

## Radical exoticism: Baudrillard and Others' wars

### I. Introduction

Baudrillard's questioning of the reality or presence of war has provided much food for thought for analysts of wars simulated by contemporary Western societies. However, questions remain as to the relation of this thought to other fields. In this paper, I ask to what extent Baudrillard's thought can be drawn upon to understand wars simulated in Other literal fields and thought by Others. With reference to East Asian, and particularly Chinese, understandings of war, I enquire into Baudrillard's understanding of radical Otherness and the effect his argument may have for our study of Other wars. China is an interesting place to look for other wars, because it is typically perceived as a radical other to the Western self-image as modern, capitalist and democratic. China's rise in the global economy and politics is commonly considered to pose one of the greatest challenges to the current world order and to modernity as we know it. This way of understanding China's role in international politics has its roots in an imagination of Chinese experience as radically different to that of Western modernity – as the 'other country' *par excellence* (Chow 1991, 81).

There are, as one may expect, various co-existing 'wars' in China, emanating from various enactments and from a rich history of thinking about strategic culture. It is impossible in this article to do justice to even a small part of these debates. Therefore, I discuss here three particular instances or vantage points on Chinese 'wars'. Most immediately, China is an active participant in America's 'war on terror' and can therefore be seen to be part of its global project, a (sometimes uneasy) part of that global war machine. At the same time, contemporary rhetoric on war in Chinese academic and policy discourse has positioned China as an alternative to what is portrayed as a war-mongering West. Many literatures trace this allegedly Chinese attitude back to Ancient Daoist thinker Sunzi: 'to subjugate the enemy's army without doing battle is the highest of excellence' (Sunzi, as quoted in Ding Sheng 2008: 197). This rhetoric has portrayed such a Chinese attitude to war as radically different to the West's, because the former is said to focus on the pre-emption of war in conjunction with the language of harmony, non-action and soft power. What is more, and simultaneously, China's neighbours have also been increasingly concerned with what is perceived as increased militarisation and the Chinese acting out of war through other modes. In popular culture, for example, the People's Republic's warring past is repeatedly acted out and fetishized in violent ways.

How should we understand these simultaneous approaches to war in contemporary China? Baudrillard himself was largely silent on East Asian society, and emphasised how difference may destroy otherness, arguing for a 'radical exoticism' in our encounter with others. What does this mean for those of us who have been influenced by his thought and who have an interest in Asian understandings of war? Should we simply follow Baudrillard and not try to make these views on war understandable to us?

I approach these questions by first visiting some of Baudrillard's own writing on war. I discuss what he *did* say about war and subsequently what he chose *not* to speak or write about with regards to war, and his apparent reasons for this

silence. Second, I turn to contemporary Chinese understandings of war. I first comment briefly on China's engagement in the war on terror. I then examine how the ontology that builds on some ancient Chinese strategic thinking relates to the Clausewitzian understanding that Baudrillard criticized. I thereafter outline the various modes through which Chinese war is simulated or reified in tension with such a purported ontology. I conclude by commenting on the implications of these discussions for future scholarship on Baudrillard and Others' wars, finding no escape in China's wars from the difficulties of that which Baudrillard described elsewhere.

## **II. Baudrillard's (non)war and its Asian others**

Baudrillard has become influential across numerous disciplines as a provocateur par excellence, and his most infamous claim relates to war – that the Gulf War did not take place. As is widely known, the piece under this name was originally published by the French paper *Libération* as a series of three articles, claiming that the Gulf war would not take place, was not taking place and had not taken place. The first of these articles (*La guerre du Golfe n'aura pas lieu*, 1991c), republished in the *Guardian* under the name 'The Reality Gulf' (1991d), opened with the now iconic claim:

From the start it was clear that this war would not exist. After the 'hot' war, and then after the 'cold' war we now have the dead war. The thawing of the cold war has left us in the embrace of a corpse of war. (Baudrillard 1991d)

This striking claim was based on the arguments that military deterrence had worked and would continue to work in the balance of power, that consequently the process of war had been marginalized into a permanent threat, and that the traditional, legalistic operation of 'war' had not survived this process (Baudrillard 1991d; see also Merrin 1994, 434). Just over a month later, after the Allied airstrike campaign against Iraqi targets had begun, he published a second article asking 'Is the Gulf War really taking place?' (*La guerre du Golfe a-t-elle vraiment lieu?* 1991a). Here, Baudrillard argued that no war was taking place in the Gulf, that what went on there remained a virtual rather than real war. Rather than fulfil Clausewitz's formula of war as 'politics continued by other means' (Clausewitz 1976), what was taking place was the reverse; the absence of politics conducted by other means (Baudrillard 1991a). Less than two months later, after a cease-fire had been declared, Baudrillard published a third article, finally claiming that 'The Gulf War did not take place' (*La guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu*, Baudrillard 1991b).

