brutal attacks would force the enemy to mount a pitched defense, knowing that they would all perish if vanquished. Less intense opposition would invariably result in fewer losses for one’s own side’ (Sawyer 1994: 286). The problem with this interpretation is that it
might stem from a well-intentioned miscalculation. On the other hand, five exegetes in the classical Eleven Schools of Glosses concur that Sunzi’s recommendation of preservation over destruction is based on the abhorrence of slaughter and destruction. Subsequent pre-modern commentators also overwhelmingly justify this pinnacle of excellence on intrinsic moral grounds – the intrinsic moral undesirability of carnage, killing, harming, and destruction (Zhu 1990, 125–6). This ‘deontological’ perspective is seldom articulated by contemporary interpreters of Sunzi.

Both interpretations make sense in Sunzi’s text. At any rate, Sunzi’s Art of War earns its fame because of its strong advocacy of clever use of stratagem and manoeuvre warfare rather than use of maximum brute force and warfare of annihilation. This explains the famous line from the first chapter: ‘[The military] is the way (Tao) of deception’ (Sun Tzu 1994: 168). Again, we should bear in mind that in this passage Sunzi is not a crypto-pacifist; he is willing to choose the third and even fourth option as a last resort.

I submit that Sunzi’s instruction of not relying on excessive force implies a certain sense of ‘proportionality of means’ in warfare. It is not yet the ‘proportionality of means’ of ius in bello in contemporary Western just war ethics, as collateral damage is not part of the discussion, but it is heading in the right direction. A modern utilitarian view on warfare ethics shows a similar concern for proportionality to Sunzi:

A belligerent must be allowed to inflict on his enemy such mischief as is likely to be effective in disabling him and inducing him to submit; but he may be expected to abstain from such mischief as does not conduce to these ends importantly in proportion to its amount … To sum up; so far as personal injuries are concerned, there is, I think, no material difficulty in limiting the mischief caused by war to something like the minimum necessary to achieve the ends of war (Sidgwick 1908: xxi, 271).

Though Walzer rightly concludes that utilitarianism is limited in establishing rules for war, he acknowledges that Sidgwick’s warfare ethic ‘is not, however, a small achievement. If it were made effective in practice, it would eliminate a great deal of the cruelty of war’ (Walzer 1977: 129–30). A similar moral concern can be found in Sunzi: when everything goes right, one can win a battle without firing a shot, and that is art of war par excellence. Only when strategic moves are not as successful as planned do we then have to fight the battle using violence. As Samuel B. Griffith, former brigadier general in the US Marine Corps and expert on Sunzi’s Art of War, correctly explains, even in such a bloody scenario, victory should be gained ‘(a) in the shortest possible time; (b) at the least possible cost in lives and effort; (c) with infliction on the enemy of the fewest possible casualties. … [T]his ancient writer did not conceive the object of military action to be the annihilation of the enemy’s army, the destruction of his cities, and the wastage of his countryside’ (Griffith 1963, 39). This is equivalent to the early idea of proportionality, which urges us to use ‘the least destructive ways to defeat those forces or render them ineffective so as to achieve those legitimate ends’ (Johnson 1991: 31).

In his foreword to Griffith’s translation of Sunzi’s Art of War, Sir Basil H. Liddell Hart, English soldier, military historian, and eminent war theorist famous for advocating an ‘indirect approach’ in war, states:

Civilization might have been spared much of the damage suffered in the world wars of this century if the influence of Clausewitz’s monumental tomes On War, which moulded
European military thought in the era preceding the First World War, had been blended with and balanced by a knowledge of Sun Tzu’s exposition on ‘The Art of War’ (Hart 1963: v).

Liddell Hart is not alone in contrasting Sunzi to Clausewitz in this light. It has been argued that whereas the Western war method paradigm is attrition warfare with an emphasis on destroying the enemy via overwhelming force, Sunzi is the earliest advocate of manoeuvre warfare with an emphasis on incapacitating the enemy through pre-emption, surprise, and disruption in conjunction with significant firepower. Hence, American strategist Michael I. Handel concurs that Sunzi represents a ‘manoeuvre-cum-deception paradigm’ (Handel 2001: 220) that has become ‘much more relevant to our own time than Clausewitz’s dismissal of its worth’ (ibid.: 230). The military merit of manoeuvre warfare is that it can defeat an opposing force more efficiently. The moral side effect is that it will reduce casualties to both sides, which is, as Walzer puts it, no small achievement.

