

The Art of Strategy

Sun-tzu

and

Commentary

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Commentary on Chapter One

The word usually used to translate this work is *The Art of War*. However, such a translation is untrue to the Chinese pictograph of the word martial (as in martial art) - of course, the word martial itself can occasion this translation because martial is a Latin derivative from the Latin God of War, **Mars**.

However, the Chinese pictograph used in the title of Sun-tzu's work has three essential elements, the walls and roof of a home, a woman standing holding a baby within that home and the right roof-line and wall appearing as a samurai sword curving in line with the woman holding the child. Actually, the pictograph is untranslatable, however, the word strategy is much more accurate than war because the very essence of any oriental martial art is the protection and nourishment of life, so the martial artist's intention is to develop and use the martial skill in a manner such that life is nourished and protected - such an intention requires that the martial artist engage in strategy to determine whether or not the martial art must be practiced and the how of that practice. An example describes such "strategizing": say that a person is threatening one with a knife. A person skilled in **Tang Soo Do**, a Korean Martial Art has several ways to respond or, indeed, not to respond so how to respond is part of the "strategizing".

If the person attacks using an overhead thrust with a knife and one decides to use a bent-arm response (as opposed merely to moving out of the way, or as opposed to any one of three kinds of kick responses), then one bends one's left or right arm and strikes under the elbow or wrist of the attacker. But, one can strike the person's elbow or arm in three ways: the first will merely force the person to drop the knife; the second will break the arm and dislodge the knife; the third will continue the strike through the arm into the neck or head of the attacker with the force to kill the attacker. Which of these kinds of strikes one uses depends upon the extent to which one's life is threatened by the attacker. Thus, the person skilled in **Tang Soo Do** tailors the response to the degree of threat to life.

In spite of the fact that one's response can come from multiple kinds of responses and yet, this description of one kind of response contains so many possibilities, the situation itself as well as the skill level of the martial artist determines the kind of response and the degree of the response instantaneously. This is why any martial artist who is skilled prefers not to respond and only responds if and to the degree that life is threatened. No skilled martial artist uses his or her skill except when life is threatened and when the threat is serious enough to warrant such a use of what can be deadly force - so not honest martial artist will ever "demonstrate" or "show off" his or her skill because such a "show" would violate the very nature of the martial art itself. However, any use of the art is referred to as "deadly force" because all oriental martial arts consider the human being a weapon -

the Japanese word **karate**, for instance, literally means the empty-hand-way. Of course, such an oriental view is totally different from the occidental, specifically, the American view. Americans consider themselves defenseless unless they have a weapon in the hand, whether that weapon be a stick, a knife, usually a gun. Yet, the psychology of viewing a person helpless unless one has a weapon in one's hand is self-destructive on its face and says volumes about the difference between the oriental and occidental way humans view the self. The obvious difference is that the oriental person has more self-confidence than the occidental person.

This brief explanation of the Chinese pictograph for martial art also explains why Sun-tzu begins *The Art of Strategy* with the *Chapter One, Strategic Assessments*. Any defensive and/or offensive action occurs as a result of life being endangered, so the first consideration is to determine the characteristics which one's defensive and/or offensive action must have, given the fact that such action occurs on "the ground of death and life, the path of survival and destruction". So, Sun-tzu describes how one must mobilize oneself to defend and/or attack. The "defensive and/or offensive" action requires explanation also. The oriental martial artist does not separate defensive from offensive actions any more than the oriental thinker separates **yin** from **yang**. Indeed, the traditional "softness" and "hardness" of a person's response to a danger to life is simultaneous and complementary.

Again an example needs to clarify this apparent confusion. If someone grabs my wrist and pulls me towards him or her, I have two options: I can tense my muscles or I can relax my muscles. If I tense my arm muscles, that is, become "hard", then I expand the thickness of my wrist and, thereby press my wrist tighter into the grasp of the person's hand grabbing me - when I tense my muscles, I apply glue, as it were, to lock myself into the grasp of the person grabbing me and I can not loose my wrist from the grasp of the other person.

If, on the contrary, I remain relaxed, that is remain "soft" and quickly twist my wrist toward the thumb of the person's hand holding me, then my wrist comes free. So, my "softness" opposes the attacking person's "hardness", but my response does not end here. My very "softness" in pulling away returns upward in the form of a fist and becomes "hardness" as I strike the attacker in the throat, or on the nose, or on the bridge of the nose. Thus, my defensive movement which enables me to escape the other person's grasp becomes an offensive movement to disable the attacking person, or, if necessary, to kill the attacker. Therefore, the "softness" and "hardness" are one, the first enabling quickness, the second disabling the attacker, so every defensive move is at the same time an offensive move and vice versa. The martial artist's skill unites mind (the general, or leadership) and the body (the army) to achieve victory in the defense of life against the offensive endangering life.

A comment Sun-tzu makes in the definition and description of the first of the "five things" is essential in understanding the skill of the the martial artist. That comment is: "without fear of danger". People fear when and to the extent they are unskilled or, as it were, when they are surprised because they do not expect an attack and, therefore, are not ready. So, this fear is rotted in the person's thought both reflecting the person's surprise and the attacker's aggression. However, the martial artist is so skilled that he or she is always ready so that the level of skill allows a response which is instinctive and, therefore, requires no thought. Thus, the martial artist experiences no "fear of danger" only a natural desire coupled with a skilled ability to protect life in the presence of danger.

The final comment Sun-tzu makes, namely, "The one who figures on victory at headquarters before even doing battle is the one who has the most strategic factors on his side" also requires explanation. This is not an arbitrary or arrogant statement. Indeed, any martial artist realizes that if he or she must engage in combat, then in a true sense he or she has lost the war, as it were, before setting foot on the battle front (or, before making the first move to defend against attack). This means that preparation is the key both to defense and offense. If a martial artist is skilled and maintains that skill level, even improving that skill level through continuous practice, then that martial artist has "...victory at headquarters before even doing battle..." because that martial artist "...has the most strategic factors on his side". Therefore, the popular occidental statement that "the best offense is a good defense" is patently untrue to the martial artist as well as to Sun-tzu. Indeed, the best preparation and, consequently, best skill level is the best defense and the best offense! Just as *yin* and *yang* are simultaneous and complementary, so too are defense and offense, the former being soft and female and the latter being hard and male.

