

CHAPTER 10

DEMYSTIFYING *SHASHOUJIAN*: CHINA'S "ASSASSIN'S MACE" CONCEPT

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KEY QUESTIONS

In the absence of a comprehensive base of knowledge or intellectual debate on *shashoujian*, this chapter seeks to develop a baseline for understanding *shashoujian* in the context of current People's Republic of China (PRC) military affairs and aspirations for transformation of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the early 21st century. To this end, this chapter will seek initial responses to three fundamental questions:

1. What are the historical origins of *shashoujian* and what does the term mean in a military context?
2. How has *shashoujian* emerged as a topic of significance within the Chinese national defense establishment?
3. How might *shashoujian* satisfy Chinese national defense requirements?

BACKGROUND

For those interested in the potential of the Chinese military to challenge or threaten U.S. interests, *shashoujian* is an important concept that must be properly understood and appreciated. While omitted from many discussions about Chinese military modernization in recent Western books and essays on the PLA, the *shashoujian* concept is a component of China's strategic culture that influences grand strategy, in addition to Chinese national security policy and PRC military affairs. As will be discussed in this chapter, *shashoujian* is an important part of China's effort to transform the PLA into a modern, effective, and professional force and should be important consideration for those studying PLA trends and developments.

CHALLENGES

Chinese Secrecy.

Military affairs are a very sensitive topic for discussions and publications in the PRC. The PRC regime considers nearly all of China's information on military subjects to be restricted (*neibu*) or internally published (*junnei faxing*). In fact, very little useful official information is publicly available or accessible to foreigners. Moreover, the national defense information that is made available by the PRC must be scrutinized carefully by researchers as it is commonly propagandist in nature and may be deliberately inaccurate for the purposes of perception management. Secrecy and a general lack of transparency on the part of the PRC often prove to be the greatest challenges to American understanding of the PRC government and the PLA. Much of the primary source material cited in this chapter was obtained from the Chinese (.cn) and Taiwan (.tw) domains of the Internet and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS); some was drawn from earlier research by experts in government and academia. Internet searching in the Chinese and Taiwan domains was enabled by the search engines provided by Google® and Yahoo®, but there can be little doubt that the PRC authorities have sanitized data of any sensitive or classified information in sources that are searchable by using these tools.

Open Source Publications Acquisition/Translation Issues.

The U.S. National Defense University (NDU) in Washington, DC, has a formalized publications-sharing program with the PLA National Defense University. This program was established in 1985 by a U.S.-PRC memorandum of understanding that was re-affirmed in 1995. The documents exchange program is a component of the U.S.-PRC military-to-military relationship, but from an American perspective the program has not been very successful. PLA NDU representatives have not demonstrated reciprocity by sharing unclassified PLA NDU military journals and other publications. Conversely, the U.S. NDU has given its PLA interlocutor virtually every document published by the U.S. NDU Press. Regrettably,

the military-to-military program has reportedly failed to produce a comprehensive collection of documents from the PLA NDU and at present *none* of the limited Chinese documents shared by the Chinese are catalogued, translated, or otherwise available to researchers using the U.S. NDU Library.¹

FBIS carries out relatively limited collection and translation of PRC publications that focus on military and military-related topics. In light of this fact, many researchers within the PLA-watching academic community make regular visits to China to conduct interviews and visit bookstores and newsstands to obtain the latest information available on developments within the PRC defense establishment. Regrettably, this chapter did not directly benefit from project-specific travel to the PRC or from interactions with PRC government or Chinese military officials.

At FBIS, the translation and dissemination of Chinese publications transitioned from hardcopy/in-print to online/softcopy availability in 1996. Documents dating from 1993 to present are available from FBIS on CD-ROM. For U.S. Government personnel and contractors with access to classified government networks, FBIS provides additional archived publications (all unclassified) from 1988 to 1993; materials that predate 1988 are only available “in transfer” from the original hardcopy to microform.² Unfortunately, FBIS materials that exist on microform, while available with full tables of contents, are not searchable using automated research tools.

Varying precision of FBIS translations poses another challenge for researchers. FBIS translations of Chinese documents into English, in some instances, have been found to be inconsistent. For example, since 1996, FBIS appears to have translated the three-character term *shashoujian* using at least 15 different interpretations.³ Multiple interpretations of a term can severely complicate a researcher’s ability to identify a topic of significance and perform trend analysis against terms and topics or to identify frequency spikes or changes in usage in primary sources. For the U.S. Government, such shortcomings hold the potential to undermine the monitoring of key indicators for warning against strategic surprises.

Problems in identification, translation, and media/trend analysis may be one of several reasons for the relatively long time that elapsed between the emergence of *shashoujian* in the PLA and

evidence of American interest in the term. They may also be why so little is known in the United States about *shashoujian* as it pertains to the current and future interests of the Chinese military.

When a single translation/interpretation for *shashoujian* is applied to all documents containing the term, it appears that *shashoujian* is more than a mere idiom or metaphor in the vernacular of the PLA cadre and individuals within the PRC defense establishment. This first becomes noticeable in materials published in 1995 and becomes increasingly obvious by 1999. In 2000, there are indications that *shashoujian* could be part of a formalized, clandestine weapons research, development and acquisition (RD&A) effort. To demonstrate this point, the term *shashoujian* is not translated, but presented in Chinese *pinyin* transliteration throughout this document.

EXISTING RESEARCH

Only limited research examines the topic of *shashoujian*. In the United States, a small number of researchers have attempted to define and contextualize the term, but none of the research discovered in the course of this project examined the subject of *shashoujian* comprehensively. The work of Dr. Michael Pillsbury comes closest. While American and Taiwan academics share some common views, there are also clear differences in their respective interpretations and assumptions about the context of *shashoujian*.

WHAT ARE THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF SHASHOUJIAN AND WHAT DOES THE TERM MEAN?

To correctly examine the concept of *shashoujian*, it is important to understand its historical origins and the context of the term. The three Chinese characters that make up the term *shashoujian* are literally translated as kill (*sha*), hand (*shou*), sword, club, or mace (*jian*). The most common English language interpretation of *shashoujian* is “assassin’s mace.”

Dissection of the term *shashoujian* by non-Chinese (who lack deep cultural and linguistic skill) can be misleading, and the true meaning and context of *shashoujian* can be easily lost. For example,

the meaning of the Chinese compound “*shashou*” is interpreted as “hitman” or “assassin,” and *jian* as “sword,” “club,” or “mace.” This approach most often results in the translation/interpretation: “assassin’s mace.” Alternatively, *shashoujian* might be dissected as *sha* (meaning kill or killing) followed by the compound “*shoujian*” (“hand sword,” “hand club,” or “hand mace”). The result in this case is most often the interpretation of *shashoujian* as “killer mace” or “killing mace.”

Interestingly, the Chinese characters *jiaan* and *jian* are different, but have very similar meanings and are used by most Chinese interchangeably. The *jiaan* is a short wood, iron, or steel rod with three or four angled edges. Some *jiaan* are tipped with a mace-type head. The *jiaan* does not have a sharp blade as a sword (*jian*) does. According to the Chinese Global Language and Cultural Center in Taiwan, the Chinese characters for these weapons are probably derived from *zhujiaan*: a bamboo strip that was used as a medium by the Chinese for writing before the invention of paper.⁴

As American scholars have argued, *shashoujian* has its origins in Chinese antiquity. *Shashoujian* has been frequently referenced in Chinese legends, folklore, and history, and the term is particularly common in Chinese contemporary martial arts novels.⁵ However, determining its origin, defining the term, and understanding its important context can be somewhat challenging.

In ancient China, when wars were common and often long, the martial arts emerged to serve the needs of individuals and armies. As a result, the “way of the fist” (*quanfa*), the sword art (*jianshu*), and the war art (*wushu*) became a way of life for many Chinese people and set the martial arts as a cornerstone in Chinese culture. The practice of *jianshu*, which remains very popular in China today, emphasizes not only the disposition of an adversary and the desired effect of one’s strikes, but also one’s own attacking position and the forms (techniques) of strikes that one should use. Great attention is paid to the precision of one’s position and use of forms in the practice of *jianshu*, as is the case in the practice of *taichi quan* (shadow boxing).

Historical references to martial arts weapons in Chinese legend and folklore pre-date the Southern and Northern dynasties period that began in 386 A.D. and can be traced to the Warring States (475-221 B.C.) and the Spring and Autumn (770-476 B.C.) periods.⁶

However, early records of Chinese fighting movements known as “hit and thrust” exercises were practiced as early as the Shang dynasty (1700-1027 B.C.).⁷ The establishment of the *Shaolin* Temple by Emperor Xiao Wen during the Northern Wei dynasty (356-534 A.D.) was a key catalyst for the development of the martial arts in China. During this period, the original *Shaolin* style of *gong fu* (martial arts) was practiced with only 18 basic weapons—among them, the hand mace (*shoujian*).

The *shoujian* was a surprisingly small and light weapon, measuring only about 15-20 inches in length and weighing just a few pounds. Modern day analogues might resemble a lead pipe, crowbar, or hammer. Both the *jian* and *jiaan* were considered highly lethal close combat weapons and could be concealed within a wide sleeve. However, effective use of these weapons required considerable skill based on deception, good training, and long practice. Using the proper forms (techniques), the *shoujian* was a weapon that could be immediately employed with little or no warning against an adversary. A forged *shoujian* was capable of breaking swords and crushing a human skull or bones—even if an enemy was protected by the type of helmets or armor available during early periods of Chinese history.

The historical origin of the term *shashoujian* is elusive. According to one Taiwan source, it is found in a legend about General Xin Xiong of the Tang Empire (618-907 A.D.). General Xin is said to have had a great reputation for very rare skill with a (nonbladed) *jiaan* that was passed down to him by several generations of ancestors.⁸ He used the weapon in fast striking forms, including the “moving serpent” and “dropping snowflake” movements. General Xin’s most powerful form, however, was called “*shashoujiaan*.” The legend relates that when General Xin taught his cousin, Lou Cheng, the most effective forms to employ with the *jiaan*, he kept secret the “*shashoujiaan*” form because he realized that he might no longer be the best user of the *jiaan* if he taught the form to his cousin. Hence, the form “*shashoujiaan*,” with the implication of “the most powerful and secret skill,” is allegedly derived from this historic Chinese tale. From this story it seems clear that while the *jian* and *jiaan* are weapons, *shashoujian* is also a form—a well-practiced technique or movement.

HOW HAS SHASHOUJIAN EMERGED AS A TOPIC OF SIGNIFICANCE WITHIN THE CHINESE NATIONAL DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT?

Interestingly, very few modern definitions of *shashoujian* can be documented. The most comprehensive Chinese military statement about *shashoujian*—that resembles a formal definition—comes from a PLA Air Force (PLAAF) officer, Senior Colonel Yang Zhibo, who, in 2002, served as a deputy researcher at the PLAAF Command College in the Office for Planning and Management Research. According to Yang, *shashoujian* can be “weapon systems and equipment” and/or a certain type of “combat method.” In a *Kongjun Bao* article, he wrote:

Basically, it is whatever the PLA needs to win future local wars under modern high-tech conditions. It includes two aspects: (1) weapon systems and equipment (e.g., hardware); and (2) every type of combat method (e.g., software). Weapons and equipment are the systems needed to deal with the enemy’s electronic warfare and information warfare, and to counter every type of weapon and equipment the enemy can use for firepower attack. [*Shashoujian*] [c]ombat methods include attacking different types of weapons, such as early warning aircraft, stealth aircraft, and cruise missiles, as well as the combat principles to deal with different situations.