However, Handel also observes, ‘The divergence between Clausewitz and Sun Tzu on the issue of victory without fighting is substantial. While Sun Tzu elevates it to an ideal, Clausewitz considers it to be a rare exception … In any case, Clausewitz considers the chance of winning without fighting to be so low that it is not of great concern’ (ibid.: 147). Two replies are in order. First, as explained earlier, the ideal of ‘victory without fighting’ is an ideal to be approximated, which allows for various degrees. Rather than advocating no fighting at all, it only advocates an aggressive use of non-lethal force to subdue one’s enemies before and during the war. If one cannot reach the pinnacle of success, one should reach for second best, which involves some fighting. (Indeed, after Chapter 3, the remaining ten chapters of Sunzi’s treatise are all about fighting.) Second, that this ideal option should be deemed ‘not of great concern’ just because of its rare occurrence is sensible only when one adopts an amoral perspective. For an amoralist, once war has started, there is no concern for ‘excessive’ force and hence no need for self-imposed restraint. No matter what school of ethics one subscribes to, a moralist abhors the massive destructiveness unleashed by military violence and so advocates fighting with self-restraint. Sunzi does not want to give up any chance of disabling the enemy and forcing it to submit bloodlessly. Hence, the ideal of victory without fighting, pace Clausewitz, should be of great concern. In short, moral sentiments are alive and well in Sunzi’s Art of War; amoral reading of the text does violence to it.

V. Normative Implications for the PLA

China is once again very proud of its rich and manifold cultural heritage, and it is understandable that there would be continuity between pre-modern Chinese military ethics and contemporary PLA military ethics. As contemporary China’s grand strategy rests on its rich strategist traditions (Burles and Shulsky 2000, Scobell 2001), a partial understanding of contemporary China’s military ethics is available through the study of ancient Chinese military ethics. The PLA studies pre-modern military treatises intensely, and PLA Press has published many studies on pre-modern Chinese military thought for their peers and students to read. A number of military scholars have also been doing research in this big field, the most recent and brilliant example of which is the six-volume A General History of Chinese Military Thought (Jiang 2010: c. 2500 ff.). The government and
the military need to endorse some ethics of war, and because they are reluctant to endorse Western notions, it is inevitable that they must retrieve it from Chinese traditions. Because the PLA is self-conscious in inheriting the rich heritage of the Military Strategist tradition, it is only natural that they will endorse a certain version of warfare ethics that is largely, though not exclusively, informed by the warfare ethics of that tradition.

The *Seven Military Classics* are the representative writings of the Military Strategist tradition; they were the canon in late imperial China. However, their collective authority collapsed together with the demise of the imperial order in 1911, though they continue to be read and studied. When all seven are read together as a whole, unity of thought is taken for granted; the diversity within the canon is ‘harmonized’ and treated as complementary, rather than contradictory. When each of the treatises is read for its own worth, diversity and inconsistency of thought among them is to be respected and their unity considered only coincidental. In the post-canon age, one can treasure any one treatise while disregarding the rest. The tradition is still present, but its authority has diminished and fragmented – each treatise can be read independently, and together with a few others, each competes for higher authority. The canonical texts are for reference only, without the binding force uniting them as in the past. Some of the advice therein can be deemed outdated and selective retrieval is based on contemporary ‘usefulness’. One can currently pick and choose freely which treatise or portion of a treatise makes up one’s canon. The popular choice, of course, is Sunzi’s *Art of War*, and contemporary Chinese publications on this treatise are dominated by PLA authors. Because of this, ways of interpreting this historical text will have far-reaching consequences in PLA deliberations and actions and in global affairs.