A final observation is necessary consequent upon these few preparatory remarks. As the reader reads this "strategy", self-reflect that the general, the leadership is you, the reader and the army is you the reader. If I were to say that the general, the leadership were the reader's mind and the army were the reader's body, such would be untrue to the spirit of the oriental way. Such a dichotomy would be true to an occidental way, but not true to the oriental way. Indeed, the "ground" refers to any place one walks, lives or works. Thus, the "ground" is planet earth which humans inhabit. This "strategy" is the way in which a person lives, both always at ease and always prepared. Such a way might be called skilled self-discipline, the ultimate in self-sufficiency, the natural person, the person Lao-tzu refers to in tone poem number. 8:

The best of humans is like water;
Water benefits all things and does not compete with them.
Water dwells in lowly placed which all disdain - wherein water comes near to
Tao.
In his dwelling, the wise one loves the lowly earth;
In his heart, he loves what is profound;
In his relations with others, he loves kindness;
In his words, he loves sincerity;
In government, he loves peace;
In business affairs, he loves ability;
In his actions, he loves choosing the right time.
Because the wise person does not contend, this person is without reproach.

Chapter One

Strategic Assessments

(This edition by Robert G. Buckenmeyer, Ph.D. reflects the original text written by Sun-tzu.)

Military action is important to the nation - it is the ground of death and life, the path of survival and destruction, so it is imperative to examine it.

Therefore, measure in terms of five things, use these assessments to make comparisons, and thus find out what the conditions are. The five things are the way, the weather, the terrain, the leadership and discipline.

The Way means inducing people to have the same aim as the leadership, so that they will share death and share life, without fear of danger.

The weather means the seasons.

The terrain is to be assessed in terms of distance, difficulty or ease of travel, dimensions and safety.

Leadership is a matter of intelligence, trustworthiness, humaneness, courage and sternness.

Discipline means organization, chain of command and logistics.

Every general has heard of these five things. Those who know them prevail; those who do not know them do not prevail.

Therefore, use these assessments for comparison, to find out what the conditions are. That is to say, which political leadership has the Way? Which general has the ability? Who has the better climate and terrain? Whose discipline is effective? Whose troops are the stronger? Whose system of rewards and punishments is clearer? This is how you can know who will win.

Assess the advantages in taking advice, then structure your forces accordingly, to supplement extraordinary tactics. Forces are to be structured strategically, based on what is advantageous.

A military operation involves deception. Even though you are competent, appear to be incompetent. Though effective, appear to be ineffective.

Use anger to throw them into disarray.

When you are going to attack nearby, make it look as if you are going to go a long way; when you are going to attack far away, make it look as if you are going just a short distance.

When they are fulfilled, be prepared against them; when they are strong, avoid them.

Use humility to make them haughty.

Tire them by flight.

Cause division among them.

Attack when they are unprepared; make your move when they do not expect it.

The formation and procedure used by the military should not be divulged beforehand.

The one who figures on victory at headquarters before even doing battle is the one who has the most strategic factors on his side. The one who figures on inability to prevail at headquarters before doing battle is the one who has the least strategic factors on his side. The one with many strategic factors in his favor wins. The one with few strategic factors in

his favor loses - how much the more so for one with no strategic factors in his favor. Observing the matter in this way, I can see who will win and who will lose.

Commentary on Chapter Two

Given nature's command and the consequent need for the martial artist's response to promote and protect life, then Sun-tzu describes the nature and duration of any defensive/offensive movement. The first necessity is that the response be quick and secondly effective so the "battle" is brought to a close as quickly as possible.

Actually, the advice within this second chapter results from reflections upon nature and the cyclic seasons which both give birth to and nurture life. The specific tone poem wherein this view is reflected is # 23:

Nature says few words.
For the same reason a whirlwind does not last a whole morning, nor does a
rainstorm last a whole day.
What causes them?
It is Heaven and Earth (Nature).
If even Heaven and Earth cannot make them last long, how much less can man?
Therefore, he who follows Tao is identified with Tao and he who follows
virtue is identified with virtue.
He who abandons Tao is identified with the abandonment of Tao.
He who is identified with Tao - Tao is also happy to have him and he who is
identified with the abandonment - the abandonment is also happy to abandon
him.
It is only when one does not have enough faith in others that others will
have no faith in him.

The leader of the army, like nature must be single minded in its effect and exercise quick action, yet no more action than what is necessary. Like nature the leader of an army must not exhaust his effort in complicated campaigns nor exhaust his army in a prolonged campaign.

Chapter Two Doing Battle

When you do battle, even if you are winning, if you continue for a long time it will dull your forces and blunt your edge; if you besiege a citadel, your strength will be exhausted. If you keep your armies out in the field for a long time, your supplies will be insufficient.

When your forces are dulled, your edge is blunted, your strength is exhausted and your supplies are gone, then others will take advantage of your debility and rise up. Then, even if you have wise advisers, you cannot make things turn out well in the end.

Therefore, I have heard of military operations which were clumsy but swift, but I have never seen one which was skillful and lasted a long time. It is never beneficial to a nation to have a military operation continue for a long time.

Therefore, those who are not thoroughly aware of the disadvantages in the use of arms cannot be thoroughly aware of the advantages in the use of arms.

Those who use the military skillfully do not raise troops twice and do not provide food three times.

By taking equipment from your own country but feeding off the enemy, you can be sufficient in both arms and provisions.

When a country is impoverished by military operations, it is because of transporting supplies to a distant place. Transport supplies to a distant place and the populace will be impoverished.

Those who are near the army sell at high prices. Because of high prices, the wealth of the common people is exhausted.

When resources are exhausted, then levies are made under pressure. When power and resources are exhausted, then the homeland is drained. The common people are deprived of seventy percent of their budget, while the government's expenses for equipment amount to sixty percent of its budget.

Therefore, a wise general strives to feed off the enemy. Each pound of food taken from the enemy is equivalent to twenty pounds you provide by yourself.

So what kills the enemy is anger; what gets the enemy's goods is reward.

Therefore, in a chariot battle, reward the first to capture at least ten chariots.

Change their colors; use them mixed in with your own. Treat the soldiers well; take care of them.

This is called overcoming the opponent and increasing your strength to boot.

So, the important thing in a military operation is victory, not persistence.