To build a *shashoujian*, China must first complete a development program. It is a difficult, systematic process and not just one or two advanced weapons. It is something that all the services will use. It is an all-army, all-location, composite land, sea, and air system. It must also be a Chinese program that can use advanced foreign technology, but should not be purchased as a full system from abroad. One reason for not purchasing it from abroad is that these types of technology and tactics are common knowledge to everyone else, including the enemy. Second, other countries may not want to give China those types of technology and tactics, which are secret. Third, during wartime, political and foreign affairs (diplomacy) could possibly cut the flow of technology off from China. In developing new combat methods research, combat methods constitute the full development of weapons and equipment technical and tactical capabilities, and the effective methods of raising combat effectiveness. The development of weapons, equipment, combat methods, and training must go hand-in-hand for them to be effective.⁹

Postings on two popular Chinese military enthusiast websites offered additional definitions of *shashoujian*. One writer

described *shashoujian* in the context of “weapons” and “system countermeasures” and also hinted that plans to develop a *shashoujian* program originated in the early 1990s.

A shashoujian is a weapon that has an enormous terrifying effect on the enemy and that can produce an enormous destructive assault. System countermeasures involve comprehensive development of land, sea, air, and strategic weapons that increase the overall countermeasures capability of equipment systems. It should be said that these are two different trains of thought in the development of weaponry, but the two are not opposites. *Shashoujian* are not isolated weapons, but rather should become important constituent parts of equipment systems. Development of *shashoujian* is aimed at further perfection of equipment systems, and can promote faster development of equipment systems; it is a step in the improvement of systems countermeasures capabilities. . . . The concept of system countermeasures is a new train of thought proposed in the early 1990s for the development of weaponry. . . . Under conditions where military funding was constrained and scientific/technical forces were limited, China could focus on the development of a few *shashoujian* weapons . . .¹⁰

Another writer cited the popular emergence of the term *shashoujian* in China in the 1990s, offered a historical definition of the term, and spoke of a *shashoujian* “designation” for specific weapons systems. This enthusiast wrote:

Shashoujian is a term often heard in China beginning in the mid-to-late 1990s. It is a synonym for a secret weapon as originally used in traditional Chinese storytelling to describe an ancient weapon of surprising power. . . . several domestically made weapons have their names on the list of successful candidates for the designation *shashoujian*.¹¹

As Dr. Michael Pillsbury and Dr. Alistair I. Johnston have noted, the Chinese also use the terms *wangpai* (trump card) and *shashoujian* to characterize certain U.S. and Russian weapons.¹² Johnston observed that “this implies that PLA writers believe Americans and Russians can conceptualize [and develop] *shashoujian* just as Chinese can.”¹³ One PLA writer validated Pillsbury’s and Johnston’s ideas when he commented that,

U.S. troops had at least five *shashoujian* on the battlefield [during Operation DESERT STORM], i.e., the F-117A stealth fighter bombers,

the B-1B stealth bombers, the B-52H bombers (specialized in launching cruise missiles outside the air defense zone), the ship-based Tomahawk cruise missiles, and the B-2A stealth bombers which can take off or touch down from domestic airbases to carry out shock tasks. Moreover, the U.S. troops would also use various kinds of ammunition which are more powerful and more accurately guided.¹⁴

Understanding the origins and context of *shashoujian* is very important for discovering the meaning of the term, realizing its true significance, and assessing the implications of *shashoujian* for the PLA. For example, learning the historical origins and context of *shashoujian* allows researchers to appreciate the term's resilience despite the significant changes that have occurred in China over the last 2,000 years. Such strong endurance of the concept of *shashoujian* through transgenerational storytelling or "vignettism"¹⁵ highlights the significance of the term in Chinese society, strategic culture, and as a possible driver for the development of Chinese military strategy, tactics, and weapons in the 21st century. Correctly translating and interpreting *shashoujian* are also important to facilitate meaningful research, to establish a baseline of knowledge, and to make new discoveries. Indeed, while there are Western analogues to and applications of *shashoujian*, "mirror-imaging" for analysis to understand the term is a pitfall to be avoided. The Chinese definitions and context must be the genesis of scholarly work on this unique subject.

The PLA Debates Alternative Paths for Military Strategy and Force Modernization.

Since the mid-1980s, Chinese military scholars have been studying trends in the development of U.S. defense policy and strategy, operational doctrine, and the enhancement of overall combat capability of the U.S. armed forces. During this period, many of these scholars also have been engaged in debate about the requirements for future warfare and the most appropriate direction for the modernization of the PLA. These military studies and debates have served as significant agents for change within China's national defense establishment.

In 1986, at a military campaign theory seminar where 60 new warplans were submitted and discussed by leading Chinese military strategists, a majority of those strategists espoused a move from China's traditional "war of annihilation" goal to a focus on "fighting a full-fledged war and attacking key-points."¹⁶ In June 1991, at the direction of the Central Military Commission (CMC), the Chinese Academy of Military Science (AMS) held a forum on Operation DESERT STORM to explore new approaches to "development of defense-related scientific research and army building," among other major topics.¹⁷ Influenced by the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) trend and the overwhelming combat effectiveness of U.S. military operations from 1991 to present,¹⁸ China's military scientists broke into three distinct schools of thought on military modernization; "the People's War school," "the Limited, High-Technology War school," and "the RMA school."¹⁹

According to Michael Pillsbury, from the early to mid-1990s, individuals and groups within the three schools of thought publicly debated alternative paths for PLA modernization in an apparent campaign for recognition by the PRC leadership.²⁰ Leaders of the PLA's RMA school of thought sought to persuade the PRC leadership that China must quickly develop the capability to deter, counter, or defeat U.S. military capabilities. The group held that nonlinear modernization by leaps was the best path.²¹ Gradually, PLA strategists shifted their thinking from a "People's War Under Modern Conditions" mindset toward "Local, Limited War Under High-Technology Conditions," as articulated in 1993 by then PRC President Jiang Zemin.

By 1996, public statements from PLA general officers and PRC leaders indicated a strong move away from that school of thought and toward the nonlinear RMA or counter-RMA²² approach to military modernization.²³ American PLA scholars observing China's military debates often opined that PLA writers were merely mimicking or "mirror-imaging" the U.S. RMA for their own purposes, but a closer examination reveals that the ideas espoused by many Chinese military scholars were indeed different from those driving the American military modernization. The following statement from Major General Xu Yanbin is characteristic of professional discussions about modernization of PLA in the 1990s.

We should not mechanically follow U.S. theory. As a military revolution is an inevitable outcome of scientific and technological progress and thus a general tendency, we should not try to meet a new challenge by running after others . . . We should try to create our own superiority. . . . We should combine Western technology with Eastern wisdom. This is our trump card for winning a 21st century war.²⁴

A “Transformation” for the PLA?

The American RMA and China’s study of trends in U.S. military operations during the 1990s sparked a period of critical thinking and intense publishing on alternative views in military affairs in the PRC. These developments resulted in unprecedented discussions and debate among the PLA cadre that prompted China’s senior leaders to evaluate PRC national military strategy, as well as PLA force structure and warfighting capabilities. By 1998, significant policy, strategy, organizational, training, and operational reforms were underway within China’s defense establishment. However, despite the American focus on “transformation,” China’s senior leadership remained committed to carry forward the military doctrines of Mao and Deng. It would be another 5 years before the phrase military “transformation” would be publicly uttered by the Chinese president and CMC chairman, Jiang Zemin. In 2002, at the 16th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) National Congress, Jiang said, “Our national defense and army building should keep in line with the world’s military transformation.” According to the *Nanfang Zhoumo* news magazine, this was the first time the term “military transformation” was used publicly by a leading member of the CCP.²⁵

In the spring of 2003, China’s senior political leaders and military officers participated in a series of significant meetings to encourage China’s own military transformation among the rank and file of the PLA and institutions that support it. These events served to promulgate a significant evolution in strategic thinking by China’s senior leadership and establish slogans to properly motivate members of these communities.

At the National People’s Congress (NPC) and National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in March, CMC Chairman Jiang Zemin said it was “necessary to push forward military transformation within Chinese characteristics.”²⁶

In May, PRC President Hu Jintao attended the fifth meeting of the CCP Political Bureau to study “trends in the development of the world’s new military transformation.” Members of the CCP Political Bureau heard lectures on military transformation from several Academy of Science speakers. Discussions at this event explored the history of the world’s six military transformations and the significance of information technology for the sixth (current) military transformation.²⁷ AMS scholar Pi Mingyong identified and described the six major “military revolutions,” noting that all have been linked to “the rise and decline, the glory and humiliation of the Chinese nation.”²⁸ Importantly, Pi argued that developing countries in a relatively “backward position” can catch-up with military revolutions. He cited the Japanese *Meiji* Reform, Turkey’s military revolution led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and China’s “nuclear revolution” as examples. PLA General Liang Bi of the AMS also highlighted the significance of information as the catalyst of the sixth transformation. He argued that:

The extensive use of information technology can multiply the people’s capacity to find out about the battlefield situation and enable the commanders to deploy an appropriate type of combat force, on an appropriate scale, at an appropriate time, in an appropriate location, and to carry out highly integrated combined operations in an appropriate manner.²⁹

Several months before the CCP Political Bureau meeting at the Human Studies Forum of Chinese Scientists, Deputy Chief of the PLA General Staff Xiong Guangkai articulated details of the PLA’s new modernization path in a speech titled, “On the New Military Transformation.” Xiong stated that “the essence of the new military transformation is a reflection of the information revolution in the military field.”³⁰

Jiang Zemin’s 2002 utterance of the phrase “military transformation” and the subsequent campaign of speeches on this topic by other senior leaders—to educate and indoctrinate PLA officers and enlisted personnel—were significant events. The consistent use of the phrase “military transformation” served to acknowledge the success of efforts by the PLA’s RMA scholars in their campaign to break from China’s long adherence to “People’s

War” doctrines and the PLA’s practice of linear, reactive approaches to force modernization.

Some American observers of the Chinese military have argued that China’s ethnocentrism and bureaucracies are the principal reasons for the PLA’s lagging combat capabilities and resistance to adopting foreign ideas. Moreover, some contend that Chinese pride or inefficiency may be the reasons for the 5-year delay in Jiang’s use the term “transformation.” However, a more rigorous examination of these events, with an understanding of the cultural and political dynamics in China, produces alternative conclusions.