### **II.i. What Baudrillard *did* say about war**

Baudrillard had commented on war, specifically on deterrence and the impossibility of nuclear conflict, in various texts over the preceding decade (see also Merrin 1994, 434). Here Baudrillard claimed that nuclear war would not and could not happen as permanent deterrence robbed the nuclear weapons of their original, intended use-value. The nuclear threat is therefore described as 'the apotheosis of simulation' (Baudrillard 1983, 58): 'an orbital, hyperreal satellization of the planet by a pure model of security, circulating like capital, with no relation to everyday or ground-level events' (Merrin 1994, 434).

Baudrillard argues that the simulated war becomes indistinguishable from the real war, proceeding from a pure model of war that is realised technologically (Baudrillard 1991a, 1991c; Merrin 1994, 444). The development of these arguments in Baudrillard's series of articles on the Gulf war have been thoroughly discussed elsewhere (for example in Merrin 1994), and have been drawn upon in subsequent scholarship on war (for example Der Derian 2001; Pope 2007; Hammond 2007; Nordin and Öberg 2013). They are also discussed in greater theoretical detail in other articles of this special issue, particularly its introduction. For these reasons I shall not dwell on them here. Nonetheless, a number of points are worth highlighting about Baudrillard's claims in relation to the Gulf war, which will be of use to our further discussion below.

First, some have understood Baudrillard's claim that the world is no longer real as meaning that it is instead 'unreal' (Norris 1990, 177; 1992, 194). However, I take Baudrillard's claim to be quite the opposite. According to him, what characterises the current era is the shift from the real to the 'hyper-real', the 'more real than real': as reality retreats into the image and the image ironically absorbs the space of the real, the hyper-real can no longer be 'the mirror of reality' (Zurbrugg 1997, 12; see also Mike Gane in Smith 2010, 96). Although there has never been a true real known to us, there has 'never been a world realer than ours: everywhere reality is enhanced, multiplied, brought to us, we to it' (Hegarty 2004, 9).

Second, some read Baudrillard as a straight-forward nihilist (Norris 1992, 194, 196; a common conception shared by Foster 1990, xv). As Merrin has argued at length, however, the very premise of Baudrillard's three essays on the Gulf War:

is a moral reaction to the fraudulence and illegitimacy of the Gulf War, of the US action, of Saddam Hussein, the United Nations and the media coverage. Whereas both left and right accepted in advance the truth of this war, Baudrillard refused to legitimate its historical status as a Western victory for democracy and world peace (Merrin 1994, 444).

On Baudrillard's understanding, what took place in the Gulf was not a war, in the Clausewitzian sense of a reciprocal relationship with the goal of rendering the enemy powerless, it was 'only a massive, punitive operation in which the "Just War" legalistic paradigm was a selectively applied pretext for the systematic annihilation of the Iraqi military' (Merrin 1994, 445). What took place was a virtual affair; not a fight, but the implementation of a programme. In this event, a one-sided, model technical 'realization' of pre-programmed plans unfolded, where all 'war', as fighting, resistance, opposition and contact, had been removed (Baudrillard 1991a, 1991b, 1991c; Merrin 1994, 446). In this way, the allegation of nihilism, complicity and irresponsibility is turned back on the accusers. It is those who insisted on the reality of the war (whether for or against it) who validated its truth as war and its aftermath as victory. Baudrillard refused to accept and legitimise the war as a war, when all he saw was 'not a Just War, this was an un-just non-war' (Merrin 1994, 451).

Third, then, whereas some have accused Baudrillard of complicity in the atrocities of the war (Norris 1992, 27), the accusation is turned right back. It is stupid to be for or against the war if you do not for one moment question its

probability, credibility or level of reality (Baudrillard 1991b). Those who promote the truth of this as a war and historical event are then the warmongers, the accomplices (Baudrillard 1991b; cf. Merrin 1994, 440). To make the point absolutely clear, Baudrillard certainly recognizes the consequences of war:

Moralists about war, champions of war's exalted values should not be greatly upset: a war is not any the less heinous for being a mere simulacrum – the flesh suffers just the same, and the dead ex-combatants count as much there as in other wars (Baudrillard 1983, 70).

