

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

XI. The Nine Situations - jiu di pian di shi yi

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 dì piān dì shí yī
九 地 篇 第 十 一

sūn zǐ yuē : yòng bīng zhī fǎ , yǒu sǎn dì , yǒu qīng dì , yǒu zhēng dì , yǒu jiāo dì , yǒu qú dì , yǒu zhòng dì , yǒu pǐ dì , yǒu wéi dì , yǒu sǐ dì 。 zhū hóu zì zhàn qí dì , wéi sǎn dì ; rù rén zhī dì ér bù shēn zhě , wéi qīng dì 。 wǒ dé zé lì , bǐ dé yì lì zhě , wéi zhēng dì ; wǒ ké yǐ wǎng , bǐ ké yǐ lái zhě , wéi jiāo dì ; zhū hóu zhī dì sān shǔ , xiān zhì ér dé tiān xià zhī zhòng zhě , wéi qú dì ; rù rén zhī dì shēn , bèi chéng yì duō zhě , wéi zhòng dì ; xíng shān lín 、 xiǎn zǔ 、 jǔ zé 、 fán nán xíng zhī dào zhě , wéi pǐ dì ; suǒ yóu rù zhě ài , suǒ cóng guī zhě yū , bǐ guǎ ké yǐ jī wú zhī zhòng zhě , wéi wéi dì ; jí zhàn zé cún , bù jí zhàn zé wáng zhě , wéi

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发之日，士卒坐者涕沾襟，偃卧者涕交颐，
tóu zhī wú suǒ wǎng zhě , zhū 、 guì zhī yǒng yě 。 gù shàn yòng bīng
投之无所往者，诸、刳之勇也。故善用兵
zhě , pì rú lǜ rán 。 lǜ rán zhě , cháng shān zhī shé yě 。 jī qí shǒu
者，譬如率然。率然者，常山之蛇也。击其首
zé wěi zhì , jī qí wěi zé shǒu zhì , jī qí zhōng zé shǒu wěi jù zhì 。
则尾至，击其尾则首至，击其中则首尾俱至。
gǎn wèn : bīng kě shǐ rú lǜ rán hū ? yuē : kě 。 fū wú rén yǔ yuè rén
敢问：兵可使如率然乎？曰：可。夫吴人与越人
xiāng è yě , dāng qí tóng zhōu ér jì , yù fēng , qí xiāng jiù yě ,
相恶也，当其同舟而济，遇风，其相救也，
rú zuǒ yòu shǒu 。 shì gù fāng mǎ mái lún , wèi zú shì yě ; qí yǒng
如左右手。是故方马埋轮，未足恃也；其勇
rú yī , zhèng zhī dào yě ; gāng róu jiē dé , dì zhī lǐ yě 。 gù shàn
如一，政之道也；刚柔皆得，地之理也。故善
yòng bīng zhě , xié shǒu ruò shǐ yì rén , bù dé yǐ yě 。
用兵者，携手若使一人，不得已也。

jiāng jūn zhī shì , jìng yǐ yōu , zhèng yǐ zhì 。 néng yú shì zú zhī
将军之事，静以幽，正以治。能愚士卒之
ěr mù , shǐ zhī wú zhī ; yì qí shì , gé qí móu , shǐ rén wú shí ;
耳目，使之无知；易其事，革其谋，使人无识；
yì qí jū , yū qí tú , shǐ rén bù dé lǜ 。 shuài yǔ zhī qī , rú dēng
易其居，迂其途，使人不得虑。帅与之期，如登
gāo ér qù qí tī ; shuài yǔ zhī shēn rù zhū hóu zhī dì , ér fā qí jī ,
高而去其梯；帅与之深入诸侯之地，而发其机，
fén zhōu pò fǔ , ruò qū qún yáng , qū ér wǎng , qū ér lái , mò zhī
焚舟破釜，若驱群羊，驱而往，驱而来，莫知
suǒ zhī 。 jù sān jūn zhī zhòng , tóu zhī yú xiǎn , cǐ wèi jiāng jūn
所之。聚三军之众，投之于险，此谓将军
zhī shì yě 。
之事也。

jiǔ dì zhī biàn , qū shēn zhī lì , rén qíng zhī lǐ , bù kě bù chá 。
九地之变，屈伸之利，人情之理，不可不察。

fán wéi kè zhī dào , shēn zé zhuān , qiǎn zé sǎn 。 qù guó yuè jìng
凡为客之道，深则专，浅则散。去国越境
ér shī zhě , jué dì yě ; sì dá zhě , qū dì yě ; rù shēn zhě , zhòng
而师者，绝地也；四达者，衢地也；入深者，重
dì yě ; rù qiǎn zhě , qīng dì yě ; bèi gù qián ài zhě , wéi dì yě ;