China’s reluctance to abandon the “People’s War” doctrines of the recent past probably has as much to do with the Marxist philosophy of “dialectical materialism” and the application of the scientific method to military affairs as it does with Chinese pride, “face,” or inertia.³¹ Decades of training, indoctrination, and belief meant that China’s military scholars and senior leaders probably could not be convinced to move away from “People’s War” until the laws of warfare that they had accepted as valid could be demonstrated to be “incorrect.” The capabilities employed by the U.S. armed forces in the 1991 Persian Gulf War and other U.S. military actions up to 2002 validated the hypotheses of many Chinese RMA scholars and severely damaged the validity of “People’s War” for the 21st century. As the practical application of “People’s War” doctrines for modern warfare eroded in the mid-1990s, an opening was created for new military thinking in China. The historical and cultural grounding of *shashoujian* in Chinese society and strategic culture afforded the PRC leadership an opportunity to blend Chinese tradition with the requirements of the future, or, in the words of an ancient Chinese stratagem, to “borrow a corpse to raise the spirit.”³² With his term as president nearing an end, Jiang Zemin did not fail to seize this uncommon opportunity to secure his legacy as a visionary leader for the PLA.

Emergence of *Shashoujian* Within the PLA.

As noted by Johnston, the term *shashoujian* does not appear in the major published military writings of Mao Zedong.³³ However, usage of the term within the PLA probably began in about 1955 under Mao’s regime, when China embarked on its “two bombs and

one satellite" program.³⁴ Some Chinese articles published since 1997 include historical references and comparisons of *shashoujian* with that program. Perhaps surprisingly, research for this chapter uncovered no comparisons of *shashoujian* with China's "863 Program."³⁵

By the mid-1990s, Chinese military scholars and other senior officers were advocating the development of *shashoujian* for deterrence, and as a means to defeat a superior adversary in modern, high-tech warfare.³⁶ In his research, Pillsbury identified and translated more than 20 articles mentioning *shashoujian* and has commented on the rise of positions and ranks of the PLA cadre discussing *shashoujian* from the mid-1990s to 2000. According to Pillsbury, the earliest, recent references to *shashoujian* weapons by Chinese military writers appear in scholarly books³⁷ as well as the AMS journal, *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue*, in 1995.³⁸ The *Guang Jiao Jingkan* journal also reported on a military program to develop *shashoujian* weapons in 1995.³⁹ The emergence of the term *shashoujian* at that time suggests a link to China's internal debates about military strategy and modernization.

From 1995 to 1997, leading PLA scholars from the RMA school of thought appeared to be campaigning to convince senior PLA leaders and the core leaders of the CCP to initiate programs to cope with the impact of the American RMA. According to Pillsbury, this campaign was probably led by General Wang Pufeng, the first senior PLA officer known to advocate the PLA's use of *shashoujian* weapons to defeat of the U.S. military.⁴⁰ Pillsbury also commented that he came to realize that the term was sensitive when he asked a senior PLA strategist about *shashoujian* and was told that the term could not be discussed.⁴¹ By early 1997, senior PLA officers (warfighters) were advocating the positions espoused by General Wang 2 years earlier.⁴²

While some advocates for *shashoujian* may have come from the RMA school of thought, the historical and cultural significance of the term to the Chinese means that in a modern context *shashoujian* blends tradition (the old) with modernity (the new). Given its lineage, *shashoujian* is a term that probably holds appeal for PLA scholars within the People's War and Local, Limited War schools of thought as well. For example, a statement by General Huang Bin of

the PLA NDU demonstrated continuing emphasis on the People's War maxim of protracted warfare in combination with *shashoujian*:

We can fight a war with them [the United States], they will not be able to continue the war after a while. Moreover, we also have our *shashoujian*.⁴³

Additional research will be necessary to demonstrate conclusively the relationships among the three schools of thought and the term *shashoujian*.

A Traceable Chronology of Documents.

Statements made by the Chinese military's most senior officers after 1996 clearly encouraged the development of *shashoujian* as a new direction for the PLA. Pillsbury cited a March 1997 issue of *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue* which featured an article by General Liu Jingsong, then president of the AMS. In the article, General Liu associated the classic Chinese stratagem of the "inferior defeating the superior" with the use of *shashoujian* weapons.⁴⁴ Pillsbury's examination of the journal also revealed that several articles containing discussions about *shashoujian* were presented by the commander of the Guangzhou Military Region, commander of the Chengdu Military Region, and commander of the PLA Navy. Pillsbury also obtained a copy of the *Journal of the PLA National Defense University (junnei faxing)* where General Liu discussed methods to successfully attack a U.S. aircraft carrier using *shashoujian* weapons.⁴⁵

In April 1997, PLA Air Force (PLAAF) Commander Liu Shun Yao hinted at a change in PLA direction when he discussed the PLA's need to "form, as soon as possible, a certain scale of *shashoujian*" and also said, "The prospect has emerged for the study of a tactical methodology aimed at defeating enemies possessing high-technology armament."⁴⁶ In the same month, the restricted AMS journal *Junshi Xueshi* contained an article by Admiral Yang Yushu of the PLA Navy's (PLAN) East Sea Fleet in which the author advocated the development of an information warfare system as a *shashoujian* weapon to defeat an enemy.⁴⁷ A September 1997 article in a Hong Kong newspaper further indicated that changes were taking place within the PLA when it reported, "the State's third generation

leading collective calls on the armed forces to adapt themselves to the requirements of modern local warfare and to have their own *shashoujian*.”⁴⁸

By 1998, advocacy of *shashoujian* programs for the PLA had reached the highest levels of the PLA and China’s civilian leadership. PRC National Defense Minister Chi Haotian disclosed in August that President Jiang Zemin had advanced “a general train of thought on China’s national defense and army modernization drive and outlined tasks for specific stages in the run up to the mid-21st century . . .” Among those tasks disclosed by General Chi, the development of *shashoujian* is specifically called out. In discussing China’s military modernization plans, he said:

We should learn and master advanced science and technology; keep abreast with the latest high-technology developments in the world; develop key technologies in the main; develop weaponry and equipment with a substantially higher scientific and technological standard; create some *shashoujian*; and explore a weaponry and equipment development path with Chinese characteristics.⁴⁹

In February 1999, Vice Chairman of the CMC General Fu Quanyou also spoke of the need for *shashoujian*:

To defeat a better equipped enemy with inferior equipment in the context of high-technology, we should rely upon high-quality personnel, superior operational methods; and high-quality *shashoujian* weapons.⁵⁰

In May 1999, in the wake of the accidental NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, Jiang Zemin stressed to the PLA leadership that “It is necessary to master, as quickly as possible, a new *shashoujian* needed to safeguard state sovereignty and security.”⁵¹

At roughly the same time, following the publication of a long article on the history of China’s “two bombs and one satellite” program written by Zhang Jingfu,⁵² Chinese Academy of Science (CAS) officials discussed the article and noted “that so long as it is needed for state security, they will work like those who did in earlier periods to develop the necessary items for the state as quickly as possible.” CAS scholar Yang Dongsheng, who took part in the historical research, stated that:

China cannot be bullied by others at will. China must become strong through our own effort. Therefore, we must develop our own high-technologies and produce some impressive and important things.⁵³

In August 1999, Jiang Zemin repeated his call to the Chinese military for *shashoujian* weapons. This time he said:

We should set great store by stepping-up high-technology innovation for national defense purposes and by developing technology useable for both military and civil purposes as well, and we should also master several new *shashoujian* for safeguarding our national sovereignty and security as quickly as possible.⁵⁴

In early March 2000, General Fu Quanyou echoed his own earlier statements on *shashoujian*, and also reinforced Jiang Zemin's calls for *shashoujian* development at the National People's Congress before a panel of PLA deputies. He said:

We must lose no time developing and building *shashoujian*, strengthening military theoretical research and overall planning for preparations for military struggles, making increased efforts to acquire scientific and technical knowledge, increasing the scientific and technological drilling of troops, and improving construction for war preparedness and the study and practice of task-specific methods of operation in order to comprehensively improve our army's ability to fight combined operations under high-technology conditions.⁵⁵

In August 2000, following a statement by the U.S. Government that the United States regards China as a "strategic competitor," Jiang issued a memo to the senior PLA cadre. In the secret memo, Jiang Zemin rejected PLA requests for large budgetary increases. Instead, he specially ordered the development of *shashoujian*.⁵⁶ He is reported to have said:

. . . As a big nation, China should have procured some *shashoujian* weapons in the struggle against global hegemony . . . As our internal resources are limited, we should concentrate them first and foremost in areas of strategically vital importance to safeguard our national security, territorial integrity and to oppose hegemony in today and tomorrow's world.⁵⁷

A November 2000 leak to a Hong Kong newspaper validated this report, which claimed that Jiang gave direction on PRC preparations to deal with the Taiwan situation. In the context of the possibility of a U.S. intervention, he discussed the importance of *shashoujian* for China's ability to maintain options for its strategy against Taiwan, stating:

The long delay of [resolution of] the Taiwan issue is detrimental to its peaceful solution. It is imperative to step-up preparations for a military struggle so as to promote the early solution of the Taiwan issue. To this end, it is necessary to vigorously develop some *shashoujian* weapons and equipment. In this way, we will always have the initiative in solving the issue in either a peaceful or nonpeaceful way.⁵⁸

***Shashoujian*: A Secret Program?**

In 2000, reports surfaced that China's senior military officers and national leaders had indeed outlined a secret project to develop *shashoujian* (warfighting concepts and weapons).⁵⁹ Details of the project (assigned the code number 998) were leaked in June 2000. Dr. Pillsbury discovered a February 2001 *Jiefangjun Bao* article (written by a *bona fide* CCP Central Committee official) that verified the plan to develop *shashoujian* weapons.⁶⁰ In February 2001, Wang Congbiao of the Policy Research Unit of the CCP Central Committee quoted Jiang Zemin as having said:

We should have a high regard for enhancing the innovation in advanced national defense technology, stressing the development of military/civilian dual-use technology and mastering as quickly as possible the new *shashoujian* needed to safeguard our national sovereignty and security.⁶¹

The Chinese leadership probably established the 998 Project in response to their growing concerns about the implications of an interventionist U.S. military strategy, missile defense program decisions, and the on-going American RMA. It was formalized by a strategic resolution adopted at Beidaihe in early August 1999 during an enlarged session of the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee.⁶² However, references to *shashoujian* in Chinese military

writings and statements appear to indicate that preliminary work on this program could have begun as early as 1995. If so, China could be as many as 7 years into a *shashoujian* weapons acquisition program.

China's 998 State Security Project has several components that respond to U.S. foreign policy decisions (including decisions to use force) and the development of new military capabilities.⁶³ The 998 Project calls for the PLA to "... accelerate the research, development and installation of new weapons . . . to resist U.S. hegemonism."⁶⁴ It is managed under the direction of the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee and the Central Military Commission. The 998 Project Leading Group is reported to include the members shown in Figure 1. The work conferences supporting the 998 Project are directed by the four PLA General Staff Departments.⁶⁵



(From left to right)

Jiang Zemin - Former PRC President, CMC Chairman

Hu Jintao - PRC President, CCP General Secretary, CMC Vice Chairman

WU Bangguo - Chairman, Standing Committee of the National People's Congress

Cao Gangchuan - CMC Vice Chairman, Minister of National Defense

Guo Boxiong - Member, Political Bureau - CCP Central Committee. CMC Vice Chairman

Liu Jibin - Director, Commission on Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense (COSTIND).