The virtual nature of the war to the US, then, takes nothing away from the experience of its victims' suffering. Virtual war is no less repulsive than real war, non-war no less so than war. The consequences of something that did not take place can be just as serious and cause just as much suffering as those of an historical event (Baudrillard 1991b).

### **II.ii. What Baudrillard *did not* say about war.**

Baudrillard's reading of the Gulf war, then, gives us a thought provoking account of the effects of an American or Western system that simulates war in a manner that never meets or engages the Asian other that is purportedly at the receiving end of this violence. This analysis of war mirrors Baudrillard's interest elsewhere in a code or system that disallows alterity, the seduction of the irreconcilable, or any form of Rumsfeldian 'unknown unknown', allowing only domesticated forms of knowable 'difference'. This raises the question of how we deal with the idea of otherness in Baudrillard's own writing, and for the purposes of this article in his writing on war.

In Baudrillard's writing on this 'system' of simulation, it is sometimes European democracy, sometimes the modern West, sometimes consumer society more broadly, that are driven by the 'perverse' logic he describes (Baudrillard 2002 [2000], 97, 207; 2004 [2002]). Baudrillard appeals to a 'we', the specificity of which varies across his writings (Baudrillard 1989 [1986], 116). Thus, as John Beck has noted, 'there is no outside of the American rhetoric of achieved utopia; for Baudrillard, it erases all alternatives' (Beck 2009, 110). In *The Spirit of Terrorism*, Beck similarly notes the deployment of a Western 'we' in opposition to an enemy 'them', 'not dissimilar to those utilized by official American (and British) discourse determined to externalise the other side' (Beck 2009, 112). Beck argues that the 9/11 attacks revealed to Baudrillard that there is 'another side, a reading of American power that can move inside it but remains other to it' (Beck 2009, 112). This, however, does little to destabilise the original us/them binary.

On anything we may imagine beyond these imagined units of the 'we', Baudrillard is largely silent. Of course, we should not over-emphasise the potentially problematic consequences of Baudrillard's focus on these specific spatio-temporal configurations – after all, nobody can write about everything, nor should they necessarily try. Nonetheless, Baudrillard's ascription of the logics he describes to the modern West, European democracy and consumer society raises the question of what lies outside those configurations and on what logics that outside may operate.

Baudrillard has a limited amount to say about this outside, but with regards to Asia, and more specifically Japan, he argues for increased exoticisation (Baudrillard 2003a). For Baudrillard, it is the modern West's refusal of alterity that spawns nostalgia for the Other, who is now always already domesticated (Baudrillard 1990 [1987], 145, 165). Despite this nostalgia, we must not try to 'foster' difference. It is counterproductive to call for 'respecting the difference' of 'marginalized groups', as this relies on a presumption that they need to have an Identity and makes the marginal valued as such, thus leaving the marginal where they are, 'in place'. Difference must therefore be rejected in favour of greater otherness or alterity: 'otherness [*l'altérité*] is not the same thing as difference. One might even say that difference is what destroys otherness' (Baudrillard 1993 [1990], 127, 131). Thus 'the other must stay Other, separate, perhaps difficult to understand, uncontrollable' (Hegarty 2004, 118). In this way, Baudrillard advocates more 'exoticism', an interest in the other as Other. The Other can only remain Other insofar as we resist the urge to assimilate.

What, then, is the consequence of this for scholars who are interested in configurations beyond the purported Western system or consumer society that Baudrillard clearly thinks he *can* speak about? Should we simply stop speaking of Asia in order to try to give it some sort of status as an 'unknown unknown'? Surely this would be intolerably patronising, building precisely the ethos of derivative difference-promotion that destroys Otherness. Or should we sidestep the issue by simply assuming that everything is now part of the global kleptocracy of Western-style capitalism, without an outside? This would surely be an equally intolerable and patronising approach to the issue of otherness. I shall return to these questions towards the end of this article. First, however, I shall brave an attempt to speak of Others' wars, namely imaginations of war emerging from contemporary China.

### **III. Chinese approaches to war**

Before I venture into some discussion of contemporary Chinese modes of war, I shall state the obvious: what I discuss here is merely a small selection of what one could write of as Chinese wars. There is a large and varied literature engaging the varied traditions of Chinese strategic culture, the numerous cultural expressions that deal with the theme of war, not to mention the Chinese military in foreign policy. In what follows I outline three dimensions of contemporary Chinese 'war' in order to bring out a number of contrast and themes that have some bearing on Baudrillard's discussion of war. I turn, first, to the People's Republic of China's participation in the war on terror. I thereafter contrast this allegedly modern and Western-led war with contemporary rhetoric in Chinese academic and policy discourse, which draws on Ancient Chinese philosophy. This discourse has focused on the pre-emption of war in conjunction with the language of harmony, innate peacefulness and soft power, portraying such attitudes in opposition to the West. Having outlined a number of areas where I think Baudrillard's discussions of war can shed some light on this allegedly Chinese ontology of war, I thereafter turn to Chinese actors or discourses that act out war in other modes, including in popular culture and propaganda. How should we understand these simultaneous approaches to war, in relation to the disappearance of war that Baudrillard and others have described in modern Western practices?