To emphasize the issue in another way, the language of ‘just war’ is intrinsic to the current Chinese government’s identity. This language has also been used to justify China’s various wars since 1949, especially the Korean War in the 1950s. The PLA establishment accepts the distinction between just and unjust wars in various publications (Strategy Research Unit of Academy of Military Science 2001, ECMS 2007, Peng 2009). However, there has not been any published elaboration of how they understand this distinction beyond what Mao Zedong articulated more than 70 years ago (Mao 1935, 1936, 1938) and how contemporary Chinese just war ethics differ from those of the contemporary West. What is noticeable thus far is that they understand just war almost entirely on the sole *ius ad bellum* criterion of just cause. Acknowledgement of *ius in bello* cannot be found in these official writings (for details, see Lo 2012). One can sense that the PLA establishment is ambivalent on Western just war ethics.

Two recent comprehensive volumes on non-Chinese military ethics edited by Gu Zhiming shed a little light on this ambivalence. The chapter ‘Contemporary Western Military Ethics’ states the following: (1) The just war language in general existed in ancient Greece and Rome and can also be found in the writings of ancient China, India, and Muslim thinkers. It is only in the particular content that we find differences. (2) Although Western just-war theory has differences with both traditional Chinese and Marxist just war theories, they have the same moral vision of morally restraining the proliferation of warfare and of promoting peace. (3) Contemporary China has been very familiar with the language of just war as China has suffered in too many unjust wars and has fought bravely in the just wars of liberation and independence. (4) Recent research on Western just war theory and international law of war help the Chinese military familiarize itself with *ius ad bellum, ius in*
bello, and the principles of proportionality and of distinction in particular (‘We know them very well’) (Gu 2010a, 507–8). (5) There is an emphatic affirmation of ius in bello principles articulated by Western military ethics; they are deemed reasonable and terrorism is to be condemned by these principles (ibid.: 482–3).

However, despite such an emphatic affirmation of ius in bello principles articulated by Western military ethics, Gu submits that while that particular component of the ethics is reasonable, it is not exclusively so because ethics are conditioned by cultural values, and Chinese cultural values are different from, yet not inferior to, Western ones. To put it differently, though he is appreciative of its moral persuasiveness, Gu expresses an unwillingness to adopt Western military ethics and just war ethics. (To ‘import’ Western values is a taboo in some Chinese quarters.) Two senior PLA officers make it clear in the prefaces to these two volumes that the PLA aspires ‘to critically assimilate all reasonable ingredients of military ethics, East or West, past or present, so that we can develop our own military ethics with a Chinese distinctiveness’ (Gu 2010a: iii, 2010b: iii; trans. mine). In short, contemporary Chinese warfare ethics, while learning from various sources, is to be ultimately informed by traditional Chinese military culture and ethics. As in other matters, the Chinese government wants to articulate its own unique voice rather than adopting the voices of others. For them, it is a matter of national dignity that China stands on equal footing with the West, which prevents its endorsement of Western just war ethics, especially when it is presented as an enlightenment project that is rationally discerned and universally binding. Hence the PLA establishment’s prevailing ambivalence on the subject.

I submit that my interpretation of Sunzi’s warfare ethics in this paper can provide an important resource for the PLA to construct a full-scale just war ethics that is similar to Western understandings. The principles of last resort and of proportionality are partially there. The amoral reading of Sunzi’s Art of War should be firmly rejected, not only because it is a wrong interpretation, but also because, like other wrong ideas, it can have disastrous consequences. It can provide ammunition for the PLA establishment to continue to be silent on ius in bello. The PLA’s public stance on ius in bello is very important, because in terms of ius ad bellum, a possible future military conflict with another nation could easily be seen as a case of ‘simultaneous ostensible justice’ (Johnson 1984: 21).59 We urgently need mutually agreed-upon ius in bello principles to mitigate possible future conflicts.60

NOTES

1. For a number of reasons, in this article I do not explore the authorship, time of composition, and historical background of this text. Readers interested in these complex issues can read the Introduction of recent English translations (e.g., Griffiths 1963, Ames 1993, Sawyer 1994, Mair 2007, Ivanhoe 2011).
2. Except for those published after 2001, these are all listed in Handel (2001: 461–462).
3. In Asia (especially Japan) it is widely studied outside the military institutions (e.g., the business community and the management world) and other parts of the world are following suit.
4. According to A.I. Johnston, many American educators in strategic theory consider the similarities between Sunzi and Clausewitz more significant than their differences
(Johnston 1999: 23). Recently Arthur Waldron, China expert at University of Pennsylvania, once again stressed the significant differences between them (Waldron 2007).