Figure 1. The 998 State Security Project Leading Group.

The 122 (December 2) Project and 126 (January 26) Program: Components of a *Shashoujian* Research and Development Effort?

In December 2000, Jiang Zemin announced that the CMC, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee, and the State Council had adopted a new “decision on the development of strategic weapons to meet the needs of the situation in the new period.”⁶⁶ The decision is referred to as the “Resolution on the December 2 Project.” The objectives of the December 2 (122) Project are said to be to improve the combat effectiveness, counterattack capability, and “winning edge” of the PLA. These goals are to be achieved by developing a new generation of “strategic high-tech weapons” and “strategic nuclear weapons” and by “improving the readiness of PLA strategic weaponry.” At the meeting, Jiang Zemin is said to have announced the members of the 122 Project Leading Group, which reportedly includes Hu Jintao (as leader); Wen Jiabao and Chi Haotian (as deputy leaders); and members Guo Boxiong, Cao Gangchuan, Wang Zuxun (Commandant of the AMS), Yang Guoliang, Huang Cisheng (Deputy Commander of the Second Artillery and Chief of Staff for Nuclear Weapons), Shen Binyi (Deputy Commander of the PLAN), Li Yongde (Deputy Commander of the PLAAF), and others.

China’s 126 Program was approved by CMC Chairman Jiang Zemin following a national conference on science, technology, and industry for national defense held in January 2000. The program focuses on the acceleration of China’s development and production of high-technology weaponry. According to a Chinese news source, the 126 Program is the second national-level program established for China’s development of military equipment. (China’s first such program was the 863 Program established by Deng Xiaoping in March 1986). Under the 126 Program, China will develop six major projects within a period of 12-15 years. These projects are reported to include the development of an aerospace technological system, an electronic information technological system, a strategic defense technological system, a deep-level counterattack technological system, an optical laser technological system, and a nonconventional and conventional materials technological system.⁶⁷ Under these six projects, 36 “theme projects” have been developed by expert groups,

technology groups, and logistics groups established to support the 126 Program.⁶⁸

The 126 Program is said by a Chinese source to be regarded by the PLA as “a development program for the new century.” The program is overseen by PRC President Hu Jintao, with Vice Premier Wu Bangguo serving as the program leader. Wang Zhongyu, Cao Gangchuan, and Liu Jibin serve as deputy leaders of the program’s leading group.⁶⁹ Interestingly, the members of this leading group are very similar to those in charge of China’s 998 Project.

Although the term *shashoujian* is not used in reference to the 122 Project or the 126 Program, additional research is necessary to determine whether these initiatives are associated with or related to the 998 Project or *shashoujian* in any way.

***Shashoujian* and PLA Research, Development and Acquisition (RD&A).**

China’s military-industrial sector is a large and complex network of PRC academic, civil, and military organizations. Some of these organizations are independent; others remain state-owned enterprises. Within this large network there are three principal organizations where Chinese military RD&A decisions are made. This smaller set of critical organizations includes the PRC State Council, the CMC, the PLA General Staff Department, and the Commission on Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense (COSTIND).

At the direction of Jiang Zemin, a sweeping series of military reforms was initiated across China’s national defense establishment in 1998. In that year, the PLA’s General Armament Department (GAD) was established as a PLA General Staff department to manage and fund military RD&A plans. At the same time, the function and authority of COSTIND were examined, and the commission was reorganized and streamlined. If *shashoujian* weapons and tactics development are indeed components of a larger PRC state security project, as evidence suggests, it is highly likely that leaders and senior officials within the PRC State Council, CMC, PLA General Staff Department, and at COSTIND have addressed considerations and decisionmaking for these issues. All of these organizations are

represented in the 998 State Security Project Leading Group.

In addition to the numerous calls for *shashoujian* made by China's senior leaders, a number of various publications include statements about *shashoujian* in the context of PLA modernization efforts. These references occur mostly (beginning in 1998) in articles in Chinese military newspapers, such as *Jiefangjun Bao*, which are intended for a PLA audience. In many instances, these articles refer to the development of *shashoujian* weapons in an aspirational context.

June 1998: "The PLA should stress both real war preparations and deterrence preparations by first developing a number of deterrent *shashoujian* of a standard identical to that of an enemy's as it did in the past when developing "two bombs and one satellite" and a nuclear submarine."⁷⁰

August 1998: "We must give priority to the development of defense-related research and high-tech weapons and equipment, concentrate resources on the tackling of key technologies, exert ourselves to tackle "bottlenecks" which prevent the improvement of our combat effectiveness, and strive to achieve major progress in key projects which will play an important part in the winning of future wars, so that our army will have a number of powerful *shashoujian* as quickly as possible."⁷¹

April 1999: PLA scholar An Weiping observed that China's *shashoujian* program should be responsive to China's "one low and five insufficiencies." The "one low" refers to China's low integration of information technology with armaments and equipment, while the "five insufficiencies" are identified as (1) high-power armaments, (2) weapons for launching attacks, (3) precision guided munitions, (4) reconnaissance, early warning, command and control, and (5) electronic armaments. The scholar recommended a focus on "key projects and development of our own *shashoujian* weapons . . . We should concentrate our resources on developing a number of *shashoujian* weapons with great deterrent power, thus making up for the insufficiencies of our armaments."⁷²

February 2000: Michael Pillsbury translated a *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue* article in which General Wang Ke, a member of the CMC and director of the PLA's General Logistics Department, discussed three priority areas for military investment. The three areas General Wang

identified were defense infrastructure, education and training, and *shashoujian* weapons.⁷³

June 2000: Party committees of various services and arms made meticulous efforts to organize the research and development and further improve measures related to weaponry development, particularly the development of *shashoujian*.⁷⁴

June 2002: An article from *Huajianbing Bao* indicated that the CMC and the PLA's four General Departments had approved the establishment of "several projects for *shashoujian* weapons."⁷⁵ The article also reported that "some *shashoujian* weapons have already been fielded in units and have formed up combat capability . . . [while] others already have final designs and are about to be issued to [Second Artillery Corps] units."⁷⁶ Further reporting in the article, if correct, seems to indicate a program featuring a significant level of investment, effort, and dedication.

So as to put *shashoujian* weapons in the hands of units as soon as possible, numerous scientific and technological cadre of the Fourth Institute . . . spend nearly 200 days each year [performing operational research] . . . producing more than 10,000 technical reports and documents of various kinds to submit to leaders at all levels to use in their decisionmaking. Nearly 4,000 of their recommendations have been adopted by staff and research and development organizations, and as many as 10,000 difficult problems have been discovered and resolved. Science and Technology personnel have also completed more than 600 scientific research projects, of which eight received first, second, and third class commendations as National Science and Technology Advancements, and 187 received awards as Military Science and Technology Advancements. Some of the research filled either military or national gaps.⁷⁷

June 2003: In the course of innovation in military technology, vigorously developing critical technological equipment with independent intellectual property rights and strategic impact is an endeavor to forge *shashoujian* of our army for informationized warfare and to build our army's modern operational system centering on informationization.⁷⁸

These discussions about *shashoujian* weapons by no means indicate or prove that China has a secret *shashoujian* weapons RD&A program. However, it also cannot be proven that such a program does not exist. The examples of PLA references to *shashoujian* weapons in

the context of military RD&A are provided to offer food for thought and perhaps a starting point for further research to examine these possibilities.

HOW MIGHT SHASHOUJIAN SATISFY CHINESE NATIONAL DEFENSE REQUIREMENTS?

As the previous discussion has shown, *shashoujian* is an element of Chinese strategic culture that influences military thinking and preparations within the PLA. If it has been formalized as a PRC state security program, *shashoujian* has significant implications for the Chinese national defense establishment and also U.S. national security interests. The final section of this chapter examines the implications of the PRC's *shashoujian* concept as it relates to 1) Chinese views about modern warfare, 2) the PLA's calculus for military assessments, and 3) the PLA's developmental efforts to cope with inferiority.

A View of Warfare in the Early 21st Century— Characteristics of Information Age Wars.

Chinese military scholars have dedicated great effort to study the change in the requirements of warfare from the mechanization-firepower age to the information-firepower era.⁷⁹ As an example, Major General Wang Baocun, a leading PLA scholar on military strategy and an expert on information warfare, concluded in 1997 that ten defining features will characterize warfare in the information-firepower era of the 21st century: 1) limited goals in conflicts; 2) wars of short duration; 3) less damage; 4) larger battlefields and less density of troops; 5) transparency on the battlefield; 6) intense struggle for information superiority; 7) unprecedented force integration; 8) increased demands for command and control; 9) strategic objectives achieved through precision, not mass; and, 10) attacks on weaknesses, not strengths, of the enemy's "combat system."⁸⁰

Interestingly, these characteristics represent strategic and operational objectives, centers of gravity (key points of strength or weakness), and opportunities for the PLA to seize the initiative in

conflict. Wang advocated the consideration of these features for the development of Chinese military strategy, warfighting methods, and the PLA's transformation process.

To be sure, it is difficult to know for certain whether General Wang's ideas have been accepted by China's senior leaders. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that such expert judgments about future warfare can influence PRC military strategy, warfighting methods, and the PLA modernization. General Wang's judgments may also help China's national defense community establish requirements that support strategy, policy, and the development of *shashoujian* (weapons and tactics). In this sense, the characteristics of future wars described by Wang (as well as those identified by other PLA scholars) can reveal hints or cues about the focus and direction of China's *shashoujian* programs for PLA watchers.

***Shashoujian* and Military Strategy—Using the Inferior to Defeat the Superior.**

Mao Zedong: Historically, . . . absolute superiority is present at the end, but is rare at the beginning of a war or campaign.⁸¹

Deng Xiaoping: Even if we could modernize our military equipment in the next 10 or 20 years, compared to our enemies, our weapons would still be inferior. We are moving forward, but our enemies are not asleep either. Therefore, by that time, if we have to fight, we will still be the weak trying to defeat the strong.⁸²

Jiang Zemin: At present, our army's modernization standard is still incompatible with the need of fighting a modern war, this being a major contradiction faced by our army building. . . . our army still lags behind armed forces in developed countries in the West in terms of weapons and equipment, intelligence and reconnaissance, telecommunications and liaison, command and control, joint operations, logistics support and in other basic fields as well.⁸³

Hu Jintao: High-tech developments have greatly facilitated new military changes in the world. . . . China must improve its research into the change so as to constantly improve national defense and military modernization.⁸⁴

Hu Jintao: [China must]...achieve a leap-forward style of development in defense and army modernization.⁸⁵

PRC leaders have recognized that the PLA has trailed behind foreign militaries in its ability to integrate science and technology with weapons and equipment—and, in this context, that the PLA is relatively inferior to advanced foreign militaries. For much of China's pre-revolutionary history, the same can be said to have been true of China's armies. Historically, Chinese forces emphasized and depended upon superior (and asymmetric) strategies and tactics to cope with the inferiority of weapons and equipment.⁸⁶ This trend continues today inside the PRC.⁸⁷ The emphasis on superior strategy and tactics is an important characteristic of Chinese strategic culture and has a significant impact upon Chinese military thinking, despite the relatively recent (and certainly more visible) priority placed on introducing advanced military hardware into the PLA.