### III.i. Chinese participation in the war on terror

As described above, there are aspects of Baudrillard's writing where all alternatives to American achieved utopia appear to be erased for Baudrillard (Beck 2009, 110). In the final parts of *America*, for example, simulation is portrayed as a means of sustaining and extending American dominance at home and abroad, which is now 'uncontested and uncontestable', a universal model 'even reaching as far as China' (Baudrillard 1989 [1986], 116). And indeed, this universal model has literally reached the very territorial border of China in the form of the war on terror that was rolled out all the way to the Sino-Afghan border and beyond. In Baudrillard's view, the 9/11 attacks represented "the clash of triumphant globalization at war with itself" and unfolded a "fourth world war":

The first put an end to European supremacy and to the era of colonialism; the second put an end to Nazism; and the third to Communism. Each one brought us progressively closer to the single world order of today, which is now nearing its end, everywhere opposed, everywhere grappling with hostile forces (Baudrillard, 2003b).

In this new fractal state of war and hostility, the Chinese state has joined forces with the American leadership to reinstate the hegemony of the global (of which they have surely dreamt, just like the rest of us). To the American unilateral war on terror in Afghanistan and George W. Bush's call "you are either with us or against us", the Chinese government responded with a (perhaps reluctant) "we are with you!"

This wish to be part of the global American self has not meant, however, the full contribution to the war effort that some American representatives may have hoped. China has, since around the time of 9/11 shifted from being extremely reluctant to condone or participate in any form of "peacekeeping" missions, including under United Nations (UN) flag, to being the UN Security Council member that contributes most to UN peacekeeping missions. Much of this participation has taken the form of non-combatant personal. Nonetheless, China has been an actively involved party in 'Operation Enduring Freedom'. It has provided police training for Afghanistan's security forces, as well as mine-clearance. Though it was opposed to the US invasion of Iraq without UN mandate, China has emerged as one of the biggest beneficiaries of the occupation, as it is one of the biggest winners of oil contracts in Iraq. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, China has been accused of 'free-riding' on American efforts, but China has nonetheless been clearly positioned as part of the participating and benefiting 'we'.

The Chinese state has benefited from participation in the war on terror in more ways than one. The war has increased Chinese influence in Central Asia. It has legitimized China's harsh clamp-downs in Xinjiang, where the state claims its violence is justified by the presence of separatist 'terrorists' in the Muslim Uyghur community. Not least, China's participation in the war on terror has been used to demonstrate to the world that China is now a 'responsible great power', as measured by the standard of 'international society' (see Yeophantong 2013

for a discussion of this 'responsibility' rhetoric). Again, this rhetoric of 'responsibility' has been deployed by both American and Chinese leaders to tie China more tightly to the purported American-led 'we'. More recently, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has stressed the importance of continued Sino-US co-operation over Afghanistan post-2014 troop withdrawal. Wang has publicly stressed the common goals of China and the US with regards to Afghanistan: "We both hope Afghanistan will continue to maintain stability ... We both hope to see the reconstruction of Afghanistan and we both don't want to see the resurgence of terrorism" (cited in Chen Weihua, 2013). China and the USA have jointly engaged in what is termed advisory and capacity-building for Afghans, for example in training Afghan diplomats, and their co-operation continues around shared goals in the region.

Much could be said here about China's participation in the American-led globalization project and war on terror. My point here is simply to note that whatever we read America as doing through its war on terror, China is a supporting and benefiting actor in this process. It is clearly positioned as part of this global idea of self. At the same time, however, China is also portrayed, from within and without, as a challenger, an alternative, or an 'other' to that global, American or Western order. We therefore turn next to the Chinese scholarly and governmental rhetoric that claims to offer such an alternative or challenge to the Western way of war that Baudrillard criticized and that we can see China joining in the war on terror.

