

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

IV. Tactical Dispositions - xing pian di si

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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xíng piān dì sì
形 篇 第 四

sūn zǐ yuē: xī zhī shàn zhàn zhě, xiān wéi bù kě shèng, yǐ dài dí zhī kě shèng。 bù kě shèng zài jǐ, kě shèng zài dí。 gù shàn zhàn zhě, néng wéi bù kě shèng, bù néng shǐ dí zhī kě shèng。 gù yuē: shèng kě zhī, ér bù kě wéi。 而不可为。

bù kě shèng zhě, shǒu yě; kě shèng zhě, gōng yě。 shǒu zé bù zú, gōng zé yǒu yú。 shàn shǒu zhě, cáng yú jiǔ dì zhī xià; shàn gōng zhě, dòng yú jiǔ tiān zhī shàng, gù néng zì bǎo ér quán shèng yě。 者, 动于九天之上, 故能自保而全胜也。

jiàn shèng bú guò zhòng rén zhī suǒ zhī, fēi shàn zhī shàn zhě yě; zhàn shèng ér tiān xià yuē shàn, fēi shàn zhī shàn zhě yě。 gù jǔ 战 胜 而 天 下 曰 善, 非 善 之 善 者 也。 故 举

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qiū háo bù wéi duō lì , jiàn rì yuè bù wéi mù míng , wén léi tíng bù wéi cōng ěr 。
秋 毫 不 为 多 力 ， 见 日 月 不 为 目 明 ， 闻 雷 霆 不 为 聪 耳 。

gǔ zhī suǒ wèi shàn zhàn zhě , shèng yú yì shèng zhě yě 。 gù shàn zhàn zhě zhī shèng yě , wú zhì míng , wú yǒng gōng , gù qí zhàn shèng bú tè 。 bú tè zhě , qí suǒ cuò bì shèng , shèng yǐ bài zhě 。 gù shàn zhàn zhě , lì yú bú bài zhī dì , ér bù shī dí zhī bài zhě 。 shì gù shèng bīng xiān shèng ér hòu qiú zhàn , bài bīng xiān zhàn ér

hòu qiú shèng 。 shàn yòng bīng zhě , xiū dào ér bǎo fǎ , gù néng wéi shèng bài zhī zhèng 。
后 求 胜 。 善 用 兵 者 ， 修 道 而 保 法 ， 故 能 为 胜 败 之 政 。

bīng fǎ : yì yuē dù , èr yuē liàng , sān yuē shù , sì yuē chēng , wǔ yuē shèng 。 dì shēng dù , dù shēng liàng , liàng shēng shù , shù shēng chēng , chēng shēng shèng 。
兵 法 ： 一 曰 度 ， 二 曰 量 ， 三 曰 数 ， 四 曰 称 ， 五 曰 胜 。 地 生 度 ， 度 生 量 ， 量 生 数 ， 数 生 称 ， 称 生 胜 。

gù shèng bīng ruò yǐ yì chēng zhū , bài bīng ruò yǐ zhū chēng yì 。 shèng zhě zhī zhàn mín yě , ruò jué jī shuǐ yú qiān rěn zhī xī zhě , xíng yě 。
故 胜 兵 若 以 镒 称 铢 ， 败 兵 若 以 铢 称 镒 。 胜 者 之 战 民 也 ， 若 决 积 水 于 千 仞 之 溪 者 ， 形 也 。

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

IV. TACTICAL DISPOSITIONS

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1. Sun Tzu said: The good fighters of old first put themselves beyond the possibility of defeat, and then waited for an opportunity of defeating the enemy.
2. To secure ourselves against defeat lies in our own hands, but the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself.
3. Thus the good fighter is able to secure himself against defeat, but cannot make certain of defeating the enemy.
4. Hence the saying: One may know how to conquer without being able to do it.
5. Security against defeat implies defensive tactics; ability to defeat the enemy means taking the offensive.
6. Standing on the defensive indicates insufficient strength; attacking, a superabundance of strength.
7. The general who is skilled in defense hides in the most secret recesses of the earth; he who is skilled in attack flashes forth from the topmost heights of heaven. Thus on the one hand we have ability to protect ourselves; on the other, a victory that is complete.
8. To see victory only when it is within the ken of the common herd is not the acme of excellence.
9. Neither is it the acme of excellence if you fight and conquer and the whole Empire says, "Well done!" 10. To lift an autumn hair is no sign of great strength; to see the sun and moon is no sign of sharp sight; to hear the noise of thunder is no sign of a quick ear.
11. What the ancients called a clever fighter is one who not only wins, but excels in winning with ease.
12. Hence his victories bring him neither reputation for wisdom nor credit for courage.
13. He wins his battles by making no mistakes. Making no mistakes is what establishes the certainty of victory, for it means conquering an enemy that is already defeated.

14. Hence the skillful fighter puts himself into a position which makes defeat impossible, and does not miss the moment for defeating the enemy.

15. Thus it is that in war the victorious strategist only seeks battle after the victory has been won, whereas he who is destined to defeat first fights and afterwards looks for victory.

16. The consummate leader cultivates the moral law, and strictly adheres to method and discipline; thus it is in his power to control success.

17. In respect of military method, we have, firstly, Measurement; secondly, Estimation of quantity; thirdly, Calculation; fourthly, Balancing of chances; fifthly, Victory.

18. Measurement owes its existence to Earth; Estimation of quantity to Measurement; Calculation to Estimation of quantity; Balancing of chances to Calculation; and Victory to Balancing of chances.

19. A victorious army opposed to a routed one, is as a pound's weight placed in the scale against a single grain.

20. The onrush of a conquering force is like the bursting of pent-up waters into a chasm a thousand fathoms deep.