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# Master Sun's Art of War

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Master Sun's Art of War: Translation and Philosophical Commentary

By

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with Honors in Philosophy

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# 孫子兵法

## Master Sun's Art of War

Translation and Philosophical Commentary  
By: Eric Dustin Colwell

## A Page of Accreditation

I would just like to take this moment to issue thanks to those who have helped me along my way. I would like to thank my family for supporting me. I would like to thank Julia Powers, Melanie Lam, and Tian Zhiyi, for being, despite their periodic insanity, three of the best girls I have met thus far. I would like to thank Don Dunbar for his continued brilliance and unparalleled friendship, and Jay Logston for his continual proof that craziness can be highly potent. Let me also thank He Jinbao, the greatest fighter I have ever met, and Richard Miller for introducing me to him and an inexhaustibly rich art that has forever changed the course of my life.

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Finally, I would like to thank Zhuangzi for my health, Nietzsche for teaching me to write those better lines of English that the Muses drive into my head, Roger Ames for advancing comparative philosophy to the degree he has, and finally, Francois Jullien who reminds us all of the French genius at its best and to whom I owe many of the insights herein.

### An Introduction

The *Sunzi Bingfa* (孫子兵法), or *The Art of War*, is a detailed exegesis on military tactics in the ancient world. Roger Ames dates the earliest versions of the work to the Warring States period (c. 402-221 B.C.),<sup>i</sup> and as such we are dealing with a philosophical treatise on war that emerged in an age of blood and relentless violence. During the Warring States, various lords engaged in vicious struggles for control and as their number lessened, and the acquisition of imperium became a possibility, the violence merely accelerated until the coming of the first Emperor, Emperor Qin—a unified China was born.

The *Sunzi Bingfa*, as the first great military classic of the world, has come to be just that, a classic of the world rather than just China. Today, one can safely gamble that most educated Americans have at least heard of the work, or the Daoist philosophy from which it originates. In fact, amongst educated Americans, Sunzi (Sun tzu) and his book may well be the most recognized Chinese name after Confucius. While many have heard of Mao Zedong (Mao Tse Tong) or Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai Shek), their names are often forgotten amongst westerners and they often need to be reminded of who such people are. With Sunzi, however, educated speakers, having read his book, seldom forget.

Put simply, Sunzi has entered into the educated literature just as Poe or Yeats. As such, one might imagine that the scholarship on this text has been quite significant and this is the reality. One need only go to Borders today to humbly note that there is as much shelf space devoted to translations of Sunzi as there is to the entire section of Chinese philosophy that is crammed into the “Eastern Religion” section.<sup>ii</sup> Likewise, Sunzi is not to be found with these “religious texts,” but rather, it may be found in the section of “Military History.”

To make a long story short, a great deal of work has been done on this book and I have no intent to reinvent the wheel. Both due to this prior scholarship and to the constraints of time and space a senior thesis supposedly entails, there are a number of things I will not do in this introduction and translation. I will not discuss matters of history in depth, be they of the origin of this work, or of how this work has been applied throughout history by Mao Zedong and others. Nor will I focus on providing a long and detailed philosophic context, though one detached from the work itself, and then apply this context to the overall work of Sunzi (something I have taken Ames to have done in parts of his introduction). All of these steps have been crucial steps in scholarship, but I will not reinvent them herein.

What shall I cover in my introduction? How will my introduction differ from prior works and relate to the translation as a whole? To answer these questions, let me note one more point. Hitherto, I have stated that *Sunzi's Art of War* has become a book with which educated Americans have had some acquaintance and that there has been substantial scholarship on this work. Yet, when one talks to educated members of society, be they American, or even Chinese, they generally can only tell you about some specific tactics mentioned in the book or a particular sentence of note. The Chinese are particularly astute at this and many sayings from the book have entered into the cultural knowledge. Among them, perhaps the most famous is as follows:

故曰：知彼知己，百戰不殆；不知彼而知己，一勝一負；不知彼，不知己，每戰 殆。

Therefore, it is said, “if you know the other and know yourself, in one hundred battles you will not be in peril. If you do not know the other but know yourself, you will lose a battle for each you win. If you do not know the other and do not know yourself, in every battle you will certainly be in peril. (Sunzi, Chapter 3)

In fact, the Chinese military uses yet another as their motto: “Attack where he is not

prepared, and go where he would not consider.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, all such sayings are merely individual tactics and tell us little about the overall worldview and approach to fighting that is hinted at throughout the *Sunzi*.