### **III.ii. Contemporary PRC rhetoric on pre-modern Chinese thought on war**

In contemporary China, the official rhetoric on war focuses on pre-emption and the claim that China will never be a 'hegemonic' or warmongering power – unlike the US. In this rhetoric, the Chinese war is by nature a non-war. Official documents emerging in the last decade repeatedly stress that China is by nature peaceful, which is why nobody needs to worry about its rise. In the 2005 government whitepaper *China's Peaceful Development Road*, for example, we are told that:

[i]t is an inevitable choice based on China's historical and cultural tradition that China persists unswervingly in taking the road of peaceful development. The Chinese nation has always been a peace-loving one. Chinese culture is a pacific culture. The spirit of the Chinese people has always featured their longing for peace and pursuit of harmony (State Council of the PRC 2005b).

The whitepaper (and numerous other official and unofficial publications) posit an essentialised Chinese culture of peacefulness as prior to any Chinese relations with the world.

This rhetoric of an inherently non-belligose Chinese way has also echoed in Chinese academic debates, where Chinese pre-modern philosophy has come back in fashion as a (selectively sampled) source of inspiration. The claims and logics that have come out of these debates are varied. One significant grouping of Chinese academics directly follow the government line and claim that 'choosing "peaceful rise" is on the one hand China's voluntary action, on the other hand it is an inevitable choice' (Liu Jianfei 2006: 38). That peacefulness and harmony is

something that 'Chinese people' have always valued is an implication, and often explicitly stated 'fact' in these literatures. Zhan Yunling, for example, claims that 'from ancient times until today, China has possessed traditional thought and a culture of seeking harmony' (Zhang Yunling 2008: 4). This claim to natural harmony is mutually supportive of the claim that 'the Chinese nation' has always been a peaceful nation, to authors such as Liu Jianfei (2006), or Yu Xiaofeng and Wang Jiangli (2006).

A related set of commentators further stress the significance of militarily non-violent means to China getting its (naturally peaceful) way in international relations. For example, Ding Sheng draws on the Sunzi quote mentioned above: 'to subjugate the enemy's army without doing battle is the highest of excellence' (Ding Sheng 2008: 197). This line of argument typically sees what some would call 'soft power tools' as a way of getting others to become more like yourself without any need for outright 'war' or other forms of physical violence. In a discussion of the official government rhetoric of 'harmonious world' under former president Hu Jintao, Shi Zhongwen accordingly stresses that the doctrine opposes going to extremes, and therefore contradicts what Shi calls 'the philosophy of struggle' (Shi Zhongwen 2008: 40, where 'struggle' implies Marxist ideology). Qin Zhiyong similarly argues that China needs to steer away from collisions and embrace the aim of 'merging different cultures' (Qin Zhiyong 2008: 73).

At the same time, few Chinese academics question the direction of the 'merging of cultures' discussed above – clearly it is *other* cultures that should merge into China's peaceful one. In a common line of thought that draws on the historical concept of *Tianxia*, or 'All-under-heaven', it is argued that the Chinese leadership can thus bring about a harmonious world through 'voluntary submission [by others] rather than force' simply through its superior morality and exemplary behaviour (Yan Xuetong 2008: 159). On this logic, the leadership will never need to use violence, because everybody will see its magnanimity and will want to emulate its behaviour (Zhao Tingyang 2006: 34. See Callahan 2008: 755 for a discussion).

Much of these debates have come to pivot around this concept of *Tianxia*, an imaginary of the world that builds on a holistic notion of space, without radical self-other distinction or bordered difference. To some thinkers, this imagination is based on a notion of globalisation (for example Yu Xiaofeng and Wang Jiangli 2006: 59) or networked space (Ni Shixiong and Qian Xuming 2008: 124) where everything is always already connected to everything else in a borderless world. In these accounts, *Tianxia* thinking is 'completely different from Western civilisation, since Chinese civilisation insists on its own subjectivity, and possesses inclusivity' (Zhou Jianming and Jiao Shixin 2008: 28). Despite this apparent binary, it is claimed that *Tianxiaism* involves an identification with all of humankind, where there is no differentiation or distinction between people (Li Baojun and Li Zhiyong 2008: 82).

A thinker whose deployment of the *Tianxia* concept has been particularly influential is Zhao Tingyang, who proposes the concept as a Chinese and better way of imagining world order (Zhao Tingyang 2005; 2006), where 'better' means better than the 'Western' inter-state system to which *Tianxia* is portrayed as the



good opposite. In opposition to this 'Western system', he argues that *Tianxia* can offer 'a view from nowhere' or a view 'from the world', where '[w]orld-ness cannot be reduced to internationality, for it is of the wholeness or totality rather than the between-ness' (Zhao Tingyang 2006: 39). However, as a consequence of a prioritisation of order over the preservation of alterity, 'any inconsistency or contradiction in the system will be a disaster' (Zhao Tingyang 2006: 33). As a corollary of this prioritisation, Zhao comes to insist on the *homogeneity* of his all-inclusive space, which aims at the *uniformity of society* (Zhao Tingyang 2006: 33, emphasis in original) where 'all political levels ... should be essentially homogenous or homologous so as to create a harmonious system' (2006: 33).