Hence, we know that the leader of the army is in charge of the lives of the people and the safety of the nation.

Commentary on Chapter Three

This Chapter Three deals with victory in relation to the battle and the essence of any such victory is self-knowledge and knowledge of the enemy in that order.

#33

He who knows others is wise;
He who knows himself is enlightened.
He who conquers others has physical strength.
He who conquers himself is strong.
He who is contented is rich.
He who acts with vigor has will;
He who does not lose his place (with **Tao**) will endure.
He who dies but does not really perish enjoys long life.

This is why the military person who knows others and self "...will not be imperiled in a hundred battles" whereas the military people who "...do not know yourself...will be imperiled in every single battle".

At the same time, such self-knowledge and knowledge of others, here the enemy are insufficient to insure victory and are insufficient to mean the military person is living according to nature and, therefore, on the way to **Tao**. If the military person is to live according to nature and, thereby be on the way to Tao, that person must be characteristically calm, never angry and must seek victory without engaging in battle.

#68

A skillful leader of troops is not oppressive with his military strength.
A skillful fighter does not become angry.
A skillful conqueror does not compete with people.
One who is skillful in using men puts himself below them.

This is called the virtue of non-competing.
This is called the strength to use men.
This is called matching Heaven, the highest principle of old.

#73

He who is brave in daring will be killed.
He who is brave in not daring will love.
Of these two, one is advantageous and one is harmful.
Who knows why Heaven dislikes what it dislikes?
Even the wise person considers it a difficult question.

The **Way** of Heaven does not compete and yet, it skillfully achieves victory; (See # 8 for the wise not competing.)
It does not speak, and yet, it skillfully responds to things.
It comes to you without your invitation.
It is not anxious about things and yet it plans well.
Heaven's net is indeed vast.
Though its meshes are wide, it misses nothing.

Yet, if the military person has no choice but to engage the enemy in battle, then such a battle must be engaged carefully and by imitating nature and the **Tao**. Since a military person and army are more knowledgeable of themselves and their territory than their enemy's territory, then the general would seek to be host to the enemy and, thereby stand a better chance of victory on his own ground.

#69

There is the maxim of military strategists;
I dare not be the first to invade (to be host), but rather be the invaded (to be the guest).
Dare not press forward an inch, but rather retreat a foot.

That is, to march without formations,
To roll not up the sleeves,
To charge not in frontal attacks,
To arm without weapons.

There is no greater catastrophe than to underestimate the enemy.
To underestimate the enemy might entail the loss of one's treasures (see # 67).
Therefore, when two equally matched armies meet,
It is the man of sorrow (who hates killing) who wins.

Furthermore, if the host general has no choice but to engage his army in actual battle, then that general and army must conduct the war as "...the man of sorrow (who hates killing)..." in order to ensure victory. Here that essential basis of any and all martial arts and each honest martial artist take precedence, that is, the promotion and protection of life because such promotion and protection of life stems from love of being alive. So, notwithstanding occidental generals, with the exception of General George S. Patton, a warrior does not fight with daring in order to be brave. Such warriors die. As Patton stated: "You men do not go into battle to die for your country; you go into battle to make the other poor son-of-a-bitch die for his country". Therefore, the general and army enter battle out of love of nature and **Tao** because they love the life which they seek to promote and to protect.

#73

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So, given the fact that those "... Who by Tao purposes to help the ruler of men...oppose conquest by force of arms...", such a general and such an army who are forced into battle wage the battle in such a way that they effect "...the purpose..." and stop because such a warrior "effects his purpose as a regrettable necessity".

#30

He who by **Tao** purposes to help the ruler of men
Will oppose conquest by force of arms (the "arms" pictograph is a "spear" over "foot")
For such things are wont to rebound.
Where armies are, thorns and brambles grow.
The raising of a great host
Is followed by a year of dearth.

Therefore, a good general effects his purpose and stops.
He dares not rely upon the strength of arms;
Effects his purpose and does not glory in it;
Effects his purpose and does not boast of it;

Effects his purpose and does not take pride in it;
Effects his purpose as a regrettable necessity;
Effects his purpose but does not love violence.
(For) things age after reaching their prime.
That (violence) would be against the **Tao** and he who is against the **Tao**
perishes young.

Chapter Three

Planning the Siege

The general rule for use of the military is that it is better to keep a nation intact than to destroy it. It is better to keep an army intact than to destroy it, better to keep a division intact than to destroy it, better to keep a battalion intact than to destroy it, better to keep a unit intact than to destroy it.

Therefore, those who win every battle are not really skillful - those who render others' armies helpless without fighting are the best of all.

Therefore, the superior militarist strikes while schemes are being laid.
The next best is to attack alliances. The next best is to attack the army.
The lowest is to attack a city. Siege of a city is only done as a last resort.

Take three months to prepare your machines and three months to complete your siege engineering.

If the general cannot overcome his anger and has his army swarm over the citadel, killing a third of his soldiers, yet the citadel is still not taken, this is a disastrous attack.

Therefore, one who is good at martial arts overcomes others' forces without battle, conquers others' cities without siege, destroys others' nation without taking a long time.

It is imperative to contest all factions for complete victory, so the army is not garrisoned and the profit can be total. This is the law of strategic siege.

So, the rule for use of the military is that if you outnumber the opponent ten to one, then surround them; five to one, attack; two to one, divide.

If you are equal, then fight if you are able. If you are fewer, then keep away if you are able. If you are not as good, then flee if you are able.

Therefore, if the smaller side is stubborn, it becomes the captive of the larger side.

Generals are assistants of the nation. When their assistance is complete, the country is strong. When their assistance is defective, the country is weak.

So, there are three ways in which a civil leadership causes the military trouble. When a civil leadership unaware of the facts tells its armies to advance when it should not, or tells its armies to retreat when it should not, this is called tying up the armies. When the civil leadership is ignorant of military affairs but shares equally in the government of armies, the soldiers get confused. When the civil leadership is ignorant of military maneuvers but shares equally in the command of the armies, the soldiers hesitate. Once the armies are confused and hesitant, trouble comes from competitors. This is called taking away victory by deranging the military.

So, there are five ways of knowing who will win. Those who know when to fight and when not to fight are victorious. Those who discern when to use many or few troops are victorious. Those whose upper and lower ranks have the same desire are victorious. Those who face the unprepared with preparation are victorious. Those whose generals are able and are not constrained by their governments are victorious. These five are the ways to know who will win.