To be fair, *Sunzi Bingfa* (孫子兵法) does mean “Master Sun’s Methods of War,” and hence, it can be argued that the book was only intended to detail individual methods and tactics such as those above. Still, it must be noted that an overall philosophical view of combat is hidden within its pages and never explicitly discussed. In ancient days, when everyone was familiar with the philosophy being used, there would be no need to discuss such a view and the tactics would be readily understood as being employed through such an underlying and assumed philosophy. This is no longer the case today and this fact is highly obvious. It is obvious because, when talking to educated Americans, they are unable to explain the underlying philosophy in the work for they never understood it in the first place. When speaking with a bright and educated Chinese person, the result is a little bit better, for such a person can at least try to provide some general, cultural understanding, but in the end, I am afraid such conversations do not go very far. This should not be surprising as most educated people in the United States would not feel qualified to give a lecture on Aristotle either. Hence, it is left to the philosophers of both traditions to bring out the underlying philosophy and present it in a manner that is comprehensible to those of their own. Roger Ames has tried to do this in his groundbreaking work on Sunzi,<sup>iii</sup> and while he approaches many important philosophical concepts, he makes no attempt to tie them together. Francois Jullien is somewhat more effective at this in works such as *A Treatise on Efficacy*, though by choice he deals with only a few concepts in a general way, rather than focusing on all of

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<sup>1</sup>攻其無備，出其不意 (*Sunzi Bingfa*, chapter 1)



the major concepts in a single text per se.

My goal for the subsequent introduction and translation is then quite simple—understanding—I wish to impart a coherent understanding of the philosophical concepts within this work. Now, due to time and space, this work cannot cover everything, but I shall attempt to cover all of the most important concepts herein and continually focus on making sense of each in the light of the others.

I have broken with tradition insofar as I have left two key philosophical terms, *dao* (道) and *shi* (勢), untranslated. I have done this in my belief that, following a good introduction, the reader will have some idea of what these concepts denote and will be able to have some comprehension of each throughout the actual book that follows. I have also left these terms untranslated as prior translations seem to be painfully inadequate. Just talk to an educated speaker about *dao* (tao) (道), they have all heard of it, but no one knows what it is about. “The way” just does not cut it as a translation. This is also true in the case of *shi* (勢), which has been translated as “disposition” by Jullien and sometimes as “tendency” and “efficacy,” “strategic advantage” by Ames, and is generally noted as “tendency” or “power” in dictionaries. While each of these translations has its own merits, no single translation can do the term justice, or even make it intelligible in every circumstance wherein the word *shi* (勢) is used. It is my hope that this difficulty can be avoided by explaining the logic underlying these terms and familiarizing the reader with this logic by way of examples.

In instances where *dao* (道) can be cleanly translated as “road” or “path,” I have done such, though added the character for *dao* (道) in parenthesis so that the reader can see how the term can be used.

Finally, I have also added commentary throughout the translation where I thought it necessary. I would have liked to create a longer introduction and end of chapter commentaries, but this will have to wait until a further date.

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<sup>i</sup> Roger Ames. *Sun tzu. The Art of Warfare*. Ballantine Books, New York: 1993. p. 3.

<sup>ii</sup> Their grouping in such a section is most likely for marketing purposes rather than intolerance.

<sup>iii</sup> Roger Ames. *Sun tzu. The Art of Warfare*. Ballantine Books, New York: 1993.

### On Dao (道)

Oh, how many people in the West have heard of *dao*!

Yet, how many understand it?