5. Johnston later admits that his argument is controversial and ‘at the moment is a minority interpretation of Sun Zi’ (Johnston 1999: 9).

6. One should note that contemporary Chinese publications on Sunzi are dominated by PLA officers. It would be interesting to find out how many PLA scholars on Sunzi share this same view.

7. The title Art of War, strictly speaking, is an inaccurate translation. ‘Bing’ means both ‘arms’ and ‘armed forces’; hence ‘bingfa’ means the method or art of the armed forces. There were other treatises composed in that age that bore the same title, e.g., Sun Bin Bingfa, Wuzi Bingfa, etc. The subject matter of these treatises is about cultivation and training of good generals and soldiers as much as about military strategies and tactics. In this essay I continue to use the translated title Art of War just for the sake of readers’ convenience.

8. The literal meaning of ‘gui’ suggests deceit, treachery, or cunning scheme. Hence the whole sentence in Chinese can be understood as ‘The military is all about deception/deceit’.

9. The literal meaning of this related word suggests deceit, fraud, cheating, or feigning.

10. As a recent translator puts it, that warfare is all about deceit ‘is by no means a unique view, since Kautilya, Machiavelli, and many others subscribe to a similar outlook’ (Mair 2007: 140). All military operations in the world today employ this tactic.

11. Sawyer’s observation is apt, ‘Although all the military writings exploit deceit and deception, Sun-tzu’s statement is the most explicit formulation of the principle’ (Sawyer 1994: 305).

12. Chapter 15 of Xunzi is entitled ‘Debate on the Principles of Warfare’. It began with a debate between the Lord of Linwu and Master Xun on the quintessence of victory in war. The Lord of Linwu contends, ‘In warfare what should be most prized is the power inherent in advantageous circumstances. What should be adopted are shifts in tactics and dissimulation’. And he argues that Sun Wu (Master Sun) and Wu Qi were advocates of this theory of war and their armies were invincible then. Xunzi, instead of focusing on the generals, focuses on the king. He counters that such a view of war as reported by Lord of Linwu is the practice of feudal lords only. But his view of war expresses the aspiration of a person of ren and that of a True King. A morally good king wins the support of the people, and under his rule ‘hundred generals will be of one mind and the three armies make a common effort’. Such an army is ‘all harmonious, devoted, and united’ and so is invincible; such an ‘army of ren and yi’ would not succumb to tactics of dissimulation (Xunzi 15.1a–1b; 1990: 218–221).


14. Movable type printing was invented in this dynasty; hence more books, across genres, were published.

15. The book of Mencius begins with the memorable dialogue: ‘Mencius went to see King Hui of Liang. “Sir,” said the King. “You have come all this distance…You must surely have some way of profiting [li, 利] my state?” “Your Majesty,” answered Mencius. “What is the point of mentioning the word ‘profit’? All that matters is that there should be benevolence [ren] and rightness [yi]…”’ (Mencius I.A.1).

16. Properly understood in context, this term means only ‘concealment of what really is, under a feigned semblance of something different’.

18. *Sunzi’s Art of War* continued to be criticized by some Confucians in subsequent times until the last dynasty of imperial China (Qing Dynasty, 1644–1912) (see Wei 2004: 18–39, R. Yu 2001: 161, 170, 174).

19. For a complete English translation of the *Seven Military Classics* see Wu ching ch’i shu (1993); for discussions see Johnston (1995), and Lo (2012).

20. The annotated treatise was originally titled *Ten Schools of Glosses on Sunzi*. Modern scholarship discovered that there are in fact eleven authors being quoted, hence nowadays critical editions of this treatise are re-titled *Eleven Schools of Glosses on Sunzi*.

21. It is admirable that some English translations incorporate some of these classical annotations in their publications (Sun Tzu 1963, 1988, 2002, 2003 [1910]). However, the total length of these annotations is at least twenty times of the original text, which is too daunting a task for a translator. Hence these English versions contain only the tip of an iceberg, usually in the form of very short sayings. Such abbreviation is by no means enough for an in-depth understanding of the text.