Although China's leading military strategists and scholars recognize the relative inferiority of PLA weapons and hardware, it is important to note that this acknowledgment is not consistent with their judgments about China's ability to prevail against a superior military adversary in an information age war. In fact, American academic reviews of Chinese military literature reveal that China's best-known military scholars calculate that the PLA can prevail in an asymmetric conflict against a superior military under the right conditions, despite the shortcomings of Chinese military hardware.⁸⁸ For many American military strategists, this inconsistency is illogical and confusing, but the assertion is, in fact, quite logical and reconcilable from the Chinese perspective. Chinese strategic culture, modes of thinking, and the concept of *shashoujian* consistently support the Chinese belief that the inferior can defeat the superior. The research of both Dr. Pillsbury and Lieutenant Colonel Mark Stokes first identified the linkage between *shashoujian* and the Chinese inferior-superior stratagem.⁸⁹

China's robust community of military scholars has been working hard for more than a decade to study the new characteristics of modern warfare amidst the period of the so-called "sixth transformation" in military affairs. PLA scholars apply a holistic approach to the assessment of military capabilities, potential, and opportunities to seize initiative on the battlefield. This holistic view often is complemented by disciplined application of dialectical and relativistic reasoning. Using dialectical and relativistic approaches,

they judge the military strength, weakness, and capability of the U.S. armed forces in comparison to those of the PLA. While rare among U.S. military analysts, dialectical and relativistic thinking is a defining characteristic of Chinese military science and strategic thinking. This important intellectual difference is precisely what enables PRC military scholars to rationalize (and believe in) the ability of the inferior to defeat the superior. Ancient and modern Chinese military literature is replete with examples of dialectical and relativistic reasoning that seeks to demonstrate this ability. This approach to military assessment is taught to officers at the PLA's NDU and reflected in the scholarship of AMS researchers. It is probably practiced by PLA forces in the field during training exercises.

In 1995, Major Yu Guangning, an assistant researcher at the AMS, published an essay in a military journal that highlighted the historical significance of dialectical thinking through his examination of differences between Chinese and Western approaches to geostrategic thinking. He also identified four major differences between Chinese and Western geostrategic thinking:

China's best known classical statesmen, strategists, diplomats, and even philosophers all favored treating war-making might dialectically. They had a whole set of dialectical war-making logic such as the weak defeating the strong, the inferior winning out over the superior, a standoff between weak and strong, and the conversion of weakness into strength. . . . We always seek to keep our opponents from bringing their might into full play, while strengthening ourselves through weakening our opponents. . . . In Western military history, the strongest military forces often do not win the final victory. That is the case in the oft stated "winning the battle, but losing the war," which is related to the West's military thinking of controlling means and emphasizing might to the neglect of winning the war.⁹⁰

Yu concluded that Western geostrategic thinking is an expansive "rivalry for superiority" with an emphasis on "technological might," while China's thinking values "balance" and stresses the importance of "strategy." The impact of China's traditional use of dialectical and relativistic thinking on matters of state is unmistakable in the writing of this PLA scholar.

The impact of China's historical traditions and practices are also visible in PLA scholarly writings. Two PLA senior colonels highlighted these characteristics in their discussion about seizing combat initiative and using relative strengths against a superior enemy's points of weakness.

It is natural that the core idea of our army's operational doctrine for high-tech conditions is deeply rooted in our army's rich operational traditions. An overview of our army's war history shows that, in most cases, our army was inferior to its enemies in terms of the overall strength and the quality of weapons and equipment. Apart from political factors, the main reason our army managed to defeat time and time again its strong enemies, Chinese or foreign, was because our army had reached higher standards in the art of war and operational guidance.⁹¹

Using a holistic approach and dialectical thinking, many PLA scholars assess military strengths and weaknesses with a focus on the "relative." In an example that is characteristic in Chinese military literature, Colonel Yu Guohua, a lecturer at the PLA NDU, demonstrated the PLA's consideration of the "relative" in its military assessment methodology, arguing that:

... the relative nature of our enemy's strength and our own weakness is manifest in the fact that although the other side may be strong, they are not strong in all things; they have some weaknesses, and our side may be weak, but we are not weak in all things; we have some strength.⁹²

Yu's essay also showed the significant influence of Chinese history and tradition on assessments of strength and weakness. In his paper, he recommended that the PLA turn weakness into strength through the use of classic stratagems: undermine the righteousness of the enemy's cause, sow discord, create confusion in the enemy's communications, cause the enemy to deplete war materials without achieving objectives, and target weaknesses (not the strengths) of the enemy's war apparatus (systems, equipment, and weapons). In his essay, Yu anticipated what might be a common foreign criticism of his arguments and approach to reasoning—such as "Can examples of the inferior defeating the superior be identified in the case of a modern, local high-tech war?" Yu's answer seems astonishingly simplistic:

. . . so far, among the local high-tech wars that have occurred, there has never been an actual case of the weak defeating the strong or the inferior defeating the superior. There are two main reasons: One, the history of high-tech local war is relatively short; we have not seen all of its forms and shapes yet. Second, the high-tech local wars so far have been unique.⁹³

Another example of the PLA's use of a holistic approach to military assessments, which included a reference to *shashoujian*, appeared in a May 2000 newspaper article. According to the article, in 1999 the PLA NDU established a Center for the Study of Military Operations against Taiwan.⁹⁴ Since then, this Center has conducted in-depth studies of tactics, campaigns, and other subjects and drawn lessons from the limited wars of the late 1990s, including the conflicts in Kosovo and Chechnya. The findings from the Center's work were forwarded to the CMC and PLA General Staff Department for consideration. Later, in April 2002, the PLA General Staff sponsored an all-army conference to hear an exchange of views among PLA scholars on campaigns and tactics for operations against Taiwan.⁹⁵ An authoritative source from the PLA conference argued that some foreign methodologies for military assessments are incorrect because they are not holistic and fail to appreciate the virtue of dialectical and relativistic reasoning:

The foreign assessment that currently China does not have the ability to invade Taiwan is not correct . . . In comparing military strengths, not only the extent of modernization of one's weaponry, but also the use of tactics, one's mastery of weaponry, and the morale of the troops must be included. When all the factors, including a certain degree of U.S. involvement, are considered, the PLA can win the war without any doubt. Besides, the PLA has a *shashoujian* unknown to outsiders.⁹⁶

While China's military scholars approach military assessments holistically, employ dialectical and relativistic thinking, and often arrive at judgments favorable to the PLA, most Chinese military scholars also emphasize the PLA's need to make up for having less (in terms of technology, weapons, and equipment, etc.). It is here that the Maoist philosophy (the value of man over material) comes into play. Increasingly, PLA scholars seem to straddle the issue and highlight the virtues of both sides. Their judgments often lead to

three common recommendations. First, the PLA must continue to study and apply China's rich tradition of superior strategy and art of warfare. Second, the PLA must progress rapidly in developing science and technology and in integrating advanced technology with the PLA's weapons and equipment. Third is a defense or validation of the "inferior can defeat the superior" stratagem. Quotations from the writings of three Chinese military scholars demonstrate a range of views within the PLA.

Reverse the Balance of Combat Strength with Superior Strategy.

Western countries have made rapid progress in science and technology in modern and contemporary times. They enjoy an obvious scientific and technological superiority in wars. In order to win a victory in their wars for national liberation or war against aggression, some developing countries naturally have to count on their traditional superiority in the use of strategy for making-up for their technological weakness. This indicates that the use of strategy can reverse the balance of combat strength despite the varying technological standards of weapons and equipment.⁹⁷

Employ Deadly Weapons.

We need to change our traditional way of thinking that we can win against superior forces by stressing tactics, but even more so by having *shashoujian* weapons.⁹⁸

Develop New Equipment While Carrying Forward Tradition.

... we should speed-up the development of equipment for reconnaissance and early warning, the automation of air defense command and electronic warfare, and of *shashoujian* weapons for hard destruction of the enemy, to narrow the technology gap between ourselves and powerful enemies. While developing new technology, we should also pay close attention to drawing sustenance from our national culture, and inheriting and carrying forward our army's tradition in being skilled at applying strategy, that is, as experts say: "Let thought and technology soar together."⁹⁹

The concept of *shashoujian* is attractive to the PLA's warfighters and intellectuals regardless of whether they represent the PLA's "old

guard” or its “young turks.” *Shashoujian* is also appealing to China’s senior leaders who seek to motivate, professionalize, and modernize the PLA. Because it blends the traditional with the modern, the *shashoujian* concept does not threaten China’s legacy philosophy and doctrine, but it does allow an exciting way forward for the Chinese military in an uncertain period of transformation. For the PLA, in terms of military strategy, the *shashoujian* concept effectively bridges the divide between the past and the future.

***Shashoujian* and PLA Operational Art.**

There has been a great deal of discussion in PLA literature about how and when weapons and tactics (including *shashoujian*) should be optimally employed against superior adversaries to achieve military objectives. Pillsbury discussed several of these “employment concepts” in his November 2001 report for the U.S. China Economic and Security Commission.¹⁰⁰ Five specific methods are common in Chinese military writings: 1) identify and exploit weaknesses, 2) seize initiative through surprise, 3) employ extraordinary means, 4) attack vulnerabilities (key points/at certain moments), and 5) ensure survivability and counter-strike capability.

Identify and Exploit Weakness. According to Pillsbury, the Chinese believe that the successful employment of *shashoujian* against a superior adversary requires good intelligence and assessments of the adversary’s strategy, tactics, weapons, platforms, and systems.¹⁰¹ This is necessary to identify the centers of gravity (weaknesses) within the enemy’s military structure. Once strengths and weaknesses have been identified and assessed, the strengths can be avoided, and the weaknesses (particularly key nodes) can be targeted for attack using *shashoujian* (weapons and methods). In 1996, a passage from a *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue* essay highlighted the need to correctly identify and fatally attack structural weaknesses (key nodes supporting military operations) while avoiding enemy strengths. Notably, the recommendation to focus on striking weaknesses is complemented by recommendations to employ other *shashoujian* methods, including surprise and precision targeting.