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*Dao* is a critical Chinese concept to understand in the *Art of War*, just as it is in nearly every Chinese text from that period. Nevertheless, its fame notwithstanding, no one apart from the sinologist seems to know anything about it. Could it be that such a complex and inclusive idea is simply communicated in all too simple a manner, or lost through careless translation, or is it that the explanations of the term are too complex, too detached from the actual meaning of the word itself? Is it possible to give a simple explanation, though impart a complex and encompassing understanding? This is what I shall try to do.

I believe that with a term such as this it is important to start with the root meanings of the word. “*Dao*” (道), in its most concrete meaning, is that of “a path,” “a road,” or as it is most frequently translated, “a way.” Of course, there are no articles in Chinese, and hence, people toss the article ‘a’ and replace it with ‘the’ and suddenly we are left with a word that almost seems inherently abstract and single and absolute—The Dao (道).

What needs to be pointed out, however, first and foremost, is that there are many *daos* in the world just as there are many paths, roads, and ways of proceeding. There is also a more comprehensive *dao* into which all of the other *daos* fall. This need not and should not and is not to be thought of in too complex a manner, but rather, one can note that just as any event in our world takes place in a larger context of events, so too is the

case of *daos* taking place in the context of one another and the totality of their inter-functioning can be thought of as a *dao* in its own right.

Now, there are always different ways to going about anything, and these, as well as the ways in which things are going about, are often what is meant by *dao*. A few

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things to note about *dao*: just as when one walks down a path, the path is always changing and novel. Hence, when one *daos*, i.e., makes one's path through the world, one must be able to adapt to the novelties and changes of the world as they unfold themselves. One must also, clearly, understand that world so as to be adaptable to its changes. We shall later examine what such understanding entails from Sunzi's perspective, but for now, let us observe some examples of how *dao* (道) is used throughout the following text.

Sunzi's *Art of War* begins with the following line:

孫子曰：兵者，國之大事也；死生之地，存亡之道，不可不察也。

Master Sun said: Warfare is a great matter of the state, the grounds of life and death, the *dao* (道) of surviving and perishing—they cannot be left unexamined. (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 1)

Let us note one more thing about the word *dao* (道). As each thing has its own way or path by which it goes, we must be careful in following the paths we wish to follow and making sure we end up on the most advantageous one. Hence, here the choice is clear, there is a *dao* for surviving and a *dao* for perishing and it is the former we wish to proceed down and not the other. Yet, both must be examined, for as Chinese logic (later explained) necessitates, we cannot have the one without the other. Put simply, these two paths shape one another.

Here are further examples of *dao* as it occurs in the *Sunzi*:

故校之以計而索其情，曰：主孰有道？

Therefore, we must compare the two sides by calculating and assessing their states of affairs. Hence, it is asked: which ruler has *dao* (道)? (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 1)

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Which ruler has the advantage of being in tune with the paths of things as they unfold?

Or, which ruler is unfolding his army's path in a way that is advantageously harmonious with the tendencies at play (*shi* 勢)<sup>1</sup> in the world?

道者，令民與上同意也，故可與之死，可與之生，而民不畏危

*Dao* (道) is what makes the people have the same thoughts as their leaders. Thus, you can die with them and you can live with them, and they will not fear danger. (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 1)

If one has proper worldly alignment and is matching the changes of the world effectively, the soldiers will recognize that it is in their interests to follow one's command.

法者，曲制、官道、主用也。

Regulation lies in management of the awry, leadership, and logistics. (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 1)

'Leadership' here is literally *guandao* (官道)—the *dao* (道) of being an official, or the way in which one serves as an official.

兵者，詭道也

Warfare is the *dao* (道) of deception. (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 1)

Warfare is the path of deception, or a forging forth of deception.

此五者，知勝之道也

To understand these five points is to understand the *dao* (道) of victory. (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 1)

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<sup>1</sup> *Shi* (勢) is a concept we shall come to later in this paper.

To understand these five is to understand the path that leads to victory (literally "victory's path).

