

*The Power of a Niche Strategy and China's Preemptive and Adaptive Response to the US Indo-Pacific Strategy**

Chunman Zhang

Abstract

The Trump administration has fleshed out a novel approach called the Indo-Pacific strategy to address the China challenge in the 21st century. Although it is still debatable about the content, aims, and approaches of the US Indo-Pacific strategy, it is crystal clear that China has taken the US Indo-Pacific strategy seriously. Students of international relations have attempted to better understand China's response to the US Indo-Pacific strategy. In this article, I propose a new perspective to comprehend China's strategic and more importantly preemptive response to the US Indo-Pacific strategy, which I call a niche strategy. The niche strategy is a widely discussed marketing strategy in the business and marketing communities. Inspired by the burgeoning marketing studies on niche strategy, this article attempts to conceptualize it in international relations as a vital foreign policy strategy and then to apply it to understand and explain China's strategic response to the US Indo-Pacific strategy. Exemplified and emboldened by the operation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the changing orientations of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's niche strategy can help the country better navigate the pressure from the US Indo-Pacific strategy. However, it still remains a question whether the clash of China's niche strategy and the US Indo-Pacific strategy will lead to war or peace.

Chunman Zhang is Senior Lecturer and Research Fellow in Fudan Institute for Advanced Study in Social Sciences, Fudan University. Correspondence should be sent to zhangchunman@fudan.edu.cn.

* The research is supported by Shanghai Philosophy and Social Science Planning Project Funding (grant number: 2019EZZ002).