So, it is said that if you know others and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know others but know yourself, you win one and lose one; if you do not know others and do not know yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle.

Commentary on Chapter Four

This Chapter Four reiterates two basic martial artist principles: first, self-knowledge and knowledge of the enemy are essential in order to promote and protect life, as noted in Chapter Three. Secondly, the strategy of victory consists in the concentration upon defensive efforts since defense (as the *yin* aspect of nature) becomes offensive (as the *yang* aspect of nature), as noted in Chapter One.

The martial artist and, therefore, the general (together with the army) must show an essential belief in *Tao* and in *Tao's* ultimate "control" through nature. This belief provides the martial artist, the general and the army with the necessity of following the workings of nature and, therefore, of *Tao* as the primary "actor" through nature. Again, the emphasis is that through nature the martial artist, the general and army perceive that *Tao* seeks the birth and nurture of life - such is the basic lesson taught through the cyclic seasons, from winter to spring, spring to summer, summer to fall, then, finally, fall to winter and the everlasting repetition of this seasonal activity.

Nature's purpose of the death of winter is the birth of spring as typified by the new blossoms and green buds. Then, nature's purpose of these spring blossoms and buds is the fruit of summer, the fulfillment of spring's promise resulting in the nourishment of living beings. Of course, nature's purpose for summer's fruit is twofold: first, nourishment and then the seeds necessary for rebirth. Therefore, nature's purpose for fall is to ensure the planting of these seeds under the leaves of fall so they will be nourished by the winter's snow and rain. Then, nature's purpose for winter is that living beings, such as trees and vines, bulbs and seeds might rest, thereby gaining strength from their winter sleep to be ready for a new spring birth. In a very true sense, therefore, the purpose of living is found in dying because only in dying can nature guarantee new life!

#29

There are those who will conquer the world
And make of it (what they conceive or desire).

I see that they will not succeed.

(For) the world is God's own Vessel

It cannot be made (by human interference).

He who makes it spoils it.

He who holds it loses it.

For: Some things go forward,

Some things follow behind;

Some blow hot,

And some blow cold;

Some are strong,

And some are weak;

Some may break,

And some may fall.

Hence the wise eschew (avoid) excess, eschew extravagance, eschew pride.

#31

Of all things, soldiers (or weapons, *ping*) are instruments of evil,
hated by men.

Therefore, the religious man (possessed of *Tao*) avoids them.
The gentleman favors the left (good omen, the creative) in civilian life,
But on military occasions favors the right (bad omen, the destructive).

Soldiers are weapons of evil.
They are not the weapons of the gentlemen.
When the use of soldiers cannot be helped,
The best policy is calm restraint.
Even in victory, there is no beauty,
And who calls it beautiful
Is one who delights in slaughter.
He who delights in slaughter
Will not succeed in his ambition to rule the world.

Chapter Four ***Formation***

In ancient times, skillful warriors first made themselves invincible,
and then watched for vulnerability in their opponents.

Invincibility is in oneself; vulnerability is in the opponent.

Therefore, skillful warriors are able to be invincible, but they cannot
cause opponents to be vulnerable.

That is why it is said that victory can be discerned but not
manufactured.

Invincibility is a matter of defense; vulnerability is a matter of
attack.

Defense is for times of insufficiency; attack is for times of surplus.

Those skilled in defense hide in the deepest depths of the earth; those
skilled in attack maneuver in the highest heights of the sky. Therefore, they
can preserve themselves and achieve complete victory.

To perceive victory when it is known to all is not really skillful.
Everyone calls victory in battle good, but it is not really good.

It does not take much strength to lift a hair; it does not take sharp
eyes to see the sun and moon; it does not take sharp ears to hear a
thunderbolt.

In ancient times, those known as good warriors prevailed when it was
easy to prevail.

Therefore, the victories of good warriors are not noted for cleverness
or bravery. Therefore, their victories in battle are not flukes. Their
victories are not flukes because they position themselves where they will
surely win, prevailing over those who have already lost.

So, it is that good warriors take their stand on ground where they cannot lose and do not overlook conditions that make an opponent prone to defeat.

Therefore, a victorious army first wins and then seeks battle; a defeated army first battles and then seeks victory.

Those who use arms well cultivate the **Way** and keep the rules. Thus, they can govern in such a way as to prevail over the corrupt.

The rules of the military are five: measurement, assessment, calculation, comparison and victory. The ground gives rise to measurements, measurements give rise to assessments; assessments give rise to calculations; calculations give rise to comparisons; comparisons give rise to victories.

Therefore, a victorious army is like a pound compared to a gram; a defeated army is like a gram compared to a pound. When the victorious get their people to go to battle as if they were directing a massive flood of water into a deep canyon, this is a matter of formation.

Chapter Five

Force

Governing a large number as though governing a small number is a matter of division into groups. Battling a large number as though battling a small number is a matter of forms and calls.

Making the armies able to take on opponents without being defeated is a matter of unorthodox and orthodox methods.

For the impact of armed forces to be like stones thrown on eggs is a matter of emptiness and fullness.

In battle, confrontation is done directly; victory is gained by surprise.

Therefore, those skilled at the unorthodox are infinite as heaven and earth, inexhaustible as the great rivers. When they come to an end, they begin again, like the days and months; they die and are reborn, like the four seasons.

There are only five notes in the musical scale, but their variations are so many that they cannot all be heard. There are only five basic colors, but their variations are so many that they cannot all be seen. There are only five basic flavors, but their variations are so many that they cannot all be tasted. There are only two kinds of charge in battle, the unorthodox surprise attack and the orthodox direct attack, but variations of the unorthodox and the orthodox are endless. The unorthodox and the orthodox give rise to each other, like a circle without beginning - who could exhaust them?

When the speed of rushing water reaches the point where it can move boulders, this is the force of momentum. When the speed of a hawk is such that it can strike and kill, this is precision. So it is with skillful warriors - their force is swift; their precision is close. Their force is like drawing a catapult; their precision is like releasing the trigger.

Disorder arises from order; cowardice arises from courage; weakness arises from strength.

Order and disorder are a matter of organization; courage and cowardice are a matter of momentum; strength and weakness are a matter of formation.