善用兵者，修道

Those who excel in using troops cultivate *dao* (道)... (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 4)

Those who excel in using troops cultivate an effective path for harmonizing with the other paths of things.

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凡此六者，地之道也，將之至任，不可不察也

Generally, these six formations are the *dao* (道) of the terrain. They are the general's utmost duty and they cannot be left unexamined. (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 10)

Generally, these six formations are the ways in which terrain subsists (literally, they are the ways in which terrain is unfolding, for even terrain changes).

將弱不嚴，教道不明，吏卒無常，陳兵縱橫，曰亂；

If the general is weak and not strict, his instructions and *dao* (道) unenlightened, his officials and troops will have no consistency and the formations of his troops will be loose and unrestrained. This is called, "upheaval." (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 10)

'...And *dao* unenlightened.' That is, the path by which he harmonizes with the other paths of the world is a path that is unenlightened. Hence, only bad results abound.

料敵制勝，計險易遠近，上將之道也

To comprehend the enemy and govern victory, to calculate difficulty and proximity in battle, such is the *dao* (道) of superior generals. (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 10)

Such is the path taken by superior generals, or, the way in which superior generals proceed through the changes of the world.

凡為客之道

The general *dao* (道) of being a guest uninvited in the enemy's terrain is as follows: (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 11)

The general path by which one proceeds to be an uninvited guest in the enemy's terrain is as follows...

Even with spies:

莫知其道

no one can know their *dao* (道). (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 13)

No one may know the paths by which your spies proceed, otherwise your intelligence will be compromised.

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Finally, allow me to note once more that one must accurately assess the changes at play in the world so as to match these changes and forge one's path in the most efficacious manner. One does so regardless of what the rest of the world says:

故戰道必勝，主曰無戰，必戰可也；戰道不勝，主曰必戰，無戰可也。

Therefore, if the *dao* (道) of combat will inevitably (*bi* 必) lead to victory, though the ruler says, “do not fight,” inevitably (*bi* 必) combat is permissible. If the *dao* (道) of combat will not lead to victory, though the ruler says, “you must (*bi* 必) fight,” to not fight is permissible. (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 10)

Therefore, if the path of combat will inevitably lead to victory one should take this path regardless of whether the ruler agrees. And if the ruler tells you to fight when the path of starting such combat will inevitably lead to defeat, do not start it.

Allow me to say two more things at this time about *dao* (道):

First, no path, no *dao* presently at play has already unfolded itself. These paths are not fixed or predetermined for there is no future in which they can be pre-constructed, only the endless unfolding of the now. That is to say, in the present, the *dao* we have has yet to unfold. The path un-constructed, we are responsible for forging and moving ahead as we harmonize with the other paths of things as they novelly proceed.

Secondly, how does one know if one is treading effectively down the path in question? Or, put differently, how does one know whether one is forging forward in a flourishing and efficacious manner? This question is critical for its answer tells us about the nature of *dao* itself. Before this question can be answered, however, some other concepts must first be discussed.

### Differences in Our Thoughts on Opposition

Before we go further in our task, we must make some attempt to approach the Chinese understanding of opposites and how they interchange with one another.

For the Chinese, opposites were never considered in an exclusionary and absolutist sense that has become so familiar to the Greek tradition following Aristotle. What this amounts to in plain language is that one cannot have hotness without coldness

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nor coldness without hotness. Yet, all the same, while the Chinese discuss the interchange of opposites in this way, we must note that their understanding of it is not one that is logically contradictory, though the language use on the surface might falsely betray contradictions to our Aristotelian eyes. What I have in mind are passages such as the following:

吾所與戰之地不可知，不可知，則敵所備者多；敵所備者多，則吾所與戰者寡矣。故備前則後寡，備後則前寡，備左則右寡，備右則左寡，無所不備，則無所不寡。

The place where we will engage in warfare cannot be known. As it cannot be known, the places the enemy will prepare are many. The places the enemy will prepare being many, the places where we will engage them are few. Therefore, if they are prepared in the front, they will be deficient in the back. If they are prepared in the back, they will be deficient in the front. If they are prepared to the left, they will be deficient to the right. If they are prepared to the right, they will be deficient to the left. If there is nowhere in which they are not prepared, they will be deficient everywhere. (Sunzi Bingfa, Chapter 6)