22. Four cardinal virtues are affirmed in *Mencius*, sc., *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness/justice), *li* (observance of rites), and *zhi* (usually translated as ‘wisdom’). But ‘zhi’ in Mencius denotes an innate sense of right and wrong and does not mean wisdom. The Mencian tradition in neo-Confucianism therefore does not acknowledge the importance of wisdom as a cardinal virtue either. I submit that this is one important reason for a Confucian lack of appreciation of Sunzi.

23. In Chapter One of the treatise, Sunzi articulates five cardinal virtues of a good general: wisdom, credibility, benevolence, courage, and strictness.智慧, 信, 仁, 勇, 嚴 (Sun Tzu 1994: 167). One prominent exegete in the Tang Dynasty and of one of the classical Eleven Schools, Du Mu, explains, ‘If wise, a commander is able to recognize changing circumstances and to act expediently. If [credible], his men will have no doubt of the certainty of rewards and punishments. If [benevolent], he loves mankind, sympathizes with others, and appreciates their industry and toil. If courageous, he gains victory by seizing opportunity without hesitation. If strict, his troops are disciplined because they are in awe of him and are afraid of punishment’ (qtd. in Sun Tzu 1963: 65). Chapter Three of this treatise will be analyzed meticulously in the next two sections. Its title is 謀攻, variously translated as ‘Planning Offensives’, ‘Offensive Strategy’, ‘Attack by Stratagem’, etc. Zhang Yu, another famous exegete of the classical Eleven Schools, elaborates that this chapter is about ‘attack by means of witty strategies 以智謀攻’ (Yang 1999: 44).

24. Hence Li Ling of Peking University opposes the current trend of applying the *Art of War* in business and management.

25. As Du Mu, an eminent exegete among the Eleven Schools, puts it, ‘The Kingly Way puts more emphasis on *ren* (benevolence) whereas the Military Strategist School puts more emphasis on *zhi* (wisdom) 先王之道, 以仁為首, 兵家者流, 用智為先’ (Yang 1999: 7).

26. Subsequent interpreters of Sunzi all agree that wisdom is the first virtue among equals for a virtuous commander (cf. Qiu 2004: 159–60).

27. Li Ling, an unorthodox scholar and the most famous civilian interpreter of Sunzi in PRC, continues to interpret Sunzi in a semi-amoral way. On the one hand, he argues that Sunzi is right that for a responsible statesman and commander all is fair to secure a military victory (and ‘deceptiveness’ is just the tip of an iceberg). On the other hand, as a human
being he finds such conduct worthy of denunciation and Sunzi’s *Art of War* posing a huge challenge to morality (Li 2006: 138, 2010a: xxviii, xxxiii, lv–lvi, 241). Li does not know Western ethics, and is not aware that such a moral paradox has been resolved rather well by Michael Walzer’s treatment of the ‘problem of dirty hands’ (Walzer 1973). Li’s effort to push Sunzi’s *Art of War* to the camp of Machiavellianism is to stretch the moral paradox too far and to inject too much of his own provocative ideas into his exegesis. (Such provocative ideas are very fresh ideas in the present social-political context of PRC, though.)

28. One memorable statement of this prudentialism is as follows: ‘If it is not advantageous, do not move. If objectives cannot be attained, do not employ the army. Unless endangered do not engage in warfare. The ruler cannot mobilize the army out of personal anger. The general cannot engage in battle because of personal frustration. When it is advantageous, move; when not advantageous, stop. Anger can revert to happiness, annoyance can revert to joy, but a vanquished state cannot be revived, the dead cannot be brought back to life. Thus the enlightened ruler is cautious about it, the good general respectful of it. This is the Tao for bringing security to the state and preserving the army intact’ (From Chapter 12, ‘Incendiary Attacks’; Sun Tzu 1994: 228).

29. According to a fine example of recent research, the word ‘*li*’ (利 benefit, advantage, interests) occurs some 50 times in this short treatise (G. Li 2009: 104).

30. In quoting Sunzi, I largely use Sawyer’s translation (1994) not only because it is by and large accurate, but also because his translation is widely used by the American military education system (Johnston 1999: 5). When I find his translation awkward I go back to Griffith’s translation (1963), which is still very reliable and also well-known among the American military.