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地也；入浅者，轻地也；背固前隘者，围地也；
wú suǒ wǎng zhě , sǐ dì yě 。
无所往者，死地也。

shì gù sǎn dì wú jiāng yì qí zhì , qīng dì wú jiāng shǐ zhī shǔ , zhēng
是故散地吾将一其志，轻地吾将使之属，争
dì wú jiāng qū qí hòu , jiāo dì wú jiāng jǐn qí shǒu , qú dì wú jiāng
地吾将趋其后，交地吾将谨其守，衢地吾将
gù qí jié , zhòng dì wú jiāng jì qí shí , pǐ dì wú jiāng jìn qí tú ,
固其结，重地吾将继续其食，圯地吾将进其途，
wéi dì wú jiāng sāi qí què , sǐ dì wú jiāng shì zhī yǐ bù huó 。
围地吾将塞其阙，死地吾将示之以不活。

gù bīng zhī qíng : wéi zé yù , bù dé yǐ zé dòu , guò zé cóng 。
故兵之情：围则御，不得已则斗，过则从。

shì gù bù zhī zhū hóu zhī móu zhě , bù néng yù jiāo ; bù zhī shān
是故不知诸侯之谋者，不能预交；不知山

lín 、 xiǎn zǔ 、 jǔ zé zhī xíng zhě , bù néng xíng jūn ; bú yòng
林、险阻、沮泽之形者，不能行军；不用
xiāng dǎo zhě , bù néng dé dì lì 。 sì wǔ zhě , bù zhī yī , fēi bà
乡导者，不能得地利。四五者，不知一，非霸
wáng zhī bīng yě 。 fū bà wáng zhī bīng , fá dà guó , zé qí zhòng bù
王之兵也。夫霸王之兵，伐大国，则其众不
dé jù ; wēi jiā yú dí , zé qí jiāo bù dé hé 。 shì gù bù zhēng tiān
得聚；威加于敌，则其交不得合。是故不争天
xià zhī jiāo , bù yǎng tiān xià zhī quán , xìn jǐ zhī sī , wēi jiā
下之交，不养天下之权，信己之私，威加
yú dí , gù qí chéng kě bá , qí guó kě huī 。
于敌，故其城可拔，其国可隳。

shī wú fǎ zhī shǎng , xuán wú zhèng zhī lìng 。 fàn sān jūn zhī zhòng ,
施无法之赏，悬无政之令。犯三军之众，
ruò shǐ yì rén 。 fàn zhī yǐ shì , wù gào yǐ yán ; fàn zhī yǐ lì ,
若使一人。犯之以事，勿告以言；犯之以利，
wù gào yǐ hài 。 tóu zhī wáng dì rán hòu cún , xiàn zhī sǐ dì rán hòu
勿告以害。投之亡地然后存，陷之死地然后
shēng 。 fū zhòng xiàn yú hài , rán hòu néng wéi shèng bài 。
生。夫众陷于害，然后能为胜败。

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gù wéi bīng zhī shì , zài yú shùn xiáng dí zhī yì , bìng dí yí xiàng ,
故为兵之事，在于顺详敌之意，并敌一向，
qiān lǐ shā jiāng , cǐ wèi qiǎo néng chéng shì zhě yě 。 shì gù zhèng
千里杀将，此谓巧能成事者也。是故政
jǔ zhī rì , yí guān zhé fú , wú tōng qí shǐ , lì yú láng miào zhī
举之日，夷关折符，无通其使，厉于廊庙之
shàng , yǐ zhū qí shì 。 dí rén kāi hé , bì jí rù zhī , xiān qí suǒ
上，以诛其事。敌人开阖，必亟入之，先其所
ài , wēi yǔ zhī qī , jiàn mò suí dí , yǐ jué zhàn shì 。 shì gù shǐ
爱，微与之期，践墨随敌，以决战事。是故始
rú chū nǚ , dí rén kāi hé ; hòu rú tuō tù , dí bù jí jù 。
如处女，敌人开阖；后如脱兔，敌不及拒。