Now, we must proceed carefully here, or all understanding will be lost and philosophical sensitivity abandoned. Note the final line of this passage, “If there is nowhere in which they are not prepared, they will be deficient everywhere.” While the logic may flow and seem somewhat commonsensical before this line, when this last statement is made the American suddenly frowns and says, “that is contradictory! That is a bad argument!” Yet, when I read this line to my friend Tian Zhiyi, a woman of Chinese nationality, she stated, “this is obvious logic. Everyone knows this!” Hence we immediately see that there is a significant difference at play here. It is not that Zhiyi is daft or that the American is philosophically inflexible, it is that each person brings forth his or her own method of interpreting the meaning of this line.

So what does the line mean to the Chinese? First we must consider basic suppositions such as that an army has limited resources. Now, as Sunzi often tells us, in order to use a few to defend adequately against a multitude we must concentrate our force



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to focus on the area that is most significant. In the example above, we find the complete opposite. We find an army doing its best to guard themselves from every single angle and by seeking the advantage in every single position. Yet, as they have limited resources, they naturally stretch themselves thin. It would be like a fighter trying to guard his left and right, front and back all at the same time rather than placing himself in a position where he could focus solely on one. Of such a fighter Master Sun would tell us, “there is no place in which he is not deficient,” for whether the attack comes from the left, right, front, or back, he will not be prepared to deal with it.

What we have here then is a statement that is understood in a sense that is foreign to our tradition. Now, as philosophers we can say that the linguistic form of the argument is still “illogical,” and as far as the “logic” applies to the *Logos* (Λόγος) we may well be

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<sup>2</sup> The *Logos* is a concept of fundamental importance to the Greek tradition and it is therein that much of our understanding of philosophical discourse, inquiry, and scientific theory is bound up. It is no mistake that “dialogue” and “logic” are both derived from this word. The claim then becomes: the line of Sunzi as it has been presented thus far is rather discordant with our understanding of acceptable logic and appropriate discourse.

justified in such a statement.<sup>2</sup> Yet, this makes little difference, for the Chinese tradition is full of such statements and while we may think Master Sun could phrase his arguments better, this does not change our ability to be considerate of what he *actually means* when he makes the argument. Furthermore, we shall find that the statement is “logical,” not insofar as it pertains to the *logos*, but insofar as it coheres with the over all Chinese worldview as a whole. After all, when we look at the passage above, this final statement was not arrived at randomly, but if such is the case, how was it arrived at?

With an example to work with, I call our gaze to focus once more upon opposites in the Chinese tradition. For the Chinese, hot cannot exist without some degree of coldness nor cold without some degree of hotness—the two define each other. This does not mean, of course, that everything is equally hot and cold for them, but rather, a necessary fluctuation of temperature occurs. On the very hottest days, there is very little

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cold present, and on the very coldest days, little heat can be found. Yet, let us note that such opposites are not regarded as having some absolute form. I know some debate can be made about a scientific “absolute coldness,” but what debate is there about “an absolute leftness” in opposed to “an absolute rightness?” Clearly all such talk strikes us as rather silly for the only reason that there is left at all is because there is something to the right of it that gives it dimension.

Hence, with it noted that there is no absolutistic formulation of opposites, i.e.: the two are always in some form of fluctuation with one another and neither exists *per se*,<sup>3</sup> and also that such opposites mutually define one another, we are able to see some of the logic above. In the passage cited, two terms are opposed to one another: “preparation” and “deficiency.” These terms are then set to a backdrop of other

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<sup>3</sup> This does not prevent us from formulating permanent opposites such as “north” and “south” for social convenience, but this is also a deviant example as the poles, by definition, are “polar” opposites. Hence, even if the earth shifts its surface or orbit, and consequently its physical poles do move, we would not longer regard those particular areas as being the poles. So, the poles are fixed by theory, but in physical actuality the stuff they are composed of moves and new material arrives in its place.

oppositions: “left and right,” “front and back,” and, “everywhere and nowhere.”