. . . in operations under high-tech conditions, we must not only focus on annihilating the enemy’s combat effectiveness, but we must, first of

all, pay attention to and place stress on striking nodes of the enemy's operational structure. With regard to operational guidance, we must try our best to find out in good time the structural weaknesses of the enemy's operational system, including the essential weak links of the enemy's whole national infrastructure which supports the enemy's operations; then we can use precision guided weapons, deep striking forces, and special operational forces to swiftly bypass the enemy's strong nodes, skillfully direct our firepower to enemy's weak links, and give it a fatal strike. . . . It is necessary to realize the combination of mobility with firepower and shock attack at a higher level, and concentrate operational effectiveness in a decisive time and at a decisive place to attack decisive spots and to strike at the enemy's critical part.¹⁰²

In 1999, the Lanzhou Military Region Headquarters conducted studies of "local wars of the 1990s." A *Jiefangjun Bao* editorial about the study effort made some revealing comments concerning the PLA's needs and requirements for *shashoujian*, calling for

. . . prioritizing and slanting our manpower and financial resources in an effort to develop a few world-class and directed *shashoujian* for an extreme deterrent against a strong enemy. . . . We need to intensify our asymmetrical combat preparations aimed at enemy weak points. We need to counter enemy asymmetrical weapons with our own asymmetrical countermeasures. A strong enemy with absolute superiority is certainly not without weakness that can be exploited by a weaker side that finds the weakness of the stronger one and [at the same time] striking larger weaknesses with smaller strengths . . . [we need to be] able to take a certain initiative by making a small move that would affect the overall situation. So our military combat preparations need to be more directly aimed at finding tactics to exploit the weaknesses of a strong enemy.¹⁰³

Seize Initiative Through Surprise. For the Chinese, operational surprise is an essential condition for an inferior force to seize initiative and achieve victory in combat against a superior adversary. It is first necessary to keep secret some *shashoujian* weapons and tactics (others are made known for the purpose of deterrence) and to prevent an adversary from knowing the ways and means of *shashoujian* strikes. To maximize the effect of such strikes the PLA will also engage an adversary in conditions when attacks are not expected. In these circumstances, the PLA's combat effectiveness can also benefit from the shock effect of *shashoujian* strikes. Inversely, inflicted damage

and the shock effect of *shashoujian* strikes severely impact the ability of the adversary to observe, orient, decide, and act. In this sense, surprise also delays and degrades the combat effectiveness of the superior adversary.

. . . we should not fight with the enemy in a way anticipated by the enemy, in a time and in a place that the enemy are expecting. Only in this way will we be able to change inferiority into superiority, and passivity to activity, and thus win the initiative in conducting operations.¹⁰⁴

Employ Extraordinary Means. Chinese military operations researchers believe that the use of secret, deceptive, or otherwise unorthodox methods (stratagems, doctrines, tactics, techniques, and procedures) that are unknown to an adversary can significantly aid the employment of *shashoujian* weapons. The use of such extraordinary means for attacks with conventional, nuclear, and *shashoujian* weapons can transform weakness into strength by generating shock and inducing chaos and paralysis in the forces of a superior adversary. In this context, tactical surprise (the use of unorthodox and/or unanticipated methods) is distinctly different from strategic surprise (in the context of time, location and conditions). Both forms of surprise are typically viewed by PLA operations researchers as force multipliers.

The key principle of the stratagem of prevailing over the enemy with extraordinary means is that it is necessary, on the basis of having technical *shashoujian* [methods] to make surprising uses of such weapons when the opponent is not psychologically or materially prepared at all.¹⁰⁵

Everyone knows that *shashoujian* weapons can be used surprisingly effectively at a certain time, place and under certain conditions, but these *shashoujian* weapons in turn require rational combinations with other weapons.¹⁰⁶

Attack Vulnerabilities. In 2001, a PLA researcher examined two U.S. military operational incidents in an effort to identify lessons of value for military tactics development. The researcher highlighted the “gray critical states” (what other Chinese military scholars have called “definite blind spots” or “dead zones”¹⁰⁷) of two U.S. military platforms: the U.S. Marine Corps’ MV-22 tilt-rotor aircraft and

the USS *Kittyhawk* aircraft carrier.¹⁰⁸ In December 2000, an MV-22 crashed during a night training mission. The cause of the crash was investigated and found to be the result of a rapid vertical descent that created unstable airflow. This occurred in the aircraft's transition from horizontal to vertical flight. In another instance, in October 2000, USS *Kittyhawk* was participating in a joint military exercise with elements of the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Forces and conducting underway replenishment operations when two Russian *Sukhoi-27* fighter aircraft overflew the deck of the carrier at very low altitude. The PLA operations researcher concluded that:

The crash of the tilt-rotor craft MV-22 *Osprey* and the penetration into the USS *Kittyhawk* aircraft carrier's defense zone have shown that dangerous critical gray states exist in both high-tech weaponry systems and modern joint combat operation processes. We ought to earnestly study it [critical gray states] to get to the heart of the problem and discover measures to deal with this problem. Only by doing so can we transform this contradiction into something beneficial to us and enable us to defeat the enemy.¹⁰⁹

Coping with U.S. aircraft carriers is a common topic of examination by Chinese military analysts. Dr. Pillsbury was among the first to identify the specific interest of PLA operations researchers in determining the vulnerability of U.S. aircraft carriers.¹¹⁰ A number of articles explore strategies and tactics that Chinese military researchers believe might permit the PLA to effectively deter, deny, or destroy an aircraft carrier.¹¹¹ A 2001 *Junshi Wenzhai* article highlighted the use of combined attacks that employ asymmetric measures such as: "sea mine emplacement, timely jamming, and electronic confusion, submarine ambush, focused surprise attack with guided missiles, and [other] raids which take the enemy by surprise."¹¹² In 2002, another article highlighted five *shashoujian* weapons that could be successfully employed in operations against U.S. aircraft carriers:

. . . the aircraft carrier has an immense body like an island, leaving it basically no hiding ground on the vast seas, and no way to evade enemy reconnaissance and tracking. Aircraft, submarines, anti-ship missiles, torpedoes, and mines are the five major killers the aircraft carrier must face.¹¹³

The article highlighted the utility of advanced mines, citing their unanticipated effectiveness against the U.S. Navy during Operation DESERT STORM when USS *Tripoli* and USS *Princeton* suffered significant damage from mine explosions.

These examples are characteristic of many contained in Chinese military writings. They serve as clear indicators that PLA analysts are carefully studying the operational vulnerabilities of U.S. weapons, platforms, and military systems. The identification and discussions about the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of the U.S. armed forces reveal a key part of PLA's systematic effort to develop operational methods to counter technologically superior adversaries in a future war.¹¹⁴

Ensure Survivability and Counter-Strike Capability. The Chinese believe that *shashoujian* (in the context of weapons, platforms, systems, and methods) must remain denied to intelligence collection, both before and after use in combat, to ensure the effectiveness of strikes as well as the survivability of *shashoujian* units and equipment. Deception, concealment, and mobility all help to avert the opportunity to mitigate against *shashoujian* strikes. These practices also minimize the likelihood of surprise (effective preemptive attacks) against *shashoujian* units and equipment. For the Chinese, *shashoujian* forces must serve as a credible deterrent and an effective tool in preemption, but must also be able to survive initial attacks by a superior adversary to ensure the PLA's ability to achieve victory through devastating counterstrikes.

. . . we must guarantee that our strategic units still have nuclear counterattack and retaliation strengths even after receiving several attacks. China has already formed a network of strategic nuclear weapons using land-based firing (from deep wells and underground tunnels), mobile firing (from strategic highways and exclusive railway lines), and sea firing (from nuclear submarines).¹¹⁵

The strategic missile nuclear submarine is the *shashoujian* of the Chinese navy. It is characterized by a large cruising radius, broad operations area, good stealthiness, strong mobility, and high speed. In coming wars against aggression, a nuclear submarine will be a mobile and stealthy missile base, striking after the enemy has struck, to make a surgical fatal blow against an enemy.¹¹⁶

Effects of *Shashoujian* Strikes.

In addition to PLA discussions about methods, Chinese military scholars also frequently discuss the effects of *shashoujian* strikes. These effects include: deterrence, decapitation, blinding, paralysis, and disintegration.

Deterrence. According to China's ancient strategists, the best military leader wins his objectives without resorting to warfare. This virtue is still respected and practiced in the PRC today and directs emphasis on psychology (through strategy, deterrence, and negotiation) over armed conflict.¹¹⁷ Most Chinese military writing on *shashoujian* weapons includes discussion of psychological warfare and the requirement for credible deterrence. Frequently, PLA scholars characterize China's strategic missile forces—including the PLA's Second Artillery Corps and, increasingly, the PLA Navy's strategic submarine fleet—as *shashoujian* forces.¹¹⁸ It is, therefore, apparent that China regards its nuclear forces as *shashoujian* because of their psychological deterring effect and overwhelming destructive power. The missions and methods of both the Second Artillery Corps and the PLAN strategic submarine fleet include requirements for survivability and counter-strike capability.¹¹⁹ Moreover, PRC leaders judge these elements of the PLA to possess the ability to decapitate, paralyze, disintegrate, and blind (e.g., through electromagnetic pulse) the most powerful adversary that China might face in conflict. This belief is the basis for China's declared deterrence strategy and nuclear weapons program.

Appropriately developing the military deterrent threat force required by an active defense policy, such as a limited and effective nuclear force, and constantly developing air force, space forces, elite armed forces, and the overall people's war waging capability, we will possess a *shashoujian* that will leave the enemy trembling; this is the basis of China's intimidation psychological war.¹²⁰

Despite the focus of this quotation on nuclear weapons, it is important to reiterate the earlier point that PLA scholars value the significant deterring power of conventional *shashoujian* weaponry.¹²¹ As previously discussed, Chinese military researchers conclude that mobile ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, sea mines, and torpedoes all

serve as means to deter U.S. air and naval forces from entering into a military engagement with the PLA.

Decapitation. In the traditional sense, the defeat of an adversary by a single fatal strike or “death blow” is the intended outcome of a *shashoujian* strike. Ideally, such a strike is executed with foreknowledge. It comes deceptively and swiftly, and without any perceptible indication or warning to alert the enemy. If employed perfectly, a *shashoujian* strike kills the adversary instantly, without the victim ever seeing it coming. The grim result is final and irreversible. In a discussion about the PRC nuclear weapons policy one PRC analyst said,

Enlightened by the Iraq war, in waging war against Taiwan in the future, the PLA is considering applying “decapitation action” against the leading elements of Taiwan independence, together with precision lightning strikes on Taiwan’s major military, economic, and political targets.¹²²

Blinding, Paralysis, and Disintegration. As in martial arts (specifically *quanfa*) and the medicinal practice of acupuncture, pressure point warfare against key nodes is intended to have debilitating systemic effects within a military structure or organization. PLA strategists often discuss the importance of conducting *shashoujian* strikes on critical infrastructure that supports military operations. Some targets frequently identified by Chinese military scholars include command and control centers and networks, early warning and intelligence systems, remote sensing platforms (specifically unmanned aerial vehicles and reconnaissance satellites), and military logistics systems. PLA scholars view these systems as operational dependencies—the relative weaknesses of a superior enemy—and as more vulnerable to attack than the relative strengths (weapons and platforms) of a superior adversary. Effective *shashoujian* strikes on the key nodes of a superior adversary can cause paralysis and initiate the disintegration of a superior force. In the minds of Chinese operational research experts, these effects can enable the inferior to overcome the superior by transforming the PLA’s weakness into strength and the adversary’s strength into weakness. In an authoritative PLA NDU document, two editors highlighted the importance of “vital points” attacks on military systems to achieve “blinding, paralyzing, and lethal” effects.