The aim of the *Tianxia* system is thus to achieve one single homogeneous and uniform space. Clearly, for such homogeneity to be born from a heterogeneous world, someone must change. Zhao argues that:

one of the principles of Chinese political philosophy is said 'to turn the enemy into a friend', and it would lose its meaning if it were not to remove conflicts and pacify social problems – in a word, to 'transform' (化) the bad into the good (Zhao Tingyang 2006: 34).

Moreover, this conversion to a single 'good' homogeneity should happen through 'volontariness' rather than through expansive colonialism: 'an empire of All-under-Heaven could only be an exemplar passively *in situ*, rather than positively become missionary' (Zhao Tingyang 2006: 36, emphasis in original).

However, when we are given clues as to how this idea of the 'good' to which everyone should conform would be determined, Zhao's idea of self-other relations seems to rely on the possibility of some Archimedean point from which to judge this good, and/or the complete eradication of any otherness, so that the one space that exists is completely the space of self (Zhao Tingyang 2006: 33). Thus, Zhao confesses that '[t]he unspoken theory is that most people do not really know what is best for them, but that the elite do, so the elite ought genuinely to decide for the people' (2006: 32). As explained by William A. Callahan:

By thinking through the world with a view from everywhere, Zhao argues that we can have a 'complete and perfect' understanding of problems and solutions that is 'all-inclusive'. With this all-inclusive notion of *Tianxia*, there is literally 'no outside'.... Since all places and all problems are domestic, Zhao says that 'this model guarantees the *a priori* completeness of the world' (Callahan 2007: 7).

This 'complete and perfect' understanding is hence attainable only to an elite, who will achieve homogeneity (convert others into self) through example. Eventually, then, there will be no other, the 'many' will have been transformed into 'the one' (Zhao Tingyang 2005: 13, see also 2006). It is through this transformation and submission to the ruling elite that the prevention of war is imagined.

If Baudrillard had engaged with these contemporary Chinese redeployments of pre-modern thought on war (which, to my knowledge, he never did), I think he would have recognised many of the themes that interested him in Western approaches to the first Gulf war. Most strikingly, this is a way of talking about war that writes out war from its story. Like deterrence, it is an imagination of war that approaches it via prevention and pre-emption. What is more, we recognise an obsession with the self-image of the self to itself – in this case, a Chinese, undemocratic self rather than a Western, democratic one. In this Chinese war, like in the Persian Gulf of which Baudrillard wrote, there is no space for an Other that is Other. In the *Tianxia* imaginary, Others can only be imagined as something that will eventually assimilate into The System and become part of the Self, as the Self strives for all-inclusive perfection. There is no meeting with an Other in any form. Encounter only happens once the Other becomes like the Self, is assimilated into the One, and hence there is no encounter at all (for an analysis that reads Baudrillard and *Tianxia* to this effect in a Chinese non-war context, see Nordin 2012).

### **III.iii. Contemporary Chinese war and its various modes**

As was the case with the first Gulf War, the war that we are waiting for here in the Chinese case is thus a non-war. If by war we mean some form of (symbolic) exchange or some clash of forms, agons, or forces (as we tend to do even in the current ‘cutting edge research’ in ‘critical war studies’, see Nordin and Öberg 2013) – we cannot expect it to take place. In China, we see not only a participation in the Western system of (non)war through the war on terror, but also another system that precisely denies space for imagining an other as Other, which in turn makes the idea of exchange impossible. In this sense, the Ancient Chinese approach to war through the *Tianxia* concept – at least as it is reflected by current Chinese thinkers like Zhao Tingyang and Yan Xuetong – is *not* a Clausewitzian war continuing politics by other means, but precisely a continuation of the absence of politics by other means. It arguably shares this aspect with both the first and the second Gulf Wars.