31. As an American military appreciator of Sunzi explains, ‘Sun Tzu was well aware that combat involves a great deal more than the collision of armed men… [He] cautioned kings and commanders not to place reliance on sheer military power. He did not conceive war in terms of slaughter and destruction; to take all intact, or as nearly intact as possible, was the proper objective of strategy’ (Griffith 1963: x).

32. In a later text entitled the *Stratagems of the Warring States* 戰國策, two grand strategies were identified, viz., strategy of annexation and strategy of alliance formation. Qin strategists adopted the former: ‘They think that annexation of a state involves both population and territory and to annex only the land while not annihilating the inhabitants of the state runs the risk that the survivors will seek to restore their state and annex you in return’. A Qin advisor even cites historical examples to support this strategy: ‘Wu did not annihilate Yue and so Yue annihilated Wu; Qi did not annihilate Yan and so Yan annihilated Qi. Qi perished under Yan; Wu perished under Yue. This is because the malady was not thoroughly rooted out’ (Yan 2011: 131).

33. This policy is meticulously recorded in Chapter 19 (‘境內 Within the borders’) of *The Book of Lord Shang* (Shang 1928: 295–303) and confirmed by *Hanfeizi* in Chapter 43 ‘定法 Determining Laws’ (Han 2000: 963). Xunzi also noted this policy of Qin, but mentioned that the state of Qi also had a similar policy (Xunzi 1990: 222–3). This policy of Qin was noticed by contemporary English scholarship on the history of that period (e.g., Lewis 1999: 612).

34. It is recorded in *Shiji* that the Qin armies have the habit of beheading enemies during military campaigns. The following numbers of beheading are recorded: 60,000 enemy soldiers in the battle against Jin in 364 BCE (Sima 1959: 201, 719), 7000 and 80,000 in
354 and 331 BCE respectively against Wei (ibid.: 205–6, 722), 80,000 in 318 BCE against the allied forces by Han, Zhao, Wei, etc. (ibid.: 207, 731–2, 1804, 2285), 10,000 in 314 BCE against Han and Wei (ibid.: 207, 733, 1872, 2288, 2483), 60,000 in 307 BCE against Han (ibid.: 209, 734–5, 1872, 2312), 20,000 in 301 BCE against Chu (ibid.: 210, 736, 1727), 50,000 in 298 BCE against Chu (ibid.: 213, 743, 1854, 2328), 150,000 in 273 BCE against Han, Zhao, Wei, etc. (ibid.: 213, 743–4, 1854, 2328, 2331), 50,000 in 264 BCE against Han (ibid.: 213, 2331), 6000 against Jin in 257 BCE (ibid.: 214), 130,000 in 256 BCE against Han and Zhao (ibid.: 218) and 100,000 in 234 BCE against Zhao (ibid.: 232, 753, 2450–1). Based on the above rough figures, the total number of soldiers beheaded by Qin is up to 1,193,000 from 364 BCE to 234 BCE.

35. It is generally believed that the word ‘China’ has its origin in the transliterated word ‘Chin,’ which is now transliterated as ‘Qin.’ China as we know it today has its beginning in the Qin Dynasty.

36. In the noteworthy book on pre-Qin political thought on international relations, Yan Xuetong has not covered Sunzi and Shang Yang. But he does examine Hanfeizi, another mastermind for Qin, and concludes, ‘Hanfeizi does not ask if the purpose of war is just or not; he is only concerned to know if it is victorious or not’ (Yan 2011: 33). The allegation by Johnston of Machiavellianism of ‘the end justifies the means’ is more suitable for Shang Yang and Hanfeizi than for Sunzi.

37. One historian offers this explanation: ‘Apparently, the Sunzi’s advice that ‘preserving their army is best, destroying their army second-best’ had become outdated by then’ (Hui 2005: 86, n.93). The word ‘outdated’ is not right. First, the fame of Sunzi’s Art of War grew rather than declined during this period. Second, that Qin defeated all rivals by ignoring this particular advice of Sunzi indicates that this advice is moral rather than strictly military in nature. If this advice were strictly military in nature and Qin’s military success proved it wrong, Sunzi’s Art of War should be held in less esteem in subsequent times; but the historical fact was just the opposite. Military commanders of all ages in China, including Mao Zedong, listen to Sunzi as a strategist, but ignore him as a moralist.