Attacks on vital points in the enemy's systems should take as their main targets three basic links in the enemy's information systems; namely, sources from which the enemy probes for information, information channels, and information processing centers. The sources from which the enemy probes for information are the "eyes and ears" of the enemy's combat operations system. The information channels are the system's "nerve centers," and the information processing centers are its "brains and heart." It is not difficult to see that these three basic links are key links, which assure that an information system, and even an entire system of combat operations, can operate normally. Attacks on these three basic links in an enemy's information systems should be part of a single, coordinated whole. Through "blinding, paralyzing, and lethal" actions against the enemy's combat operations system, these attacks create conditions favorable for decisive combat. . . . By striking directly at the "brains, heart, and nerve centers" of the enemy's systems, this method paralyzes powerful troop formations and makes them collapse without being attacked.¹²³

In another essay, two PLA senior colonels explained the importance of dominance across the electromagnetic spectrum to create chaos for an adversary in modern warfare. They characterized electronic warfare as an "intangible power on the modern battlefield."

Electronic warfare has obscured the demarcation line that marks the beginning of an engagement and [EW] has become an intangible power on the modern battlefield. Whichever side loses in an electronic war will be reduced to blind and deaf, so its weapons will be disabled, and it will lose its initiative in battle or a campaign or even a whole strategic situation.¹²⁴

PLA Major General Dai Qingmin has discussed the critical role of information warfare as an element of electronic warfare to deny critical information to an adversary.

Integrated network-electronic warfare uses electronic warfare to disrupt the opponent's acquisition and forwarding of information. It uses computer network warfare to disrupt the opponent's processing and use of information. And it makes integrated use of electronic warfare and computer network warfare to form up overall, combined power to paralyze an opponent's information systems.¹²⁵

In an interview about U.S. dominance of the electromagnetic spectrum in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, Dai observed:

... the United States used the space-based strategic-class reconnaissance advanced warning and positioning system with very high resolution, Airborne Warning and Control System planes, unmanned aircraft, other campaign-class information systems, all types of sensors and other tactical-class information systems to conduct round-the-clock continuous reconnaissance on Iraq, and provide real-time information about the targets to U.S. and British special forces and ground forces, thereby considerably raising the hit rate. To the U.S. troops, the battleground was "crystal clear," and the battle situation was "in full view." But because the other side did not have complete reconnaissance positioning system of all classes, it could not see clearly and even was completely blind about what the other side was doing; to them, the battleground was "shrouded" with heavy "battle fog."¹²⁶

From a defensive perspective, several strategies to minimize the impact of an adversary's high-technology advantage in warfare were proposed by Sun Zian in 1995. This scholar identified the following as key areas for PLA strategy development: employing long-range interception weapons, maintaining communications during warfare, maintaining secrecy, exploiting intelligence derived from commercial channels, conducting saturation ballistic missile strikes against key nodes, ensuring camouflage and dispersal of equipment, deceiving the enemy with false targets, jamming enemy targeting systems, and enhancing the mobility of existing weapons. He also noted that other factors can minimize an enemy's high-tech advantage, including seasonal and weather factors and terrain.¹²⁷

In summary, *shashoujian* is an important concept for the Chinese military because it impacts thinking on military strategy, weapons acquisition programs, and also the PLA's warfighting methods. The stratagem that the "inferior" can overcome or defeat "the superior" is a separate concept that is also an important element of Chinese strategic culture. However, the two concepts are linked because *shashoujian* (weapons and tactics) make valuable contributions to support the stratagem (as *shashoujian* can serve as both the ways and the means by which an inferior military can defeat a more powerful military). However, it is important to emphasize that, for China, the question is not *whether* the weak can overcome the strong, but *how*.

This seems the critical question being considered by contemporary Chinese military strategists and PLA analysts of foreign military capabilities. For the Chinese, *shashoujian* is *not* necessarily a “silver bullet” that automatically brings victory in warfare. The Chinese seem to believe that *shashoujian* will assure victory against a superior adversary only if used appropriately, in the context of the correct strategy, under the proper conditions, and at optimal moments. The Chinese also recognize that superior adversaries can also possess and employ *shashoujian* weapons and tactics that can force a weaker enemy to capitulate, as the U.S. armed forces have done on two separate occasions in wars against Iraq.

CONCLUSIONS

China’s history and traditions profoundly influence the thinking of China’s leaders and senior military officers. Ancient Chinese history, as well as more recent experiences and observations, are guiding internal PLA debates about strategy, methods, and the development of new weapons and military equipment. In these debates, China’s military scholars are also reexamining philosophical issues, such as Mao Zedong’s emphasis upon the relative value of strategy and methods (man) versus new weapons, platforms, and systems (material). Practical matters, such as the applicability of traditional approaches versus the modern methods and others, are also being considered by scholars, particularly at the AMS and the PLA NDU.

For China, the initial years of the 21st century will serve as an interesting and appropriate period of reflection, examination, reexamination, and experimentation where old and new ideas compete—and sometimes mix—to drive the development of the PLA. Such is the case for *shashoujian* as it relates to PRC military strategy, methods (doctrine), and the PLA’s transformation campaign. While China’s leaders seek to rapidly improve both the PLA’s warfighting methods and the quality of weapons and equipment through resource reallocations and the acquisition of *shashoujian* (weapons), PRC military strategy will likely remain asymmetric vis-à-vis the United States. China’s long tradition of minimizing the relative superiority of adversaries while employing effective stratagems and

tactics will also endure. The PLA's transformation is underway, but it will take time. The influence of ancient Chinese military concepts and stratagems will likely remain strong within the PLA throughout this transformation. In the minds of China's military strategists and, increasingly, of the PRC leadership, the *shashoujian* concept is not only compatible, but also potentially catalytic for current and emerging military strategy and for the PRC's ambition to develop new capabilities to credibly deter, and if necessary defeat, military superpowers. At a minimum, *shashoujian* serves as a function to help Chinese military officials prioritize a select set of military programs for special funding and rapid development to guide China's military modernization program.

Shashoujian holds significance for Chinese military affairs, strategic culture, and military preparations. A spike in the usage of the term by PLA scholars in the mid-1990s indicates that *shashoujian* was an element or outgrowth of the PLA's post-DESERT STORM debates over military strategy. In 1995, references to *shashoujian* began appearing in China's most authoritative military journal, *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue*. By 1997, numerous references to and indications of PLA discussions about *shashoujian* appeared in other significant PRC military journals and in PLA newspapers, particularly in *Jiefangjun Bao*. From 1996 to 1998, China's senior military officers, including PRC military region commanders and PLA service chiefs, wrote a series of PLA articles about *shashoujian*. In 1998, PRC Defense Minister Major General Chi Haotian said publicly that President Jiang Zemin had advanced a new line of thinking on military modernization and had specifically called out the need for *shashoujian*. During the same year, China's military RD&A system began to implement an unprecedented reform that included the restructuring of COSTIND and the establishment of the PLA's GAD. From 1999 to 2000, several of China's most prominent senior leaders and military officers undertook a campaign of speeches about military preparations that included slogans calling upon the PLA to develop *shashoujian* (weapons and tactics). By the summer and fall of 2000, several Chinese newspapers reported that Jiang Zemin had ordered the creation of the 998 State Security Project, a secret project to develop *shashoujian*. And, finally, in 2002 Jiang Zemin advocated a "transformation" with *shashoujian* weapons for the PLA.

During this remarkable period, the *shashoujian* concept appeared to be a response to changes in military strategy. It also influenced PRC leadership decisions about reform within the PLA, military transformation, plans for the development of new weapons, and tactics tailored for asymmetric warfare.

Despite the traceable chronology of events over a period of 5 years and the relevance of the *shashoujian* concept to the classic stratagem of “overcoming the superior with the inferior,” there has been surprisingly limited study of *shashoujian* in the United States. With the exception of Pillsbury’s groundbreaking discoveries, the PLA’s unusual focus on *shashoujian* has gone largely unnoticed and uninvestigated by the American PLA-watching community. Perhaps a more comprehensive examination of open source materials from and on the Chinese military is necessary.

At present, due to resource limitations and prioritization, the U.S. Government directs FBIS translation of only selected articles from *Jiefangjun Bao*, with virtually no full-text translations of other PLA (military region or PLA service) newspapers, military journals, or books specific to Chinese military affairs.¹²⁸ Absent the specific direction and resources from various U.S. Government communities of interest—to shift the emphasis of FBIS translation work to perform these tasks—FBIS was quite understandably unable to recognize the significance of *shashoujian*—that *shashoujian* is more than a mere idiom or metaphor for those discussing it within China’s national defense establishment.

For U.S. policymakers, analysts, and academics, routine and comprehensive coverage and translation of publicly available Chinese military literature is important for several reasons. First, an increasing amount of published information is becoming available from authoritative Chinese military sources, including the AMS, the PLA NDU, and other military research institutions. Importantly, these documents appear to be precisely where new ideas, theories, and concepts are initially raised within the PLA. Moreover, the reporting in Chinese military newspapers, such as the popular *Jiefangjun Bao*, tends to lag from 6 to 12 months behind the appearance of key issues in the PLA’s more prominent military journals and full-length books.

Second, surprising as it may seem, few American PLA watchers can read Chinese well enough to perform primary source research or are trained with machine language translation and other tools. They remain largely dependent upon Chinese military literature in translation. Third, failure to keep up with developments in the Chinese national defense establishment by exploiting primary sources (especially PRC military journals and books) can prevent identification of key indicators of change—or warning of developments that are of interest to U.S. policymakers. In a worst case scenario, the failure to monitor Chinese military literature could be a contributing factor in a future miscalculation or intelligence failure.

While the United States and China both conduct military assessments of their own and each other's armed forces and military operations, they reach starkly contrasting conclusions.¹²⁹ In a cautionary 1996 report for the Department of Defense Office of Net Assessments, Pillsbury wrote of PRC judgments about U.S. military strengths, weaknesses, and capabilities, concluding that these judgments could lead to "dangerous misperceptions" with potentially catastrophic consequences.¹³⁰ An example of such a "dangerous misperception" is found in a PLA judgment made about the performance of the Yugoslav army during NATO's ALLIED FORCE operation in Bosnia, which stated that

From the outstanding performance of the Yugoslav army in resisting NATO airstrikes, we can see that there are great prospects for overcoming a superior enemy with an inferior force in a high-tech war.¹³¹

While the deception and denial campaign of the Yugoslav army may have been effective against NATO air forces, it seems a leap for the PLA military scholar to conclude that the Yugoslav army was successful in overcoming NATO's superior forces.

The contrast between U.S. and PRC assessments and judgments is troubling because these views can lead either nation toward miscalculation and possibly military disaster. It is dangerous for China's leaders to believe that the PLA can prevent a conflict or prevail in a military campaign against a superpower such as the United States with "superior strategy," despite the generational

gaps between the United States and China in hardware and in the integration of science and technology with military equipment. The notion that China's leadership could decide to order a *shashoujian*-equipped PLA into what would almost certainly be a disastrous conflict with the United States is, indeed, very troubling.

These grim possibilities are the fundamental reasons why PLA watchers must consider dozens of new research questions concerning the implications of *shashoujian* for PLA organizational reform, warfighting capability and readiness, and PLA professionalization. In addition, researchers should carefully study the impact of the *shashoujian* concept on strategic issues, including Chinese negotiation strategy, PRC deterrence and military coercion theory, China's propensity to use force for conflict resolution, and escalation issues.