This, however, is certainly not to say that there are not those who fear a Chinese war or that we have no reason to fear it. In various guises, the war that is imagined through a Clausewitzian ontology of agonistic and reciprocal exchange returns and is reified also in China. It is not uncommon for authors discussing the Chinese traditions of thinking war that I describe above to begin their discussion by explicitly drawing on Clausewitz and take his war as their point of departure (for example Liu Tiewa 2014). For several Chinese writers, it is clear that this building of a ‘harmonious world’ is directed against others whose influence should be ‘smashed’ (Fang Xiaojiao 2008: 68). From this line of thinkers, the call to build a harmonious world has also been used to argue for increased Chinese military capacity, including its naval power (Deng Li 2009). Although Chinese policy documents stress that violence or threat of violence should be avoided, they similarly appear to leave room for means that would traditionally be understood as both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ in Joseph Nye’s dichotomisation (See for example State Council of the PRC 2005a). Indeed, many of Chinas neighbours have voiced concern with growing Chinese military capacity over the last few years, and a Chinese non-war is no less frightening to its neighbours than a war – be it labelled ‘just’ or ‘unjust’, ‘real’ or ‘virtual’.

This Chinese war – past, present and future – is acted out in various different modes. Violent war is reified through the spectacle of computer games, art, online memes, cartoons and not least dramas on film and television (Diamant 2011, 433). The Chinese state claims success in all of its wars, and simultaneously claims that it has never behaved aggressively beyond its borders (which is also, of course, a convenient way of glossing over all the violence perpetrated by the Chinese state within those borders, the violence with which they are upheld and with which they were established in the first place, and the clear contradiction between the state's fixation on territorial integrity and its borderless and holistic *Tianxia* rhetoric). Popular cultural renditions of war paint a more varied picture, but all contribute to a reification of war.

Recent Chinese productions that reify war on the screen through what we may call 'war porn' are numerous – indeed, it has been claimed that China produces what is probably the highest number of dramas set in wartime in the world (Diamant 2011, 433). One example accessible to a non-Chinese audience is Feng Xiaogang's *Assembly* (*Jijiehao* 集结号) from 2007, which recreates horrifically violent and 'realistic' battle scenes from the Civil War between Guomindang nationalists and Communist troops. The Second Sino-Japanese war is another popular setting for these reifications of war, providing the backdrop for another large budget film by Feng Xiaogang, the 2012 *Back to 1942* (*Yijiusier* 一九四二), and international star-director Zhang Yimou's *The Flowers of War* (*Jinling shisan chai* 金陵十三钗). Another example is Lu Chuan's *City of Life and Death* (*Nanjing! Nanjing! 南京! 南京!*) which became a box office hit in China in 2009, but was criticized for its portrayal of a Japanese soldier as a fully formed and sympathetic person in its narration of the Nanjing massacre.

Off screen China has, in the reform era since Mao's death, seen a new and related wave of commemorations of the Civil and Anti-Japanese wars in museums throughout China, which play a central role in national education campaigns to 'never forget national humiliation'. Examples that house both permanent exhibitions and temporary special exhibits commemorating particular war events include the Rape of Nanjing Memorial/Nanjing Massacre museum in Nanjing; the Military Museum, the Museum of Revolutionary History and the Memorial Museum of the Chinese People's War of Resistance to Japan in and outside Beijing; and the September 18<sup>th</sup> Incident Memorial and Museum of the Manchurian Crisis in Shenyang, to name but a few (these museums and their exhibits of war have been studied for example by Mitter 2000, 2003 and Waldron 1996). Many of these museums include vivid reconstructions, often as waxworks with sound and motion, of horrific battlefield scenes for its audience to consume.

Reifications of war on screen and in museums moreover tie in with a 'new remembering' by academic and popular publications since the late 1980s, which commemorates and fetishizes China's past experiences of war as well as projects that experience into the present and the future through the ever-present rhetoric of 'National Humiliation' (*guochi*. For articles tracing this 'new remembering', see Coble 2007 and Mitter 2003). Masses of propaganda are devoted to the commemoration of the Anti-Japanese war, particularly relating to various Campaigns to Support the People's Liberation Army and Military Dependents,

and in annually recurring celebrations of the Spring Festival, the Anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic, Army Day and the 'National Humiliation Day' which has received much academic attention in recent years (Callahan 2004, 2009; Wang Zheng 2008).

Much of the state-led reification of war, and particularly its treatment in academic publications and governmental speeches, has centred on the 'numbers game' of claiming high death tolls and economic costs of the battle histories of the Anti-Japanese war, rather than fore-fronting the all-too-human element that may be found in for example memoir literature (Coble 2007, 406). Accordingly, other scholars have argued – and I agree with them here – that '[a]lthough Chinese movies and television often feature military-related themes, it is rare to find frank and politicized depictions of China's military conflicts' (Diamant 2011, 431). As in the *Tianxia* narrative discussed above, politics is paradoxically eradicated from these versions of war, together with an other understood as a human other. However, the literatures critiquing this de-politicization typically criticise the intellectual elites in various cultural and propaganda offices for producing an 'artificial rendering of China's wars' denying veterans an 'authentic military voice' (Diamant 2011, 431, 461). My point here is different. It is not a question of creating an image of false representation, or what we may call a third order simulation, a masking of the reality of war. Rather, the point is that reality and illusion can no longer be distinguished, but have collapsed into one another. There is no longer a 'real' war behind these narratives which can be uncovered (cf. Nordin 2012).