Therefore, those who skillfully move opponents make formations that opponents are sure to follow, give what opponents are sure to take. They move opponents with the prospect of gain, waiting for them in ambush.

Therefore, good warriors seek effectiveness in battle from the force of momentum, not from individual people. Therefore, they are able to choose people and let the force of momentum do its work.

Getting people to fight by letting the force of momentum work is like rolling logs and rocks. Logs and rocks are still when in a secure place, but roll on an incline; they remain stationary if square; they roll if round. Therefore, when people are skillfully led into battle, the momentum is like that of round rocks rolling down a high mountain - this is force.

Chapter Six

Emptiness and Fullness

Those who are first on the battlefield and await the opponents are at ease; those who are last on the battlefield and head into battle get worn out.

Therefore, good warriors cause others to come to them and do not go to others.

What causes opponents to come of their own accord is the prospect of gain. What discourages opponents from coming is the prospect of harm.

So, when opponents are at ease, it is possible to tire them. When they are well fed, it is possible to starve them. When they are at rest, it is possible to move them.

Appear where they cannot go; head for where they least expect you. To travel hundreds of miles without fatigue, go over land where there are no people.

To unfailingly take what you attack, attack where there is no defense. For unfailingly secure defense, defend where there is no attack.

So, in the case of those who are skilled in attack, their opponents do not know where to defend. In the case of those skilled in defense, their opponents do not know where to attack.

Be extremely subtle, even to the point of being formless. Be extremely mysterious, even to the point of being soundless. Thereby, you can be the director of the opponent's fate.

To advance irresistibly, push through their gaps. To retreat elusively, out speed them.

Therefore, when you want to do battle, even if the opponent is deeply entrenched in a defensive position, he will be unable to avoid fighting if you attack where he will surely go to the rescue.

Therefore, when you induce others to construct a formation while you yourself are formless, then you are concentrated while the opponent is divided.

When you are concentrated into one while the opponent is divided into ten, you are attacking at a concentration of ten to one, so you outnumber the opponent.

If you can strike few with many, you will thus minimize the number of those with whom you do battle.

Your battleground is not to be known, for when it cannot be known, the enemy makes many guard outposts and since multiple outposts are established, you only have to do battle with small squads.

So, when the front is prepared, the rear is lacking and when the rear is prepared the front is lacking. Preparedness on the left means lack on the right; preparedness on the right means lack on the left. Preparedness everywhere means lack everywhere.

The few are those on the defensive against others; the many are those who cause others to be on the defensive against themselves.

So, if you know the place and time of battle, you can join the fight from a thousand miles away. If you do not know the place and time of battle, then your left flank cannot save your right; your right cannot save your left; your vanguard cannot save your rear-guard and your rear-guard cannot save your vanguard, even in a short range of a few to a few dozen miles.

According to my assessment, even if you have many more troops than others, how can that help you to victory?

So, it is said that victory can be made.

Even if opponents are numerous, they can be made not to fight.

So, assess them to find out their plans, both the successful ones and the failures. Incite them to action in order to find out the patterns of their movement and rest.

Induce them to adopt specific formations in order to know the ground of death and life.

Test them to find out where they are sufficient and where they are lacking.

Therefore, the consummation of forming an army is to arrive at formlessness. When you have no form, undercover espionage cannot find out anything; intelligence cannot form a strategy.

Victory over multitudes by means of formation is unknowable to the multitudes. Everyone knows the form by which I am victorious, but no one knows the form by which I ensure victory.

Therefore, victory in war is not repetitious, but adapts its form endlessly.

Military formation is like water - the form of water is to avoid the high and go to the low; the form of a military force is to avoid the full and attack the empty; the flow of water is determined by the earth; the victory of a military force is determined by the opponent.

So, a military force has no constant formation; water has no constant shape: the ability to gain victory by changing and adapting according to the opponent is called genius.

Chapter Seven

Armed Struggle

The ordinary rule for use of military force is for the military command to receive the orders from the civilian authorities, then to gather and mass the troops, quartering them together. Nothing is harder than armed struggle.

The difficulty of armed struggle is to make long distances near and make problems into advantages.

Therefore, you make their route a long one, luring them on in hopes of gain. When you set out after others and arrive before them, you know the strategy of making the distant near.

Therefore, armed struggle is considered profitable and armed struggle is considered dangerous.

To mobilize the whole army to struggle for advantage would take too long, yet to struggle for advantage with a stripped-down army results in a lack of equipment.

So, if you travel light, not stopping day or night, doubling your usual pace, struggling for an advantage a hundred miles away, your military leaders will be captured. Strong soldiers will get there first; the wary later on - as a rule, one in ten make it.

Struggling for an advantage fifty miles away will thwart the forward leadership and, as a rule, only fifty percent of the soldiers make it.

Struggle for advantage thirty miles away and two out of three get there.

So, an army perishes if it has no equipment; it perishes if it has no food and it perishes if it has no money.

So, if you do not know the plans of your competitors, you cannot make informed alliances.

Unless you know the mountains and forests, the defiles and impasses and the lay of the marshes and swamps, you cannot maneuver with an armed force. Unless you use local guides, you cannot get the advantages of the land.

So, a military force is established by deception, mobilized by gain and adapted by division and combination.

Therefore, when it moves swiftly, it is like the wind; when it goes slowly, it is like a forest; it is rapacious as fire, immovable as mountains.

It is as hard to know as the dark; its movement is like pealing thunder.

To plunder a locality, divide up your troops. To expand your territory, divide the spoils.

Act after having made assessments. The one who first knows the measures of far and near wins - this is the rule of armed struggle.

An ancient book of military order says: "Words are not heard, so cymbals and drums are made. Owing to lack of visibility, banners and flags are made". Cymbals, drums, banners and flags are used to focus and unify people's ears and eyes. Once people are unified, the brave cannot proceed alone; the timid cannot retreat alone - this is the rule for employing a group.

So, in night battles, you use many fires and drums; in daytime battles, you use many banners and flags so as to manipulate people's ears and eyes.

So, you would take away the energy of their armies and take away the heart of their generals.

So, morning energy is keen; midday energy slumps; evening energy recedes – therefore, those skilled in use of arms avoid the keen energy and strike the slumping and receding. These are those who master energy.

Using order to deal with the disorderly, using calm to deal with the clamorous, is mastering the heart.