When considered in the context of current Chinese threat perceptions concerning the United States, PRC assessments of PRC and U.S. military capabilities and vulnerabilities, and the potential for miscalculation, the *shashoujian* concept and weapons development programs hold disturbing implications for American defense strategy and military operations in the Asia-Pacific region. *Shashoujian* is a concept that merits watching as it continues to be incorporated into the lexicon, weapons acquisition plans, and practices of the PLA.

Can China successfully develop and use *shashoujian* to enhance its position as an inferior military force? On the one hand, it can be argued that leaders within the PLA think so and will persevere to achieve these objectives. It is also evident that increasingly sophisticated research is being performed and published at the AMS. Similarly, the PLA officer corps is becoming more professional as a result of improvements in PRC and PLA education programs. Operational training of PLA officers and enlisted personnel is also more realistic and challenging than in the past. On the other hand, China's military is rising from a low base of professionalism and capability, and has few discernible areas of world-class excellence. China has also had a long history of military inferiority and has traditionally trailed the world's leading militaries in the development and integration of cutting-edge military hardware. The PRC defense industrial base, although reforming, remains a complex, corrupt, and inefficient network of organizations where personal relationships

continue to heavily influence important investment decisions and outcomes. Thus, the outlook for the PLA's successful development and employment of *shashoujian* is uncertain.

Dr. Larry Wortzel, a former U.S. Army attaché to China and long-time scholar of the Chinese military, examined a similar set of questions in a 1998 essay titled "Chinese Military Potential."¹³² In his essay, he asked and answered the question, "Can the Chinese [PLA] get it all together? . . . The short answer is probably not." But Wortzel added an important caveat in the form of a case study: another possible scenario. He noted that in 1984 Zhang Ruimin took over China's leading producer of home appliances, the collectively owned and failing Haier Group, and by 1989 had turned the failing collective into one of China's most successful companies. Zhang incorporated world-class "best practices" in leadership, management, and production; established an effective quality control system; dealt out incentives and penalties to govern employee performance; and enhanced the company's systems engineering and integration capabilities. Wortzel concluded that if the PLA could similarly attract and properly assign individuals with these talents, then the PLA could achieve its military potential—as Wortzel claims the PLA has already done for its M-class missile programs, as well as its sea and air launched cruise missile programs.

Whether the PLA can develop and effectively use *shashoujian* is perhaps less important than whether China's senior leaders believe in the possibility, and whether the PLA would attempt to defeat the superior with the inferior, plus a few "assassin's maces."

Senior American policymakers should concern themselves with and watch out for the following elements or combinations of elements to counter *shashoujian* and the stratagem of the ability of an "inferior defeating the superior": 1) the possibility of China presenting a military operational concept that takes the United States by surprise, 2) weapons systems and infrastructure that can enable the PLA to implement the operational concept, and/or 3) a strategic or tactical context in which the successful use of this operational concept is decisive.

This chapter is an effort to address these important issues. However, these and many other questions about *shashoujian* and its impact on the PLA merit serious attention and dedicated study

by PLA watchers in academia and government. It is hoped that this research will complement a larger foundation of existing work—upon which to build a stronger, more robust base of knowledge.

CHAPTER 10 - ENDNOTES

1. Dr. David Shambaugh has led other efforts to encourage greater collection and sharing of Chinese military literature by the academic community and the U.S. Government, in part by establishing the Chinese Documents Center, a library of Chinese military publications at The George Washington University's Gelman Library.

2. Conversation with Mr. Jeffrey Dyrek, FBIS Customer Service Office, August 21, 2003.

3. Some FBIS interpretations include: assassin's mace, decisive weapons, killer mace, killing mace, killing sword, killer weapons, leap ahead weapon, leap forward weapon, magic weapon, new type weapons, powerful weapons, silver bullets, sure-to-win striking power, trump card weapons, and vital acupuncture point weapons.

4. Chinese Global Language and Cultural Center Online: <http://edu.ocac.gov.tw/taiwan/kungfu/e/5123-3.htm>.

5. See Michael Pillsbury, *Dangerous Chinese Misperceptions: The Implications for DoD*, prepared for the Office of Net Assessment, Washington, DC, 1996; Michael Pillsbury, ed., *Chinese Views of Future Warfare*, Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1997; Mark Stokes, *China's Strategic Modernization: Implications for the United States*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 1999; Alistair Iain Johnston, "Toward Contextualizing the Concept of a *Shashoujian* (Assassin's Mace)," unpublished manuscript, August 2002; Dennis Blasko, "PLA Ground Forces Lessons Learned: Experience and Theory," Laurie Burkitt, Andrew Scobell, and Larry M. Wortzel, eds., *The Lessons of History: The Chinese People's Liberation Army at 75*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2003, pp. 61-89.

6. Discussion with Michael Pillsbury in August 2003. Also see "Security Issues: Strategic Perceptions."

7. See "The History of Kung Fu" at http://www.prodigymartialarts.com/wing_chun.htm.

8. This paragraph draws from Chinese Global Language and Cultural Center Online.

9. Yang Zhibo, "An Attempt at Analysis of *Sashoujian*," *Kongjun Bao*, May 16, 2002 [*sashoujian* has a slightly different meaning than *shashoujian*: *sa* implies a "sudden thrust" of a hand mace].
10. Anonymous explanation posted at <http://army.tom.com>, September 29, 2000.
11. Posting by Kadey, www.redfox88.com/w090htm (originally carried on *Zhonghua Wang Luntan* [China Network Forum]), August 2, 2002.
12. Michael Pillsbury, *China's Military Strategy Toward the U.S.: A View from Open Sources*, November 2, 2001, http://www.uscc.gov/beseanchieports/200_2003/pdfs/strat.pdf, p. 16. Also see Johnston, "Toward Contextualizing the Concept of a *Shashoujian*."
13. Johnston, "Toward Contextualizing the Concept of a *Shashoujian*," p. 1.
14. Dong Wenxian, "Diplomatic Success Comes From the Sky—Analyzing U.S. Troops' Military Deterrent During the Iraqi Arms Inspection Crisis," *Jiefangjun Bao*, April 14, 1998, translated in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter FBIS).
15. A term coined by Dr. Dore Levy of Brown University, author of "Vignettism in Chinese Poetics," in a paper presented at the Association of Asian Studies, Washington, DC, April 4-7, 2002. Abstract available at <http://www.aasianst.org/absts/2002abst/China/sessions.htm#138>. I am grateful to Dr. Michael Pillsbury for highlighting the importance of "vignettism" as it pertains to Chinese military history and strategy.
16. Gao Guozhen and Ye Zheng, "Operational Doctrine Must Change Over Time," *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue*, November 20, 1996 in FBIS.
17. Li Xuanqing, Fan Juwei, and Su Kuoshan, "Defense Science and Technology Forges Sharp Sword for National Defense—Second Roundup on Achievements of Army Building Over the Past 50 Years," *Jiefangjun Bao*, September 7, 1999, in FBIS.
18. An incomplete list of events examined by the PLA cadre at the PLA National Defense University and AMS includes, but is not limited to, the sale of U.S. defense articles to Taiwan (1991-present), Operation DESERT STORM (1991), Desert Hammer Exercise (1994), the Taiwan Strait Crisis (1995-96), and Operation ALLIED FORCE (1999).
19. Michael Pillsbury, *Chinese Views of Future Warfare*.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.* Also see discussions with Dr. Michael Pillsbury in summer 2003.

22. Thomas Christensen, "Posing Problems Without Catching Up," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4, p. 10. For additional comments on the "counter-RMA" approach, also see Zhang Dejiu's excerpt of Major General Xu Yanbin's "Academic Report at the National Defense University," published under the title "In Depth Information Warfare Is Psychological Warfare," *Jiefangjun Bao*, August 13, 1996, in FBIS.

23. This movement was likely vindicated (from a Chinese perspective) as a result of the strong U.S. military response to PLA operational exercises during the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis.

24. Zhang Dejiu.

25. Wu Chenguang, "Push Forward Military Transformation," *Nanfang Zhoumo*, June 12, 2003, in FBIS.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.* Also see Wang Baocun, "Subduing Enemy Force Without Battle and Informationized War," *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue*, May 4, 1999, pp. 60-63, in FBIS; Peng Guangqian, "Meeting the Challenge of the New Military Transformation," *Liaowang*, No. 23, June 9, 2003, pp. 52-54, in FBIS.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. I am grateful to Dr. John Battilega for sharing his expertise on the impact of Marxist dialectical materialism and use of the scientific method on military affairs.

32. "Borrow a Corpse to Raise the Spirit": to "take an institution, a technology, or a method that has been forgotten or discarded and appropriate it for your own purpose. To revive something from the past by giving it a new purpose, or to reinterpret and bring to life old ideas, customs, and traditions" (from <http://www.chinastrategies.com>).

33. Johnston, "Toward Contextualizing the Concept of a *Shashoujian*," p. 1.

34. Unattributed article, "Take the Road of Building Crack Troops with Chinese Characteristics," *Ta Kung Pao*, September 3, 1997, in FBIS; Yi Jan, "The People's Liberation Army Will Conduct Massive Anti-Hegemony Military Drill; Breakthroughs Will Be Achieved in Deadly Equipment," *Ching Pao*, No. 263, June 1, 1999, in FBIS; Li Xuanqing, Fan Juwei, and Su Kuoshan, "Defense Science and Technology Forges Sharp Sword for National Defense—Second Roundup on Achievements of Army Building Over the Past 50 Years," *Jiefangjun Bao*, September 7, 1999, in FBIS; Xu Hezhen, "Focus on Psychological War Under the Background of Larger Military Strategy," *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue*, October 20, 2000, p. 67-76, in FBIS; Zhang Yining and Sun Kejia, "Understanding Development by Leaps in the Build-Up of the Armed Forces," *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue*, June 1, 2001, pp. 123-131, in FBIS; Wang Congbiao, "Studying Jiang Zemin's 'On Science and Technology'," *Jiefangjun Bao*, February 13, 2001, in FBIS.

35. China's 863 Program was a national-level program initiated in March 1986 to advance Chinese science and technology through indigenous research and development, foreign acquisition, and other hybrid approaches as a component of, and to achieve the objectives of, Deng Xiaoping's "Four Modernizations." Some U.S. scholars believe it to have been responsive to President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) program that was presented on March 23, 1983. See Su Enze, "Observer: '863' and Military Modernization," *Jiefangjun Bao* (Internet Version), February 28 2001, p. 9.

36. You Ji, "The Evolution of China's Maritime Combat Doctrines and Models: 1949-2001," Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, 2002, p. 25. Also see Dr. You's references to Zhang Youcai, "Several Issues Regarding Electronic Warfare in a Landing Operation" and "Research on Operational Command Under High-Technology Conditions," Beijing: PLA National Defense University, 1997, pp. 327-333.

37. As identified by Michael Pillsbury: Wang Pufeng, *Information Warfare and the Revolution in Military Affairs*, Beijing: Military Sciences Press, 1995.

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