Through these other modes, the Chinese non-war is reified as war. Like the Gulf War of which Baudrillard wrote, it appears seamless, yet is riddled with contradictions. If what took place in the Persian Gulf was the spectacle of war, what is taking place in contemporary China is perhaps better understood as the spectacle of non-war. Like the spectacle of war it has a range of strategic and political purposes for everyone involved. Like the pre-emptive narratives of *Tianxia*, the reifications of war that hark back to a Clausewitzian ontology relay a war that is scripted or coded in advance, disallowing alterity. And to those who fear the possibility of the Chinese war, we might indeed see reasons to fear, but also provide a reminder that it is stupid to be for or against this war, if we do not for a moment question its probability, credibility or level of reality.

#### **IV. Baudrillard's war and others' wars in China and Asia**

As shown at the outset of this article, Baudrillard advocates an interest in the other as Other, but is unclear about how this feeds in to knowledge about that other. What form can our 'interest' take, if we disallow the attempt to gain knowledge? We return, then, to the question of how we as scholars may approach Others' wars, as they are thought, operationalised and simulated in other places. What I think emerges from the above is an understanding that 'the global', as we may understand it through Baudrillard, is precisely global. Systems that try to assimilate anything and everything into their own programmes exist in different forms in different places, including in Asia. To essentialize these systems into one great mysterious unit of imagined Alterity would ironically be a way to deny such alterity by fetishizing it and reducing it to an Identity of Otherness. From Baudrillard's notion that every system contains the seed of its

own demise stems his suspicion of centralized systems and the pretence to holistic unity. These systems, of which the American-led war on terror is one example and Zhao's Sinocentric *Tianxia* is another, always claim to do good and attempt to assimilate everything and anything into their system, striving towards perfection. Asia offers no respite from this logic. Clearly, They grapple with the same problems as We do, and can offer no greener grass where the scholar can comfortably stretch out assured at having escaped the confines of The System.

In this way, perhaps China's wars can indicate to us that the logics of Baudrillard's globality does not only have to be understood in the narrow sense of an operational system of total trade, but that its logic is recognisable also in other systems – systems that are not just some extension of Western capitalism and attempts at democracy, but that have their roots in other philosophical traditions. Moreover, as Baudrillard tells us, these systems are always susceptible to challenge by singularities of culture, that which is excluded and condemned by the system because it tries to stand outside it – the Other that does not want to be turned into self, the barbarian that does not want to be civilized, or what Baudrillard himself calls 'the other who will not be mothered', whose call to arms is 'fuck your mother' (Baudrillard 2006, see also Nordin 2013, forthcoming 2014). Baudrillard reads a clear antagonism as existing between the global and the singular (Baudrillard 2006, 2002 [2000], 155-6). To him, 'foreignness is eternal' (Baudrillard 1993 [1990]), or as Coulter writes: 'Just as all those cultural singularities will never merge into one global monoculture, people remain radically other to each other' (Coulter 2004).

This alterity or radical otherness, then, is there whether the theorist recognises it or not. Of course, an argument could be made that all attempts at understanding, studying or explaining something is a violent act that reduces its purported object to a knowable unit and denies its alterity. That argument would have a point – after all, speaking is an act of violence and there are numerous problems with the scholarly endeavour to make visible, to communicate and to reveal things as though they were not hyper-visible already. If, however, we decide that we will choose to commit this violence of speaking (rather than, say, choose a lifetime of silence or expressing ourselves only through the means of interpretative dance), there seems to be no reason for remaining silent on swathes of people we have chosen to designate as radical Others because of their geographical location. That is to say, there are no reasons except ones based on the imposition of an artificial *a priori* Identity as Other, for the purposes of exclusion, which again is surely intolerably patronising. Perhaps we can draw on Baudrillard not so much to remind ourselves only of the alterity of exotic Others elsewhere, but to remind ourselves of the Other in the Self. Perhaps the most crucial thing is to remember, with Coulter I think, that it is not those other (Asian, foreign) Others and Their wars that are radically other to Us and Our wars, but *people* that are radically other to each other – and we who are radically other to ourselves, despite and through all our attempts to knowledge.

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