

## Advanced lesson - Sun Zi Bing Fa - Sun Tzu on the Art of War

### XII.The Attack by Fire - huó gōng piān dì shí èr

Sun Zi's Art of War was written by Sun Wu in the final year of the Spring and Autumn Period (770BC - 476BC).

It is not only the oldest Chinese military work in existence but also the oldest book of military theory in the world, well-known for a long time in the history of the military academy in China and abroad.

Sun Zi's Art of War has altogether 13 chapters. Both concise and comprehensive, this book sum up the experience of ancient wars, bring to light the many laws of war which are of universal significance.

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huó gōng piān dì shí èr  
火 攻 篇 第 十 二

sūn zǐ yuē : fán huǒ gōng yǒu wǔ : yì yuē huǒ rén , èr yuē huǒ jī , sān yuē huǒ zī , sì yuē huǒ kù , wǔ yuē huǒ duì 。  
孙 子 曰 : 凡 火 攻 有 五 : 一 曰 火 人 , 二 曰 火 积 , 三 曰 火 辎 , 四 曰 火 库 , 五 曰 火 队 。

xíng huǒ bì yǒu yīn , yān huǒ bì sù jù 。 fā huǒ yǒu shí , qǐ huǒ yǒu rì 。 shí zhě , tiān zhī zào yě 。 rì zhě , yuè zài jī 、 bì 、 yì 、 zhěn yě 。 fán cǐ sì sù zhě , fēng qǐ zhī rì yě 。 fán huǒ gōng , bì yīn wǔ huǒ zhī biàn ér yīng zhī : huǒ fā yú nèi , zé zǎo yīng zhī yú wài ; huǒ fā bīng jìng zhě , dài ér wù gōng , jí qí huǒ lì , kě cóng ér cóng zhī , bù kě cóng ér zhǐ 。 huǒ kě fā yú wài , wú dài yú nèi , yǐ shí fā zhī 。 huǒ fā shàng fēng , wú gōng xià fēng , zhòu fēng jiǔ , yè fēng zhǐ fán jūn bì zhī yǒu wǔ huǒ zhī biàn , yǐ shù shǒu

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久，夜风止。凡军必知有五火之变，以数守  
zhī。  
之。

gù yǐ huǒ zuǒ gōng zhě míng, yǐ shuǐ zuǒ gōng zhě qiáng。shuǐ kě  
故以火佐攻者明，以水佐攻者强。水可  
yǐ jué, bù kě yǐ duó。  
以绝，不可以夺。

fū zhàn shèng gōng qǔ ér bù xiū qí gōng zhě xiōng, mìng yuē fèi liú。  
夫战胜攻取而不修其功者凶，命曰费留。  
gù yuē: míng zhǔ lǜ zhī, liáng jiāng xiū zhī。fēi lì bú dòng,  
故曰：明主虑之，良将修之。非利不动，  
fēi dǎi bú yòng, fēi wēi bú zhàn。zhǔ bù kě yǐ nù ér xīng shī, jiāng  
非得不用，非危不战。主不可以怒而兴师，将  
bù kě yǐ yùn ér zhì zhàn。hé yú lì ér dòng, bù hé yú lì ér zhǐ。  
不可以愠而致战。合于利而动，不合于利而止。  
nù kě yǐ fù xǐ, yùn kě yǐ fù yuè, wáng guó bù kě yǐ fù cún, sǐ zhě  
怒可以复喜，愠可以复悦，亡国不可以复存，死者  
bù kě yǐ fù shēng。gù míng jūn shèn zhī, liáng jiāng jǐng zhī。cǐ  
不可以复生。故明君慎之，良将警之。此  
ān guó ān jūn zhī dào yě。  
安国安军之道也。

**Translation:** (Translated from the Chinese version By LIONEL GILES, M. A. (1910))

## XII. THE ATTACK BY FIRE

1. Sun Tzu said: There are five ways of attacking with fire. The first is to burn soldiers in their camp; the second is to burn stores; the third is to burn baggage trains; the fourth is to burn arsenals and magazines; the fifth is to hurl dropping fire amongst the enemy.
2. In order to carry out an attack, we must have means available. The material for raising fire should always be kept in readiness.
3. There is a proper season for making attacks with fire, and special days for starting a conflagration.

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4. The proper season is when the weather is very dry; the special days are those when the moon is in the constellations of the Sieve, the Wall, the Wing or the Cross-bar; for these four are all days of rising wind.
5. In attacking with fire, one should be prepared to meet five possible developments:
6. (1) When fire breaks out inside to enemy's camp, respond at once with an attack from without.
7. (2) If there is an outbreak of fire, but the enemy's soldiers remain quiet, bide your time and do not attack.
8. (3) When the force of the flames has reached its height, follow it up with an attack, if that is practicable; if not, stay where you are.
9. (4) If it is possible to make an assault with fire from without, do not wait for it to break out within, but deliver your attack at a favorable moment.
10. (5) When you start a fire, be to windward of it. Do not attack from the leeward.
11. A wind that rises in the daytime lasts long, but a night breeze soon falls.
12. In every army, the five developments connected with fire must be known, the movements of the stars calculated, and a watch kept for the proper days.
13. Hence those who use fire as an aid to the attack show intelligence; those who use water as an aid to the attack gain an accession of strength.
14. By means of water, an enemy may be intercepted, but not robbed of all his belongings.
15. Unhappy is the fate of one who tries to win his battles and succeed in his attacks without cultivating the spirit of enterprise; for the result is waste of time and general stagnation.
16. Hence the saying: The enlightened ruler lays his plans well ahead; the good general cultivates his resources.

17. Move not unless you see an advantage; use not your troops unless there is something to be gained; fight not unless the position is critical.

18. No ruler should put troops into the field merely to gratify his own spleen; no general should fight a battle simply out of pique.

19. If it is to your advantage, make a forward move; if not, stay where you are.

20. Anger may in time change to gladness; vexation may be succeeded by content.

21. But a kingdom that has once been destroyed can never come again into being; nor can the dead ever be brought back to life.

22. Hence the enlightened ruler is heedful, and the good general full of caution. This is the way to keep a country at peace and an army intact.