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

XI. THE NINE SITUATIONS

1. Sun Tzu said: The art of war recognizes nine varieties of ground: (1) Dispersive ground; (2) facile ground; (3) contentious ground; (4) open ground; (5) ground of intersecting highways; (6) serious ground; (7) difficult ground; (8) hemmed-in ground; (9) desperate ground.
2. When a chieftain is fighting in his own territory, it is dispersive ground.
3. When he has penetrated into hostile territory, but to no great distance, it is facile ground.
4. Ground the possession of which imports great advantage to either side, is contentious ground.
5. Ground on which each side has liberty of movement is open ground.
6. Ground which forms the key to three contiguous states, so that he who occupies it first has most of the Empire at his command, is a ground of intersecting highways.
7. When an army has penetrated into the heart of a hostile country, leaving a number of fortified cities in its rear, it is serious ground.

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8. Mountain forests, rugged steeps, marshes and fens—all country that is hard to traverse: this is difficult ground.
9. Ground which is reached through narrow gorges, and from which we can only retire by tortuous paths, so that a small number of the enemy would suffice to crush a large body of our men: this is hemmed in ground.
10. Ground on which we can only be saved from destruction by fighting without delay, is desperate ground.
11. On dispersive ground, therefore, fight not. On facile ground, halt not. On contentious ground, attack not.
12. On open ground, do not try to block the enemy's way. On the ground of intersecting highways, join hands with your allies.
13. On serious ground, gather in plunder. In difficult ground, keep steadily on the march.
14. On hemmed-in ground, resort to stratagem. On desperate ground, fight.
15. Those who were called skillful leaders of old knew how to drive a wedge between the enemy's front and rear; to prevent co-operation between his large and small divisions; to hinder the good troops from rescuing the bad, the officers from rallying their men.
16. When the enemy's men were united, they managed to keep them in disorder.
17. When it was to their advantage, they made a forward move; when otherwise, they stopped still.
18. If asked how to cope with a great host of the enemy in orderly array and on the point of marching to the attack, I should say: "Begin by seizing something which your opponent holds dear; then he will be amenable to your will."
19. Rapidity is the essence of war: take advantage of the enemy's unreadiness, make your way by unexpected routes, and attack unguarded spots.

20. The following are the principles to be observed by an invading force: The further you penetrate into a country, the greater will be the solidarity of your troops, and thus the defenders will not prevail against you.
21. Make forays in fertile country in order to supply your army with food.
22. Carefully study the well-being of your men, and do not overtax them. Concentrate your energy and hoard your strength. Keep your army continually on the move, and devise unfathomable plans.
23. Throw your soldiers into positions whence there is no escape, and they will prefer death to flight. If they will face death, there is nothing they may not achieve. Officers and men alike will put forth their uttermost strength.
24. Soldiers when in desperate straits lose the sense of fear. If there is no place of refuge, they will stand firm. If they are in hostile country, they will show a stubborn front. If there is no help for it, they will fight hard.
25. Thus, without waiting to be marshaled, the soldiers will be constantly on the qui vive; without waiting to be asked, they will do your will; without restrictions, they will be faithful; without giving orders, they can be trusted.
26. Prohibit the taking of omens, and do away with superstitious doubts. Then, until death itself comes, no calamity need be feared.
27. If our soldiers are not overburdened with money, it is not because they have a distaste for riches; if their lives are not unduly long, it is not because they are disinclined to longevity.
28. On the day they are ordered out to battle, your soldiers may weep, those sitting up bedewing their garments, and those lying down letting the tears run down their cheeks. But let them once be brought to bay, and they will display the courage of a Chu or a Kuei.
29. The skillful tactician may be likened to the shuai-jan. Now the shuai-jan is a snake that is found in the ChUng mountains. Strike at its head, and you will be attacked by its tail; strike at its tail, and you

will be attacked by its head; strike at its middle, and you will be attacked by head and tail both.

30. Asked if an army can be made to imitate the shuai-jan, I should answer, Yes. For the men of Wu and the men of Yueh are enemies; yet if they are crossing a river in the same boat and are caught by a storm, they will come to each other's assistance just as the left hand helps the right.

