

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

VIII.Variation in Tactics - jiu bian pian di ba

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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jiǔ biàn piān dì bā 九 变 篇 第 八

sūn zǐ yuē : fán yòng bīng zhī fǎ , jiāng shòu mìng yú jūn , hé jūn jù zhòng 。 pǐ dì wú shě , qú dì jiāo hé , jué dì wú liú , wéi dì zé móu , sǐ dì zé zhàn 。 tú yǒu suǒ bù yóu , jūn yǒu suǒ bù jī , chéng yǒu suǒ bù gōng , dì yǒu suǒ bù zhēng , jūn mìng yǒu suǒ bú shòu 。
孙 子 曰 : 凡 用 兵 之 法 , 将 受 命 于 君 , 合 军 聚 众 。 圯 地 无 舍 , 衢 地 交 合 , 绝 地 无 留 , 围 地 则 谋 , 死 地 则 战 。 涂 有 所 不 由 , 军 有 所 不 击 , 城 有 所 不 攻 , 地 有 所 不 争 , 君 命 有 所 不 受 。

gù jiāng tōng yú jiǔ biàn zhī dì zhě , zhī yòng bīng yǐ ; jiāng bù tōng yú jiǔ biàn zhī lì zhě , suī zhī dì xíng , bù néng dé dì zhī lì yǐ ; zhì bīng bù zhī jiǔ biàn zhī shù , suī zhī wǔ lì , bù néng dé rén zhī yòng yǐ 。
故 将 通 于 九 变 之 地 者 , 知 用 兵 矣 ; 将 不 通 于 九 变 之 利 者 , 虽 知 地 形 , 不 能 得 地 之 利 矣 ; 治 兵 不 知 九 变 之 术 , 虽 知 五 利 , 不 能 得 人 之 用 矣 。

shì gù zhì zhě zhī lù , bì zá yú lì hài , zá yú lì ér wù kě xìn yě ,
是 故 智 者 之 虑 , 必 杂 于 利 害 , 杂 于 利 而 务 可 信 也 ,

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zá yú hài ér huàn kě jiě yě 。 shì gù qū zhū hóu zhě yǐ hài , yì zhū hóu zhě yǐ yè , qū zhū hóu zhě yǐ lì 。 gù yòng bīng zhī fǎ , wú shì qí bù lái , shì wú yǒu yǐ dài yě ; wú shì qí bù gōng , shì wú yǒu suǒ bù kě gōng yě 。
不可攻也。

gù jiāng yǒu wǔ wēi , bì sǐ kě shā yě , bì shēng kě lǔ yě , fèn sù kě wǔ yě , lián jié kě rǔ yě , ài mín kě fán yě 。 fán cǐ wǔ zhě , jiāng zhī guò yě , yòng bīng zhī zāi yě 。 fù jūn shā jiāng , bì yǐ wǔ wēi , bù kě bù chá yě 。
五危，不可不察也。

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

VIII. VARIATION IN TACTICS

1. Sun Tzu said: In war, the general receives his commands from the sovereign, collects his army and concentrates his forces
2. When in difficult country, do not encamp. In country where high roads intersect, join hands with your allies. Do not linger in dangerously isolated positions. In hemmed-in situations, you must resort to stratagem. In desperate position, you must fight.
3. There are roads which must not be followed, armies which must be not attacked, towns which must be besieged, positions which must not be contested, commands of the sovereign which must not be obeyed.
4. The general who thoroughly understands the advantages that accompany variation of tactics knows how to handle his troops.

5. The general who does not understand these, may be well acquainted with the configuration of the country, yet he will not be able to turn his knowledge to practical account.

6. So, the student of war who is unversed in the art of war of varying his plans, even though he be acquainted with the Five Advantages, will fail to make the best use of his men.

7. Hence in the wise leader's plans, considerations of advantage and of disadvantage will be blended together.

8. If our expectation of advantage be tempered in this way, we may succeed in accomplishing the essential part of our schemes.

9. If, on the other hand, in the midst of difficulties we are always ready to seize an advantage, we may extricate ourselves from misfortune.

10. Reduce the hostile chiefs by inflicting damage on them; and make trouble for them, and keep them constantly engaged; hold out specious allurements, and make them rush to any given point.

11. The art of war teaches us to rely not on the likelihood of the enemy's not coming, but on our own readiness to receive him; not on the chance of his not attacking, but rather on the fact that we have made our position unassailable.

12. There are five dangerous faults which may affect a general: (1) Recklessness, which leads to destruction; (2) cowardice, which leads to capture; (3) a hasty temper, which can be provoked by insults; (4) a delicacy of honor which is sensitive to shame; (5) over-solicitude for his men, which exposes him to worry and trouble.

13. These are the five besetting sins of a general, ruinous to the conduct of war.

14. When an army is overthrown and its leader slain, the cause will surely be found among these five dangerous faults. Let them be a subject of meditation.