

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

VI. Weak Points and Strong - xu shi pian di liu

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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xū shí piān dì liù
虚 实 篇 第 六

sūn zǐ yuē : fán xiān chù zhàn dì ér dài dí zhě yì , hòu chù zhàn dì ér qū zhàn zhě láo 。 gù shàn zhàn zhě , zhì rén ér bú zhì yú rén 。 néng shǐ dí rén zì zhì zhě , lì zhī yě ; néng shǐ dí rén bù dé zhì zhě , hài zhī yě 。 gù dí yì néng láo zhī , bǎo néng jī zhī , ān néng dòng zhī 。 chū qí suǒ bù qū , qū qí suǒ bú yì 。
之 。 出 其 所 不 趋 ， 趋 其 所 不 意 。

xíng qiān lǐ ér bù láo zhě , xíng yú wú rén zhī dì yě ; gōng ér bì qǔ zhě , gōng qí suǒ bù shǒu yě ; shǒu ér bì gù zhě , shǒu qí suǒ bù gōng yě 。 gù shàn gōng zhě , dí bù zhī qí suǒ shǒu ; shàn shǒu zhě , dí bù zhī qí suǒ gōng 。 wēi hū wēi hū , zhì yú wú xíng ; shén hū shén hū , zhì yú wú shēng , gù néng wéi dí zhī sī mìng 。 jìn ér bù kě yù

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乎，至于无声，故能为敌之司命。进而不可御
zhě, chōng qí xū yě; tuì ér bù kě zhuī yě, sù ér bù kě jí yě。
者，冲其虚也；退而不可追也，速而不可及也。
gù wǒ yù zhàn, dí suī gāo lěi shēn gōu, bù dé bù yǔ wǒ zhàn zhě,
故我欲战，敌虽高垒深沟，不得不与我战者，
gōng qí suǒ bì jiù yě; wǒ bú yù zhàn, huà dì ér shǒu zhī, dí bù
攻其所必救也；我不欲战，画地而守之，敌不
dé yǔ wǒ zhàn zhě, guāi qí suǒ zhī yě。gù xíng rén ér wǒ wú xíng,
得与我战者，乖其所之也。故形人而我无形，
zé wǒ zhuān ér dí fēn。wǒ zhuān wéi yī, dí fēn wéi shí shì yī shí
则我专而敌分。我专为一，敌分为十，是以十
gōng qí yī yě, zé wǒ zhòng ér dí guǎ。néng yǐ zhòng jī guǎ zhě,
攻其一也，则我众而敌寡。能以众击寡者，
zé wú zhī suǒ yǔ zhàn zhě, yuē yī。wú suǒ yǔ zhàn zhī dì bù kě zhī,
则吾之所与战者，约矣。吾所与战之地不可知，

bù kě zhī, zé dí suǒ bèi zhě duō; dí suǒ bèi zhě duō, zé wú suǒ
不可知，则敌所备者多；敌所备者多，则吾所
yǔ zhàn zhě guǎ yī。gù bèi qián zé hòu guǎ, bèi hòu zé qián guǎ,
与战者寡矣。故备前则后寡，背后则前寡，
bèi zuǒ zé yòu guǎ, bèi yòu zé zuǒ guǎ, wú suǒ bú bèi, zé wú suǒ
备左则右寡，备右则左寡，无所不备，则无所
bù guǎ。guǎ zhě, bèi rén zhě yě; zhòng zhě, shǐ rén bèi jǐ zhě yě。
不寡。寡者，备人者也；众者，使人备己者也。

gù zhī zhàn zhī dì, zhī zhàn zhī rì, zé kě qiān lǐ ér huì zhàn;
故知战之地，知战之日，则可千里而会战；
bù zhī zhàn dì, bù zhī zhàn rì, zé zuǒ bù néng jiù yòu, yòu bù néng
不知战地，不知战日，则左不能救右，右不能
jiù zuǒ, qián bù néng jiù hòu, hòu bù néng jiù qián, ér kuàng yuǎn
救左，前不能救后，后不能救前，而况远
zhě shù shí lǐ, jìn zhě shù lǐ hū!
者数十里，近者数里乎！

yǐ wú dù zhī, yuè rén zhī bīng suī duō, yì xī yì yú shèng bài zāi?
以吾度之，越人之兵虽多，亦奚益于胜败哉？
gù yuē: shèng kě wéi yě。dí suī zhòng, kě shǐ wú dòu。
故曰：胜可为也。敌虽众，可使无斗。

gù cè zhī ér zhī dé shī zhī jì, zuò zhī ér zhī dòng jìng zhī lǐ,
故策之而知得失之计，作之而知动静之理，

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xíng zhī ér zhī sǐ shēng zhī dì, jiǎo zhī ér zhī yǒu yú bù zú zhī chù 。
形 之 而 知 死 生 之 地 ， 角 之 而 知 有 余 不 足 之 处 。
gù xíng bīng zhī jí, zhì yú wú xíng 。 wú xíng , zé shēn jiān bù néng
故 形 兵 之 极 ， 至 于 无 形 。 无 形 ， 则 深 间 不 能
kuī , zhì zhě bù néng móu 。 yīn xíng ér cuò shèng yú zhòng , zhòng
窥 ， 智 者 不 能 谋 。 因 形 而 错 胜 于 众 ， 众
bù néng zhī 。 rén jiē zhī wǒ suǒ yǐ shèng zhī xíng , ér mò zhī wú suǒ
不 能 知 。 人 皆 知 我 所 以 胜 之 形 ， 而 莫 知 吾 所
yǐ zhì shèng zhī xíng 。 gù qí zhàn shèng bú fù , ér yīng xíng yú wú
以 制 胜 之 形 。 故 其 战 胜 不 复 ， 而 应 形 于 无
qióng 。
穷 。

