

FIRST PRINCIPLES:

THE ART OF WAR IN CONTEMPORARY IR ANALYSES

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BACKGROUND

- Since the 1990's, analyzing strategic competition between the United States and the People's Republic of China has been an increasingly critical challenge in the study of international relations.
- While the realist approach to this rivalry attempts to be formulaic and elegant, it does not take cultural values and historical memories into account.
- *The Art of War* by Sunzi bridges political concerns and priorities of Confucianism and Legalism. It offers strategic concepts that this study synthesized into a more culturally pertinent analytical framework.



SITUATIONAL POTENTIAL

- The term *shi* is often translated as "energy." "Situational potential" acknowledges the transitory and malleable nature of strategic situations.
- It is underpinned by the dichotomy of direction and indirection. Sunzi argues that the former is used for joining battle while the latter is used to secure victory.
- This dichotomy is embodied in the traditional Chinese game of *weiqi*.
- This study concludes that situational potential is measured by considering the potentials obtained through analyses of comparative strength.



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STRENGTH

- Designed to assess the relative strengths of states and coalitions with metrics like "moral law," "heaven," "earth," and "the commander."
- They represent the composite assessment of a polity's economic vitality, military power, political integrity, and public opinion.
- A polity's composite comparative strength determines its economic, military, cultural, and diplomatic options.



METHODOLOGY

- This study compares the textual and contextual significance of *The Art of War* with the Confucian *Analects*, Carl von Clausewitz's *On War*, and contemporary realist approaches.
- The application of comparative strength is explored through examining:
 - Roman "Crisis of the Third Century"
 - 1911 Xinhai Revolution and the "Three Principles of the People"
 - European energy crisis and the Russia-Ukraine War
 - China's economic reforms in the 1980's and 1990's
- The application of situational potential is explored through examining:
 - Nuclear proliferation
 - US and Soviet foreign policies during the Cold War
 - The current situation in Taiwan