Standing your ground, awaiting those far away, awaiting the weary in comfort, awaiting the hungry with full stomachs, is mastering strength.

Avoiding confrontation with orderly ranks and not attacking great formations is mastering adaptation.

So, the rule for military operations is not to face a high hill and not to oppose those with their backs to a hill.

Do not follow a feigned retreat. Do not attack crack troops.

Do not eat food for their soldiers.

Do not stop an army on its way home.

A surrounded army must be given a way out.

Do not press a desperate enemy.

These are rules of military operations.

Chapter Eight ***Adaptations***

The general rule for military operations is that the military leadership receives the order from the civilian leadership to gather armies.

Let there be no encampment on difficult terrain. Let diplomatic relations be established at borders. Do not stay in barren or isolated territory.

When on surrounded ground, plot. When on deadly ground, fight.

There are routes not to be followed, armies not to be attacked, citadels not to be besieged, territory not to be fought over, orders of civilian government not to be obeyed.

Therefore, generals who know all possible adaptations to take advantage of the ground know how to use military forces. If generals do not know how to adapt advantageously, even if they know the lay of the land, they cannot take advantage of it.

If they rule armies without knowing the arts of complete adaptivity, even if they know what there is to gain, they cannot get people to work for them.

Therefore, the considerations of the intelligent always include both benefit and harm. As they consider benefit, their work can expand; as they consider harm, their troubles can be resolved.

Therefore, what restrains competitors is harm; what keeps competitors busy is work; what motivates competitors is profit.

So, the rule of military operations is not to count on opponents not coming, but to rely on having ways of dealing with them, not to count on opponents not attacking, but to rely on having what cannot be attacked.

Therefore, there are five traits which are dangerous in generals: Those who are ready to die can be killed; those who are intent on living can be captured; those who are quick to anger can be shamed; those who are puritanical can be disgraced; those who love people can be troubled.

These five things are faults in generals, disasters for military operations.

Chapter Nine

Maneuvering Armies

Whenever you station an army to observe an opponent, cut off the mountains and stay by the valleys.

When cut off by water, always stay away from the water. Do not meet them in the water; it is advantageous to let half of them cross and then attack them.

When you want to fight, do not face an enemy near water. Watch the light; stay in high places; do not face the current of the water. This applies to an army on water.

Go right through salt marshes; just go quickly and do not tarry. If you run into an army in the middle of a salt marsh, stay by the water plants with your back to the trees. This applies to an army in a salt marsh.

On a level plateau, take up positions where it is easy to maneuver, keeping higher land to your right rear, with low ground in front and high ground behind. This applies to an army on a plateau.

It was by taking advantage of the situation in these four basic ways that the Yellow Emperor overcame four lords.

Ordinarily, an army likes high places and dislikes low ground, values light and despises darkness.

Take care of physical health and stay where there are plenty of resources. When there is no sickness in the army, it is said to be invincible.

Where there are hills or embankments, keep on their sunny side, with them to your right rear. This is an advantage to a military force, the help of the land.

When it rains upstream and froth is coming down on the current, if you want to cross, wait until it settles.

Whenever the terrain has impassable ravines, natural enclosures, natural prisons, natural traps, natural pitfalls and natural clefts, you should leave quickly and not get near them. For myself, I keep away from these, so that opponents are nearer to them; I keep my face to these so that opponents have their backs to them.

When an army is traveling, if there is hilly territory with many streams and ponds or depressions overgrown with reeds, or wild forests with a luxuriant growth of plants and trees, it is imperative to search them carefully and thoroughly. For these afford stations for bushwhackers and spoilers.

When the enemy is near but still, he is resting on a natural stronghold. When he is far away but tries to provoke hostilities, he wants you to move forward. If his position is accessible, it is because that is advantageous to him.

If birds start up, there are ambushers there. If the animals are frightened, there are attackers there. If dust rises high and sharp, vehicles are coming; if it is low and wide, foot-soldiers are coming. Scattered wisps of smoke indicate woodcutters. Relatively small amounts of dust coming and going indicate setting up camp.

Those whose words are humble while they increase war preparations are going to advance. Those whose words are strong and who advance aggressively are going to retreat.

When light vehicles come out first and stay to the sides, they are going to set up in battle line.

Those who come seeking peace without a treaty are plotting.

Those who busily set out arrays of armed vehicles are expecting reinforcements.

If half their force advances and half retreats, they are trying to lure you.

If they brace themselves as they stand, they are starving. When those sent to draw water first drink themselves, they are thirsty.

When they see an advantage but do not advance on it, they are weary.

If birds are gathered there, the place has been vacated.

If there are calls in the night, they are afraid.

If the army is unsettled, it means the general is not taken seriously. If signals move, that means they are in confusion.

If their emissaries are irritable, it means they are tired.

When they kill their horses for meat, it means that the soldiers have no food; when they have no pots and do not go back to their quarters, they are desperate adversaries.

When there is murmuring, lapses in duties, and extended conversation, the loyalty of the group has been lost.

When they give out numerous rewards, it means they are at an impasse; when they give out numerous punishments, it means they are worn out.

To be violent at first and wind up fearing one's people is the epitome of ineptitude.

Those who come in a conciliatory manner want to rest.

When forces angrily confront you but delay engagement, yet do not leave, it is imperative to watch them carefully.

In military matters it is not necessarily beneficial to have more strength, only to avoid acting aggressively; it is enough to consolidate your power, assess opponents, and get people, that is all.

The individual without strategy who takes opponents lightly will inevitably become the captive of others.

If soldiers are punished before a personal attachment to the leadership is formed, they will not submit and , if they do not submit, they are hard to employ.

If punishments are not executed after personal attachment has been established with the soldiers, then they cannot be employed.

Therefore, direct them through cultural arts, unify them through martial arts; this means certain victory.

When directives are consistently carried out to edify the populace, the populace accepts. When directives are not consistently carried out to edify the populace, the populace does not accept. When directives are not consistently carried out, there is mutual satisfaction between the leadership and the group.

Chapter Ten

Terrain

Some terrain is easily passable; in some you get hung up; some makes for a standoff; some is narrow, some is steep; some is wide open.

When both sides can come and go, the terrain is said to be easily passible. When the terrain is easily passable, take up your position first, choosing the high and sunny side, convenient to supply routes, for advantage in battle.