38. Some elaborations of the Eleven Schools are as follows: ‘to make their plans unfeasible or counter-productive in all kinds of ways’ (Li Quan), ‘to outwit one’s opponents’ (Mei Yaochen, Wang Xi), ‘to launch psychological war’ (He), ‘to cut off supply lines and lines of communication with other states’ (Zhang Yu) (Yang, 1999: 44–50).

39. A.I. Johnston consistently resists interpreting these texts morally. Hence he proposes that these four strategic choices should be read not as a ranked set of preferences but rather as one of two things: (1) a menu of strategic choices; or (2) a temporal sequence of strategies (Johnston 1995: 103). Griffith, on the other hand, following mainstream interpretation in the history of exegesis, understands these four choices as ‘in order of relative merit’ (Sun Tzu 1963: 78, n.2).

40. Though the concern for casualties in this paragraph is for soldiers on our side, the similar concern in the previously quoted passage is for soldiers on the enemy’s side. (Ames’ translation, in following D. C. Lau, errs here, though he acknowledges the presence of the standard interpretation; Ames 1993: 111, 284, n.123).

41. It is noteworthy that the last chapter of this treatise is on the employment of spies. The penetration of secret agents can increase the chances of success of these two non-violent options.
42. This famous ideal is re-affirmed in some other treatises of the *Seven Military Classics*, e.g., *Taigong’s Six Secret Teachings*, *Master Weiliao, Questions and Replies between Tang Taizong and Li Weigong*, (Wu ching ch’i shu 1993: 65, 69, 273–4, 360). This ideal is also affirmed in some Confucian writings, though for a different reason, such as *Xunzi*: ‘Although the army did not bloody its swords, from near and far people came to offer submission, (for their moral force so flourished at this place that its manifestations reached the Four Limits)” (*Xunzi* 1990: 228).

43. One of the classical exegetes, Zhang Yu, tries to illustrate by citing the distinction of ‘Victory by the Dao’ and ‘Victory by Force’ in the *Weiliaozi*, another military treatise later than Sunzi’s. The former comes by damaging enemy morale, demoralizing their will to fight, disarming them mentally, and paralyzing their chain of commands. To win this way is a moral victory. Hence the emphasis is not on brute force imposed on others, but on the moral superiority of one’s cause (Yang 1999: 44).

44. The classical exegetes have these comments on this instruction: ‘an army does not prolong violence 師不久暴’ (Zhang Yu); ‘in punishing the tyrant and destroying his regime one does not do violence to the army and the general mass 若誅理暴逆, 毀滅敵國, 不暴師眾’ (Du You); ‘we should strive to destroy the regime, but not to inflict violence to the people 但毀滅其國, 不傷殘於人’ (Jia Lin) (Yang 1999: 51–2).

45. For example, ‘it is better to have the whole enemy state forced to surrender to us because of internal and external pressures on them 絕其內外, 敵舉國來服為上’ (Cao Cao曹操, concurred with by Du You 杜佑 and He 何氏; Yang 1999, 44)); ‘[that] the enemy state is not damaged implies that our state is not damaged too; this would be the best 全得其國, 我國亦全, 乃為上’ (Jia Lin 賈林; Yang 1999: 44).

46. We should note that to treat POWs well is not a natural conclusion of Consequentialist reasoning. Henry Sidgwick understands how one can arrive at the contrary conclusion: ‘The slaughter of prisoners has also been justified as a measure of self-protection; but I conceive that it would now only be tolerated – however extreme the emergency – if the prisoners refused to give their parole not to serve during the remainder of the war, or if experience showed that their word could not be trusted’ (Sidgwick 1908: 270, n.1). Alternatively, Li Ling interprets this recommendation from a prudential post-bellum, rather than in bello, perspective (Li 2010a: lvi, 53).

