

SUN ZI'S ART OF WAR

孫子兵法

Sun Zi Bing Fa

“The Master's Child of old does not inflict a second wound. He does not take prisoner those with gray hair. When invading, he does not try to block his enemy from escape. Though I am but a remnant of a destroyed state, I will not order an attack before my opponents have drawn up their ranks.”

– Duke Xi from the State of Song

“Surely my lord does not understand the reality of war. If our mighty enemy is trapped without escape or has not yet drawn up their ranks and we have by chance come upon them, is this not Heaven itself offering us the favor? Ordering to attack when they are trapped, is this really not permissible?”

– his Minister of War

from the Zuo Zhuan, 638 BC

Chapter 1

孫子曰兵者國之大事死生之地存亡之道不可不察也

Master Sun says: “The warring of a nation is a matter of great import – to die or live on the earth, to survive or perish on the way. It is not something that can be ignored.

故經之以五事校之以計而索其情曰道二曰天三曰地四曰將五曰法

Experience maintains that there are five factors to consider when checking over your plans and searching your feelings: the first is the way, the second is the sky, the third is the earth, the fourth is the command, and the fifth is the method.

道者令民於上同意可與之死可與之生而不畏危也

The way is that which allows the people to rise up with the same intention. Maybe they will die, maybe they will live, but they will not fear the danger.

天者陰陽寒暑時制也

The sky is that which is yin or yang, cold or hot, the timing and order of it.

地者遠近險易廣狹死生也

The earth is that which is far or near, rugged or easy, broad or narrow, the death or life of it.

將者智信仁勇嚴也

The command is that which is wise, faithful, humane, courageous, and thorough.

法者曲制官道主用也

The method is how the crooked is ordered, the way of the officers, and the practice of the host.

凡此五者將莫不聞知之者勝不知之者不勝

None of these five can a commander disregard. Knowing them leads to victory. Not knowing them leads to no victory.

故校之以計而索其情曰主孰有道將孰有能天地孰得法令執行兵眾孰強士卒孰練賞罰孰明

Therefore, when checking over your plans and searching through your feelings, ask yourself: Which host has the way? Whose command is more able? Who has the advantages of sky and earth? Whose methods are carried out with greater conduct? Whose military mass is stronger? Whose scholars and warriors are more practiced? Whose rewards and punishments are more fair?

吾以此知勝負矣

According to these one can know if the end will bring victory or loss.

將聽吾計用之必勝留之將不聽吾計用之必敗去之

Retain the commanders that can hear my strategy. Using them will surely bring victory. Remove the commanders that can't hear my strategy. Using them will surely bring defeat.

計利以聽乃為之勢以佐其外勢者因利而制權也

Strategy favors the use of listening. Thus depending on the situation, be willing to accept assistance from outside the situation according to the favor and order of what is necessary.

兵者詭道也故能而示之不能用而示之不用近而示之遠遠而示之近

War is the dao of deception. Thus what is able manifests as being unable. What is useful manifests as being useless. What's near appears to be far, and what's far appears to be near.

利而誘之亂而取之實而備之強而避之怒而撓之卑而驕之佚而勞之親而離之攻其無備出其不意

When there is favor, tempt it. When there is chaos, claim it. When there is substance, prepare for it. When there is strength, avoid it. When there is anger, irritate it. When there is inferiority, intimidate it. When there is idleness, engage it. When there are close relations, reveal them. Attack when nothing is ready. Issue forth when there are no intentions.

此兵家之勝不可先傳也

Like this the warrior is victorious by not being able to be predicted.

夫未戰而廟算勝者得算多也未戰而廟算不勝者得算少也

If before battle, in the temple, one is able to formulate victory, it is because there have been many formulations. While if before battle, in the temple, one is not able to formulate victory, it is because there have been only a few formulations.

多算勝少算而況於無算乎吾以此觀之勝負見矣

Thus many formulations are victorious over few formulations, and so much the more so over no formulations. According to this one can watch for themselves to see if the end will bring victory or loss.

Chapter 3

Taking your opponents whole is better than destroying them. One hundred victories in one hundred battles is not skillful. Subduing your opponent without battle is what is skillful. Thus the best kind of military obstructs its opponents strategies. The second best kind of military obstructs its opponents alliances. The third best kind of military obstructs its opponents military. The worst kind of military attacks cities.

Knowing victory has five aspects: knowing where one can and cannot do battle is victory; knowing the use of the many and the few is victory; the greater and lesser both desiring the same is victory; using preparation to await the unprepared is victory; and the general being able and the ruler trusting it is also victory.

Knowing oneself and knowing others, in one hundred battles no danger.
Knowing oneself yet not knowing others, one victory for each defeat.
Not knowing oneself or others, certain danger in every battle.

The skillful first make themselves invincible and then await the opponent's mistakes.

Invincibility belongs to oneself. Mistakes belong to the opponent.

The skillful are only able to make themselves invincible.

They can not cause the opponent to make a mistake.

Thus it is said, "Victory can only be known. It cannot be made."

Defend and one is increased. Attack and one is decreased.

One who is skilled at defense hides below the nine earths and moves above the nine skies. Only through preserving oneself can one be victorious in all situations.

Chapter 4

When defining victory, not going beyond what everyone knows is what is skillful.

The kind of victory in battle that everybody calls "skillful" is not actually what is skillful.

Thus the lifting of a leaf does not take great strength. Seeing the sun and moon does not require clear vision. Hearing the thunder does not require a keen ear.

What is meant by skilled is to be victorious over the easily defeated. Thus, the battles of the skilled are without extraordinary victories, without brilliant uses of insight and wisdom, and without extreme merit for courage. If like this, one is without error. Being without error and causing no harm, whatever one arranges is necessarily victorious, since it is only trying to be victorious over the already defeated. One who is skilled at war takes a stand on the ground of being invincible and so can not lose when the opponents make their mistakes.

Therefore the victorious military is the one that is first victorious and after that goes to battle.

The defeated military is the one that goes to battle first and after that seeks the victory.

Chapter 5

Use the correct to engage. Use the extraordinary to attain victory.

Chapter 6

The ultimate in giving form to the military is to arrive at formlessness.

When one is formless deep spies cannot catch a glimpse and the wise cannot use strategy.

The form of military is like water. Water moves to avoid the high and seek the low, avoids the solid and flows through the empty. Thus water and military both accord their movements with the earth.