When you can go, but have a hard time getting back, you are said to be hung up. On this type of terrain, if the opponent is unprepared, you will prevail if you go forth, but if the enemy is prepared, if you go forth and do not prevail, you will have a hard time getting back to your disadvantage.

When it is disadvantageous for either side to go forth, it is called standoff terrain. On standoff terrain, even though the opponent offers you an advantage, you do not go for it - you withdraw, inducing the enemy half out, and then you attack to your advantage.

On narrow terrain, if you are there first, you should fill it up to await the opponent. If the opponent is there first, do not pursue if the opponent fills the narrows. Pursue if the opponent does not fill the narrows.

On steep terrain, if you are there first, you should occupy the high and sunny side to await the opponent. If the opponent is there first, withdraw from there and do not pursue.

On wide-open terrain, the force of momentum is equalized and it is hard to make a challenge as well as disadvantageous to fight.

Understanding these six kinds of terrain is the highest responsibility of the general and it is imperative to examine them.

So among military forces there are those who rush, those who tarry, those who fall, those who crumble, those who riot and those who get beaten. These are not natural disasters but faults of the generals.

When the generals are weak and lack authority, instructions are not clear, officers and soldiers lack consistency and they form battle lines every which way, this is riot. When the generals cannot assess opponents, clash with much greater numbers or more powerful forces and do not sort out the levels of skill among their own troops, these are the ones who get beaten.

These six are ways to defeat. Understanding this is the ultimate responsibility of the generals; they must be examined.

The contour of the land is an aid to an army; sizing up opponents to determine victory, assessing dangers and distances - this is the proper course of action for military leaders. Those who do battle knowing these will win; those who do battle without knowing these will lose.

Therefore, when the laws of war indicate certain victory, it is surely appropriate to do battle, even if the government says there is to be no battle. If the laws of war do not indicate victory, it is appropriate not to do battle, even if the government orders war. Thus, one advances without seeking glory, retreats without avoiding blame, only protecting people, to the benefit of the government as well, thus rendering valuable service to the nation.

Look upon your soldiers as you do infants and they willingly go into deep valley with you. Look upon your soldiers as beloved children and they willingly die with you.

If you are so nice to them that you cannot employ them, so kind to them that you cannot command them, so casual with them that you cannot establish order, they are like spoiled children, useless.

If you know your soldiers are capable of striking, but do not know whether the enemy is invulnerable to a strike, you have half a chance of winning. If you know the enemy is vulnerable to a strike, but do not know if your soldiers are incapable of making such a strike, you have half a chance of winning. If you know the enemy is vulnerable to a strike and know your soldiers can make the strike, but do not know if the lay of the land makes it unsuitable for battle, you have half a chance of winning.

Therefore, those who know martial arts do not wander when they move and do not become exhausted when they rise up. So it is said that when you know yourself and others, victory is not in danger. When you know sky and earth, victory is inexhaustible.

Chapter Eleven

Nine Grounds

According to the rule for military operations, there are nine kinds of ground. Where local interests fight among themselves on their own territory, this is called a ground of dissolution.

When you enter others' land, but not deeply, this is called light ground.

Land which would be advantageous to you if you got it and to opponents if they got it is called ground of contention.

Land where you and others can come and go is called a trafficked ground.

When you enter deeply into others' land, past many cities and towns, this is called heavy ground.

When you traverse mountain forests, steep defiles, marshes, or any route difficult to travel, this is called bad ground.

When the way in is narrow and the way out is circuitous, so a small enemy force can strike you, even though your numbers are greater, this is called surrounded ground.

When you will survive if you fight quickly and perish if you do not, this is called dying ground.

So, let there be no battle on a ground of dissolution; let there be stopping on light ground; let there be no attack on a ground of contention; let there be no cutting off of trafficked ground., On intersecting ground form communications; on heavy ground plunder; on bad ground keep going; on surrounded ground make plans; on dying ground fight.

Those who are called the good militarists of old could make opponents lose contact between front and back lines, lose reliability between large and small groups, lose mutual concern for the welfare of the different social classes among them, lose mutual accommodation between the rulers and the ruled, lose enlistments among the soldiers, lose coherence within the armies. They went into action when it was advantageous, stopped when it was not.

It may be asked, when a large, well-organized opponent is about to come to you, how do you deal with it? The answer is that you first take away what they like and then they will listen to you.

The condition of a military force is that its essential factor is speed, taking advantage of others' failure to catch up, going by routes they do not expect, attacking where they are not on guard.

In general, the pattern of invasion is that invaders become more intense the farther they enter alien territory, to the point where the native rulership cannot overcome them.

Glean from rich fields and the armies will have enough to eat. Take care of your health and avoid stress, consolidate your energy and build up your strength. Maneuver your troops and assess strategies so as to be unfathomable.

Put them in a spot where they have no place to go and they will die before fleeing. If they are to die there, what can they not do? Warriors exert their full strength. When warriors are in great danger, then they have no fear. When there is nowhere to go, they are firm; when they are deeply involved, they stick to it. If they have no choice, they will fight.

For this reason the soldiers are alert without being drilled, enlist without being drafted, are friendly without treaties and are trustworthy without commands.

Prohibit omens to get rid of doubt and soldiers will never leave you. If your soldiers have no extra goods, it is not that they dislike material goods. If they have no more life, it is not that they do not want to live long. On the day the order to march goes out, the soldiers weep.

So a skillful military operation should be like a swift snake which counters with its tail when someone strikes at its head, counters with its head when someone strikes at its tail and counters with both head and tail when someone strikes at its middle.

Therefore, tethered horses and buried wheels are not sufficiently reliable.

To even out bravery and make it uniform is the **Tao** of organization. To be successful with both the hard and the soft is based on the pattern of the ground.

Therefore, those skilled in military operations achieve cooperation in a group so that directing the group is like directing a single individual with no other choice.

The business of the general is quiet and secret, fair and orderly.

He can keep the soldiers unaware, make them ignorant.

He changes his actions and revises his plans so that the people will not recognize them. He changes his abode and goes by a circuitous route so that people cannot anticipate him.

When a leader establishes a goal with the troops, he is like one who climbs up to a high place and then tosses away the ladder. When a leader enters deeply into enemy territory with the troops, he brings out their potential. He has them burn the boats and destroy the pots, drives them like sheep, none knowing where they are going.