Now with the second set of opposites the logic shines clearly to us: If the enemy is prepared to the left, they will be deficient to the right. If the right is well-defended, one should go to the left. If the front will generate massive conflict, go to the rear for it will not. If not-A is everywhere, then A is nowhere. Yet with the first opposition, between “preparation” and “deficiency,” the logic snaps: if one is well-prepared in one place, one will be deficient in another. And yet, we also find that if one is prepared everywhere, then one is deficient everywhere. Now this first sort of statement, “if one is prepared to the left, one will be deficient to the right,” one can argue to be a non sequitur argument.

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After all, if one is prepared to one side, why does it follow one cannot be prepared to the other? And then, even more pressing, how is it that if one is prepared everywhere, they are deficient everywhere? Hence, the first argument seems non sequitur and the second contradictory. But there is more going on here than simply opposites that are fluctuating and non absolute, there is a logic of reversal.<sup>4</sup>

### The Logic of Reversal in Opposites

To proceed we must cultivate a new understanding of opposites in Chinese thought, for they are not only in fluctuation, but they are reversing and reverting into one another. In other words, in Chinese thought, when highness hits its peak, rather than becoming an absolute of some kind and subsisting in isolation, the highness merely reverts to lowness. Just think of a bird that flies up to the utmost height that it is able. Upon reaching such a height and exhausting itself, where else can it go but down? Hence the claim is implicitly

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<sup>4</sup> This language I borrow from Francois Jullien as he discusses it in *The Propensity of Things*.

advanced by the Chinese, “when any opposite hits its extreme, it flows into its opposite.” This sounds somewhat awkward in English, for opposites are positioned (-pos-) against (op-) one another. That is, they oppose one another and form a necessary relationship of polarity. In Chinese, however, one is merely the other flipped over (*fan* 反).

So the Chinese have provided us with a position that will shed some light upon the argument of Master Sun above: As the enemy’s state of “preparation and deficiency” is always fluctuating in correspondence with this logic of reversal, if the enemy is focusing their forces to the left, they will necessarily be unprepared to the right. And, even more critically, if the enemy is prepared everywhere, they will be deficient

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everywhere. Why is this so?—Because there is no absolute state of “total preparedness,” before such a state can be reached a reversal occurs—all lapses into deficiency.

Furthermore, this is empirically verifiable within our own world.

First of all, why is no state of “total preparedness” possible? Our answer is simple, as with all worldly things, “preparedness” can only be effected to a certain degree until it is exhausted and this exhaustion occurs before an absolute state can ever be reached. Even the Eternal Fire of Prometheus, a symbol representing the Olympics, went out when the Greeks ran out of gas last year. The logic is simple enough: When one starts with the limited and expends to its extreme, it is not absoluteness that results—but exhaustion.

So here we now examine the scenario above and envision an army of a thousand troops aiming their bows in a thousand directions. Each soldier is aiming his bow in a different direction in preparation for the enemy’s advance, but no soldier is adequately prepared to guard that angle against more than one soldier, not to mention if the soldier had a shield, agility, or if he too were with an army of one thousand! By being prepared in every direction or for every possibility, one’s resources and abilities are stretched to their thinnest. In the army’s eagerness to fight off assault in a thousand directions, they are not prepared to resist in the only direction that matters. As their state of preparation hits its fullest, deficiency abounds and death can enter from every corner.

While this logic of reversal then makes sense of the passage of Sunzi above, we are left with an interesting question: “If this logic of reversal is really empirically<sup>5</sup> verifiable as it seems to be, why did no one in the west bother to theorize it? Or, put differently, why did the Chinese bother to theorize a form of logic that at first glimpse

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appears to be so commonsensical that it should not be mentioned in the first place? And to this second question we have an answer—efficacy.