31. Hence it is not enough to put one's trust in the tethering of horses, and the burying of chariot wheels in the ground

32. The principle on which to manage an army is to set up one standard of courage which all must reach.

33. How to make the best of both strong and weak--that is a question involving the proper use of ground.

34. Thus the skillful general conducts his army just as though he were leading a single man, willy-nilly, by the hand.

35. It is the business of a general to be quiet and thus ensure secrecy; upright and just, and thus maintain order.

36. He must be able to mystify his officers and men by false reports and appearances, and thus keep them in total ignorance.

37. By altering his arrangements and changing his plans, he keeps the enemy without definite knowledge. By shifting his camp and taking circuitous routes, he prevents the enemy from anticipating his purpose.

38. At the critical moment, the leader of an army acts like one who has climbed up a height and then kicks away the ladder behind him. He carries his men deep into hostile territory before he shows his hand.

39. He burns his boats and breaks his cooking-pots; like a shepherd driving a flock of sheep, he drives his men this way and that, and nothing knows whither he is going.

40. To muster his host and bring it into danger:--this may be termed the business of the general.

41. The different measures suited to the nine varieties of ground; the expediency of aggressive or defensive tactics; and the fundamental laws of human nature: these are things that must most certainly be studied.

42. When invading hostile territory, the general principle is, that penetrating deeply brings cohesion; penetrating but a short way means dispersion.

43. When you leave your own country behind, and take your army across neighborhood territory, you find yourself on critical ground. When there are means of communication on all four sides, the ground is one of intersecting highways.

44. When you penetrate deeply into a country, it is serious ground. When you penetrate but a little way, it is facile ground.

45. When you have the enemy's strongholds on your rear, and narrow passes in front, it is hemmed-in ground. When there is no place of refuge at all, it is desperate ground.

46. Therefore, on dispersive ground, I would inspire my men with unity of purpose. On facile ground, I would see that there is close connection between all parts of my army.

47. On contentious ground, I would hurry up my rear.

48. On open ground, I would keep a vigilant eye on my defenses. On ground of intersecting highways, I would consolidate my alliances.

49. On serious ground, I would try to ensure a continuous stream of supplies. On difficult ground, I would keep pushing on along the road.

50. On hemmed-in ground, I would block any way of retreat. On desperate ground, I would proclaim to my soldiers the hopelessness of saving their lives.

51. For it is the soldier's disposition to offer an obstinate resistance when surrounded, to fight hard when he cannot help himself, and to obey promptly when he has fallen into danger.

52. We cannot enter into alliance with neighboring princes until we are acquainted with their designs. We are not fit to lead an army on the march

unless we are familiar with the face of the country--its mountains and forests, its pitfalls and precipices, its marshes and swamps. We shall be unable to turn natural advantages to account unless we make use of local guides.

53. To be ignored of any one of the following four or five principles does not befit a warlike prince.

54. When a warlike prince attacks a powerful state, his generalship shows itself in preventing the concentration of the enemy's forces. He overawes his opponents, and their allies are prevented from joining against him.

55. Hence he does not strive to ally himself with all and sundry, nor does he foster the power of other states. He carries out his own secret designs, keeping his antagonists in awe. Thus he is able to capture their cities and overthrow their kingdoms.

56. Bestow rewards without regard to rule, issue orders without regard to previous arrangements; and you will be able to handle a whole army as though you had to do with but a single man.

57. Confront your soldiers with the deed itself; never let them know your design. When the outlook is bright, bring it before their eyes; but tell them nothing when the situation is gloomy.

58. Place your army in deadly peril, and it will survive; plunge it into desperate straits, and it will come off in safety.

59. For it is precisely when a force has fallen into harm's way that is capable of striking a blow for victory.

60. Success in warfare is gained by carefully accommodating ourselves to the enemy's purpose.

61. By persistently hanging on the enemy's flank, we shall succeed in the long run in killing the commander-in-chief.

62. This is called ability to accomplish a thing by sheer cunning.

63. On the day that you take up your command, block the frontier passes, destroy the official tallies, and stop the passage of all emissaries.

64. Be stern in the council-chamber, so that you may control the situation.
65. If the enemy leaves a door open, you must rush in.
66. Forestall your opponent by seizing what he holds dear, and subtly contrive to time his arrival on the ground.
67. Walk in the path defined by rule, and accommodate yourself to the enemy until you can fight a decisive battle.
68. At first, then, exhibit the coyness of a maiden, until the enemy gives you an opening; afterwards emulate the rapidity of a running hare, and it will be too late for the enemy to oppose you.