47. Such as Li Quan 李筌 (‘we do treasure killing 不貴殺也’), Chen Hao 陳嗥 (‘war would necessitate killing 戰必殺人故’), Jia Lin 賈林 (‘it is only second best to win by strategic deception, destruction, annihilation, and inflicting harm and damages…詐詐為謀, 擊破敵眾, 殘人傷物, 然後得之, 又其次也’), Mei Yaochen 梅彝臣 (‘war would necessitate harming people, but to kill and harm is abhorrent 恐乎殺傷殘害也…戰則傷人’), Zhang Yu 張預 (‘to win by fighting would necessitate massive killing and harming 戰而後能勝, 必多殺傷’) (Yang 1999: 44–5, 50–2). The first three authors were of the Tang Dynasty whereas the last two were of the Song Dynasty.

48. Lisa Raphals correctly observes that Sunzi subscribes to ‘the principle of the undesirability of warfare’ and that Sunzi understands warfare, in spite of its physical nature, as a highly intellectual exercise. These two tenets entail ‘a corresponding disparagement of unnecessary force or violence’ (Raphals 1992: 104).

49. This idea of warfare of stratagem encourages the invention and compilation of all kinds of effective stratagems, both for battle use and for other settings. The most famous collection of them is known as *The Thirty-six Stratagems*, published c.600 CE.
50. An example of a ‘crypto-paciﬁst’ interpretation of this passage appears in the translator’s notes in one recent English translation: ‘This is, of course, an idealistic desideratum. In an actual war setting, where one is under attack by an aggressive enemy, such an approach to war would be both simplistic and impractical, as well as potentially fatal. In this regard, the defensive strategies described elsewhere in the Sun Zi must be considered of greater practicality and effectiveness than the suggestion that not fighting at all is the best policy’ (Mair 2007: 142).

51. According to James Turner Johnson, this ius in bello requirement emerges quite late even in the Western just war tradition, and its emergence is largely to the credit of Paul Ramsey (Johnson 2005: 19).

52. Sawyer’s interpretation of this passage is correct in his ‘Introduction’: ‘Even when exercising this option [armed combat], every military campaign should focus on achieving maximum results with minimum risk and exposure, limiting as far as possible the destruction that is inflicted and suffered, fighting with the aim of preservation’ (Sawyer, 1994: 129). Li Ling also correctly points out that Sunzi is more interested in victory than in killing, and that ‘preservation’ is a paramount goal (Li 2010a: 45, 2010b: 163). Hence it seems correct to me that Sunzi is more interested in maneuver warfare than warfare of annihilation and of attrition.

53. Hart’s stress on the difference between Clausewitz and Sunzi has both been disputed (Johnston 1999: 23, Handel 2001) and re-afﬁrmed (Waldron 2007). More in-depth study is still needed, as virtually all Western interpretations of Sunzi are not adequately informed by commentaries of eminent exegetes in the long history of interpretation of this text in Chinese. A knowledgeable strategy scholar in Taiwan concludes that there are more overall parallels between Sunzi and Clausewitz than differences, though Clausewitz’s stress on destruction and annihilation is clearly distinctive. Clausewitz realizes this mistake too late to incorporate it into his On War (Niu 2007: 215–27).

54. It has been observed that Sunzi’s strategic thinking is reﬂected in the game of wei qi (go), which resembles maneuver warfare and has remarkable differences from the game of chess, which resembles attrition warfare (Lai 2004).

55. Quite a number of historical examples were cited in the Eleven School of Glosses (Yang 1999: 45–7).

56. Hence P.J. Ivanhoe is correct to say that ‘Sunzi never gloriﬁes war or revels even in the prospect of victory, and he is poignantly aware of how harmful war is to the welfare of states and the people within them’ (Ivanhoe 2011: xv).

57. The Chinese Communist Party came into power as a result of initiating a violent revolution which turned into a civil war in the 1930s and 1940s.

58. Gu and his team work in the Chinese PLA Nanjing Academy of Politics, which is one of the major think tanks of the PLA and an academic institution for senior PLA ofﬁcers.

59. ‘Since China has long been oppressed – enduring more than a century of humiliation – it follows that any war China wages is a just one, even a war in which China strikes ﬁrst’ (Scobell 2003: 34). This statement by a China-watch scholar is conﬁrmed by the words of a senior PLA strategist, who proclaims that all wars that China might have to ﬁght in the future will be forced upon her, for example, when territorial integrity, sea border rights, and national unification are under serious threat. Such wars will be just and defensive wars, and will be fought with no other choice (Peng 2009: 209).

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