

# COUNTERSTRIKE MEDIA

## MASTER SUN TZU vs. GENERAL CLAUSEWITZ

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### Impacts: R.M.A.

Revolution in Military Affairs, especially the limits of technological prowess

### Impacts: Jointness

The contemporary doctrine emphasizing intrinsic operational compatibility, challenges of implementation

### Impacts: C.O.I.N.

Displaces the supremacy of conventional linear, positivist approach to war-craft unhelpful in fighting Islamic Eurasian nomads

There is an old saying at West Point: *'beginners study tactics, amateurs study strategy, but only the best study logistics'*. Logistics being the formal study of **how** one achieves a goal. There is not always symmetry between these competing claims as witnessed by successful military officers who have studied war as strategy. September 11 and the *'long war'* has exacerbated an already long debate within military strategic craft who study the advantages and limitations of both Clausewitz and Sun Tzu. The literature on both men is astonishing. However, without studying how geography, politics, morale and psychology all interact to blunt the initiatives of war-craft; it is pointless to study either in isolation.

In the end, Clausewitz was wrong to ignore experience as a hermeneutic strengthening the impact of employing terrain to blunt an adversaries initiative.

This essay will explore the achievements of both men whose writings dominate the curriculum of war colleges as well as a brief synopsis outlining the weaknesses implicit in each strategist.

Clausewitz was a Prussian military officer (d. 1831) who began his text **'On War'** in 1816, it remained unfinished

**Master Sun Tzu**

**Vs.**

**General Clausewitz**

**Adroit Operational  
Flexibility**

**Vs.**

**Mass as Linear  
Overt Stress**

upon his death and was published by his wife who assumed the imprimatur.

Clausewitz viewed war as a social act, an extension of political craft with moral and ethical consequences in both its construction and execution. His philosophical antecedents were Kant, Hegel and a romantic movement that dominated university life throughout Germany, Prussia and Russia throughout the 18th & 19th century. Both Kant and Hegel advance a romantic idealism in respect to perspective. This is an intrinsic weakness to Clausewitz for he ignores both the craft of intelligence and experience in the execution of war aims. Both men proposed to discover the '*center of gravity*' in each engagement. This is defined as an opponents operational, strategic and political power. Notice the use of Newtonian mechanics throughout the work and approach of Clausewitz, this overt positivist approach of dominant linear stress will be challenged in Mesopotamia and the Eurasian heartland post 9/11, it will challenge and shape new dynamic protocols regarding the perspective of 'mass' that informs war craft; for the supremacy of positivism will be thwarted by the militants use of fanaticism, geography and imagination.

Clausewitz's arch nemesis was Antoine Henri Jumini who dominated the military curricula on both continents, especially the American South immediately before the Civil War. Jumini advocated the aphorism that a commander should put superior combat power at the decisive point in any engagement, he also stressed exclusive superiority of maintaining interior lines of communication, engagement and supply. Still, the writings of Jumini were not adapted to the geography of the American South throughout the American Civil War. It is significant that neither man proposed to study the personality and command that provides superior craft in assessing when to apply the proponents of either text. Both Jumini and Clausewitz stressed the social class of troops. Studying class orientation and monarchy reveals the political limitations of both men's capacity to access the rise of constitutional republics or democracy in the west or the social impact implicit in democratic institutions that welcomed an industrial revolution. Neither man anticipated a Hamiltonian ethos that would shape contemporary war. The finest critic of Clausewitz was Raymond Aron's classical 1950's text '**Clausewitz: Philosopher of War**' and Christopher Bassford '**Clausewitz in English**'.

Sun Tzu is considered the finest military strategist to ever fight throughout the Orient. It is not possible to discover whether he is an actual person or a community of persons dedicated to studying the craft of war. Nevertheless, he text is by far the single most significant study of military craft. His study of war was crafted during the '*Warring States Period*'. This was cultural anarchy among several provinces, each with equal weaponry and manpower. Although Sun Tzu is a contemporary of Confucius he was not stimulated by the monolithic approach so characteristic of Confucius' social endeavor to end anarchy. Such a monolithic approach had its cultural response among the population as Taoism. Taoism is not monolithic in

either its approach or execution of any assessment of policy aims or war-craft. Sun Tzu approaches his study synoptically; nothing is treated in isolation. Aphorisms are used, not narrative. He treats the use of intelligence with geography and supply lines together. This gives his approach an easier grasp. However, there are enormous problems implicit in Sun Tzu, problems that did not constrain Clausewitz.

Sun Tzu lived in an age of enormous anarchy, analogous to Mao Zedon's '*Cultural Revolution*' and '*Great Leap Forward*'. Neither Sun Tzu nor Confucius discovered the use of reason in the policy of war-craft.

Consequently, both Sun Tzu and Confucius neglected to develop politics as an equivalent discipline; a necessary appendage to consolidating any enduring victory.

Why is this so?

Sinic Civilization never developed an ethics outside its Confucian mandate. Without recognizing the necessity of a moral foundation, Chinese culture was left to the single device of expressed centralized power alone, as demonstrated in its monolithic posture of rigid Confucian assimilation.

This means that Chinese Civilization never recognized the significance of the individual person.

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The West's development of reason in the Enlightenment, its ability to permit spheres of autonomy (a Reformation) in its culture gave it an enduring strength that Chinese civilization did not possess.

In a word, the west recognized the limits of both power and politics in the pursuit of policy. Sinic Civilization never did. Does anyone think that the cruelty demonstrated as enforced solicitation of compliance among either Hannibal or Sun Tzu's troops would be tolerated in the west? Could Petraeus act like Gengis Khan, Mao, or even Vo Nguyen Giap and still retain command?

The west is superior because we believe and shape our war craft from an informed Christian anthropology, an ethics that recognizes spheres of autonomy as natural right.

This is the most enduring quality to our war-craft and it is threatened today.

Those interested in reading the world's finest commentary on Sun Tzu's ' should choose Mark McNelly's '**Sun Tzu & The Art Of Modern Warfare**'. Future essay's in this series will be published to help the reader continue his/her interest in the legacy of Sun Tzu.

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*Christopher Bassford*

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