fū bīng xíng xiàng shuǐ, shuǐ zhī xíng , bì gāo ér qū xià ; bīng zhī
夫 兵 形 象 水 ， 水 之 行 ， 避 高 而 趋 下 ； 兵 之
xíng , bì shí ér jī xū ; shuǐ yīn dì ér zhì liú , bīng yīn dí ér zhì
形 ， 避 实 而 击 虚 ； 水 因 地 而 制 流 ， 兵 因 敌 而 制
shèng 。 gù bīng wú cháng shì , shuǐ wú cháng xíng 。 néng yīn dí biàn
胜 。 故 兵 无 常 势 ， 水 无 常 形 。 能 因 敌 变
huà ér qǔ shèng zhě , wèi zhī shén 。 gù wǔ xíng wú cháng shèng sì shí
化 而 取 胜 者 ， 谓 之 神 。 故 五 行 无 常 胜 ， 四 时
wú cháng wèi , rì yǒu duǎn cháng , yuè yǒu sǐ shēng 。
无 常 位 ， 日 有 短 长 ， 月 有 死 生 。

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

VI. WEAK POINTS AND STRONG

1. Sun Tzu said: Whoever is first in the field and awaits the coming of the enemy, will be fresh for the fight; whoever is second in the field and has to hasten to battle will arrive exhausted.
2. Therefore the clever combatant imposes his will on the enemy, but does not allow the enemy's will to be imposed on him.
3. By holding out advantages to him, he can cause the enemy to approach of his own accord; or, by inflicting damage, he can make it impossible for the enemy to draw near.

4. If the enemy is taking his ease, he can harass him; if well supplied with food, he can starve him out; if quietly encamped, he can force him to move.
5. Appear at points which the enemy must hasten to defend; march swiftly to places where you are not expected.
6. An army may march great distances without distress, if it marches through country where the enemy is not.
7. You can be sure of succeeding in your attacks if you only attack places which are undefended. You can ensure the safety of your defense if you only hold positions that cannot be attacked.
8. Hence that general is skillful in attack whose opponent does not know what to defend; and he is skillful in defense whose opponent does not know what to attack.
9. O divine art of subtlety and secrecy! Through you we learn to be invisible, through you inaudible; and hence we can hold the enemy's fate in our hands.
10. You may advance and be absolutely irresistible, if you make for the enemy's weak points; you may retire and be safe from pursuit if your movements are more rapid than those of the enemy.
11. If we wish to fight, the enemy can be forced to an engagement even though he be sheltered behind a high rampart and a deep ditch. All we need do is attack some other place that he will be obliged to relieve.
12. If we do not wish to fight, we can prevent the enemy from engaging us even though the lines of our encampment be merely traced out on the ground. All we need do is to throw something odd and unaccountable in his way.
13. By discovering the enemy's dispositions and remaining invisible ourselves, we can keep our forces concentrated, while the enemy's must be divided.
14. We can form a single united body, while the enemy must split up into fractions. Hence there will be a whole pitted against separate parts of a whole, which means that we shall be many to the enemy's few

. 15. And if we are able thus to attack an inferior force with a superior one, our opponents will be in dire straits.

16. The spot where we intend to fight must not be made known; for then the enemy will have to prepare against a possible attack at several different points; and his forces being thus distributed in many directions, the numbers we shall have to face at any given point will be proportionately few.

17. For should the enemy strengthen his van, he will weaken his rear; should he strengthen his rear, he will weaken his van; should he strengthen his left, he will weaken his right; should he strengthen his right, he will weaken his left. If he sends reinforcements everywhere, he will everywhere be weak.

18. Numerical weakness comes from having to prepare against possible attacks; numerical strength, from compelling our adversary to make these preparations against us.

19. Knowing the place and the time of the coming battle, we may concentrate from the greatest distances in order to fight.

20. But if neither time nor place be known, then the left wing will be impotent to succor the right, the right equally impotent to succor the left, the van unable to relieve the rear, or the rear to support the van. How much more so if the furthest portions of the army are anything under a hundred LI apart, and even the nearest are separated by several LI!

21. Though according to my estimate the soldiers of Yueh exceed our own in number, that shall advantage them nothing in the matter of victory. I say then that victory can be achieved.

22. Though the enemy be stronger in numbers, we may prevent him from fighting. Scheme so as to discover his plans and the likelihood of their success.

23. Rouse him, and learn the principle of his activity or inactivity. Force him to reveal himself, so as to find out his vulnerable spots.

24. Carefully compare the opposing army with your own, so that you may know where strength is superabundant and where it is deficient.

25. In making tactical dispositions, the highest pitch you can attain is to conceal them; conceal your dispositions, and you will be safe from the prying of the subtlest spies, from the machinations of the wisest brains.

26. How victory may be produced for them out of the enemy's own tactics--that is what the multitude cannot comprehend.

27. All men can see the tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved.

28. Do not repeat the tactics which have gained you one victory, but let your methods be regulated by the infinite variety of circumstances.

29. Military tactics are like unto water; for water in its natural course runs away from high places and hastens downwards.

30. So in war, the way is to avoid what is strong and to strike at what is weak.

31. Water shapes its course according to the nature of the ground over which it flows; the soldier works out his victory in relation to the foe whom he is facing.

32. Therefore, just as water retains no constant shape, so in warfare there are no constant conditions.

33. He who can modify his tactics in relation to his opponent and thereby succeed in winning, may be called a heaven-born captain.

34. The five elements (water, fire, wood, metal, earth) are not always equally predominant; the four seasons make way for each other in turn. There are short days and long; the moon has its periods of waning and waxing.