To assemble armies and put them into dangerous situations is the business of generals. Adaptations to different grounds, advantages of contraction and expansion, patterns of human feelings and conditions - these must be examined.

Generally, the way it is with invaders is that they unite when deep in enemy territory but are prone to dissolve while on the fringes. When you leave your country and cross the border on a military operation, that is isolated ground. When it is accessible from all directions, it is trafficked ground. When penetration is deep, that is heavy ground. When penetration is shallow, that is light ground. When your back is to an impassible fastness and before you are narrow straits, that is surrounded ground. When there is nowhere to go, that is deadly ground.

So, on a ground of dissolution, I would unify the minds of the troops. On light ground, I would have them keep in touch. On a ground of contention, I would have them follow up quickly. On an intersecting ground, I would be careful about defense. On a trafficked ground, I would make alliances firm. On heavy ground, I would ensure continuous supplies. On bad ground, I would urge them onward. On surrounded ground, I would close up the gaps. On deadly ground, I would indicate to them there is no surviving.

So the psychology of soldiers is to resist when surrounded, fight when it cannot be avoided and obey in extremes.

Therefore, those who do not know the plans of competitors cannot prepare alliances. Those who do not know the lay of the land cannot maneuver their forces. Those who do not use local guides cannot take advantage of the ground. The military of an effective rulership must know all these things.

When the military of an effective rulership attacks a large country, the people cannot unite. When it powers overwhelms opponents, alliances cannot come together.

Therefore, if you do not compete for alliances anywhere, do not foster authority anywhere, but just extend your personal influence, threatening opponents; this makes town and country vulnerable.

Give out rewards which are not in the rules; give out directives which are not in the code.

Employ the entire armed forces like employing a single person. Employ them with actual tasks; do not talk to them. Motivate them with benefits; do not tell them about harm.

Confront them with annihilation and they will then survive. Plunge them into a deadly situation and they then will live. When people fall into danger, they then are able to strive for victory.

So, the task of a military operation is to accord deceptively with the intentions of the enemy. If you concentrate totally on the enemy, you can kill its military leadership a thousand miles away. This is skillful accomplishment of the task.

So, on the day war is declared, borders are closed, passports are torn up and emissaries are not let through.

Matters are dealt with strictly at headquarters.

When opponents present openings, you should penetrate them immediately. Get to what they want first, subtly anticipate them. Maintain discipline and adapt to the enemy in order to determine the outcome of the war. Thus, at first, you are like a maiden, so the enemy opens his door; then you are like a rabbit on the loose, so the enemy cannot keep you out.

Chapter Twelve

Fire Attack

There are five kinds of fire attack: burning people, burning supplies, burning equipment, burning storehouses and burning weapons.

The use of fire must have a basis and requires certain tools. There are appropriate times for setting fires, namely, when the weather is dry and windy.

Generally, in fire attacks, it is imperative to follow up on the crises caused by the fires. When fires is set inside an enemy camp, then respond quickly from outside. If the soldiers are calm when fire breaks out, wait - do not attack. When the fire reaches the height of its power, follow up, if possible, hold back if not.

When fire can be set out in the open, do not wait until it can be set inside a camp - set it when the time is right.

When fire is set upwind, do not attack downwind.

If it is windy during the day, the wind will stop at night.

Armies must know there are adaptations of the five kinds of fire attack and adhere to them scientifically.

So, the use of fire to help an attack means clarity; use of water to help at attack means strength. Water can cut off, but cannot plunder.

To win in battle or make a successful siege without rewarding the meritorious is unlucky and earns the name of stinginess. Therefore, it is said that an enlightened government considers this and good military leadership rewards merit. They do not mobilize when there is no advantage, do not act when there is nothing to gain, do not fight when there is no danger.

A government should not mobilize an army out of anger. Military leaders should not provoke war out of wrath. Act when it is beneficial; desist if it is not. Anger can revert to joy; wrath can revert to delight, but a nation destroyed cannot be restored to existence and the dead cannot be restored to life. Therefore, an enlightened government is careful about this and a good military leadership is alert to this. This is the way to secure a nation and to keep the armed forces whole.

Chapter Thirteen

On the Use of Spies

A major military operation is a severe drain on the nation and may be kept up for years in the struggle for one day's victory. So to fail to know the conditions of opponents because of reluctance to give rewards for intelligence is extremely inhumane, uncharacteristic of a true military leader, uncharacteristic of an assistant of the government, uncharacteristic of a victorious chief. So, what enable an intelligent government and a wise military leadership to overcome others and achieve extraordinary accomplishments is foreknowledge.

Foreknowledge cannot be gotten from ghosts and spirits, cannot be had by analogy, cannot be found out by calculation. It must be obtained from people, people who know the conditions of the enemy.

There are five kinds of spy: the local spy, the inside spy, the reverse spy, the dead spy and the living spy. When the five kinds of spies are all active, no one knows their routes - this is called organizational genius and is valuable to the leadership.

Local spies are hired from among the people of a locality. Inside spies are hired from among enemy officials. Reverse spies are hired from among enemy spies. Dead spies transmit intelligence to enemy spies. Living spies come back to report.

Therefore, no one in the armed forces is treated as familiarly as are spies; no one is given rewards as rich as those given to spies; and no matter is more secret than espionage.

One cannot use spies without sagacity and knowledge. One cannot use spies without humanity and justice. One cannot get the truth from spies

without subtlety. This is a very delicate matter indeed. Spies are useful everywhere.

If an item of intelligence is heard before a spy reports it, then both the spy and the one who told about it die.

Whenever you want to attack an army, besiege a city, or kill a person, first you must know the identities of their defending generals, their associates, their visitors, their gatekeepers and their chamberlains, so have you spies find out.

You must seek out enemy agents who have come to spy on you, bribe them and induce them to stay with you so you can use them as reverse spies. By intelligence thus obtained, you can find local spies and inside spies to recruit. By intelligence thus obtained, you can cause the misinformation of dead spies to be conveyed to the enemy. By intelligence thus obtained, you can get living spies to work as planned.

It is essential for a leader to know about the five kinds of espionage and this knowledge depends on reverse spies, so reverse spies must be treated well.

So, only a brilliant ruler or a wise general who can use the highly intelligent for espionage is sure of great success. This is essential for military operations and the armies depend on this in their actions.

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