### ***Shi* (勢) and the Efficacy Inherent throughout the Flux of Opposition**

For Chinese, the concept of *shi* (勢) entails numerous meanings. One such meaning is that of “tendency.” The tendencies of that which we speak are the tendencies of the opposites that are at play in a situation. This “situation” must be examined later in its own right, but for now we shall focus our attention on the discussion of *shi* as “tendency.”

Hence, in any given situation, there are opposites at play. Hardness or softness, the expenditure of force and assets or their conservation, victory and defeat, or any other such set of oppositions, all have one set of rules in common: all are tendencies that are

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<sup>5</sup>Why is it empirical?—Because there is no absolute fire. Even stars exhaust themselves. When a bullet is moving its very fastest, what else can it do but begin to slow down?

present in the world and all follow the logic of reversal. Hence, one can achieve great things by observing the *shi* (勢) at play, for if one wishes to understand what is happening in the world or how to achieve one’s desires, one merely need observe the *shi* (勢) that is presiding so as to influence its unfolding and allow that unfolding to make one’s success inevitable.

It is here that we unavoidably encounter *shi*’s other meaning, “efficacy.” For one’s ability to merge with the opposites as they are tending at hand will dictate one’s victory or defeat. Of course, the manipulation of such opposites to one’s advantage is a risky affair, for as long as one is fighting against the tendency of things one is rushing

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one's own destruction. If, however, one can quickly change the tendencies at play to one's advantage without overly expending oneself, one can then harmonize with such *shi* and one's victory will be inevitable. Thus, the difficulty in translating *shi*, and the reason I have decided to leave it untranslated herein, is not only because it refers to both the tendencies and the efficacy that is established through their understanding, harmonization, and manipulation, *shi* is in fact a solitary concept—it is both tendency and the efficacy stemming from that tendency at the same time.<sup>6</sup>

The *Sunzi* devotes an entire chapter to the concept of *shi* (勢) and I have decided to provide some explanatory examples below:

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<sup>6</sup> How exactly these two concepts are interconnected will become even more clear in the section that follows.

三軍之眾，可使必<sup>7</sup>受敵而無敗者，奇正是也...凡戰者，以正合，以奇勝。故善出奇者，無窮如天地，不竭如江河。終而復始，日月是也；死而復生，四時是也。

To have one's army receive the total force of the enemy without suffering defeat lies in the orthodox (*zheng* 正) and unorthodox (*qi* 奇)... Generally, when one engages in battle, one takes the orthodox (*zheng* 正) as one meets the enemy and then invokes the unorthodox (*qi* 奇) to win. Thus, those who excel at bringing forth the unorthodox (*qi* 奇) are as limitless as the heavens and the earth and as inexhaustible as the rivers and seas.<sup>8</sup> They end and begin anew, just as the sun and moon. They die and are reborn, just as the four seasons. (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 5)

In this passage above, placed early within the chapter of *shi* (勢), we see very clearly the efficacy at hand in the logic of opposition. Here one enters into combat in an overly obvious manner, tricking the enemy with the orthodoxy and straightforwardness (*zheng* 正) of one's positions, which shift into the strangeness and unorthodoxy (*qi* 奇) that necessitate the enemy's defeat. Sunzi tells us that people who excel at the manipulation

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of these opposites are “limitless” and “inexhaustible” for they alter at exactly the right time and harmonize with the world, forcing nothing. They are like the sun and the moon as they begin once more, like the seasons in that they revive after their death, for their reversal of the tendencies at play is so complete.

Elsewhere in this chapter Sunzi tells us the following:

兵之所加，如以礮投卵者，虛實是也

To have one’s troops attack as if taking a whetstone and flinging it upon eggs lies in the vacant (*xu* 虛) and the substantial (*shi* 實). (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 5)

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<sup>7</sup> Reading 畢.

<sup>8</sup> Using the Han text’s 江海 here.

And:

進而不可禦者，衝其虛也

To advance so that the enemy is unable to defend lies in bursting through the enemy’s vacancies (*xu* 虛). (*Sunzi Bingfa*, Chapter 6)

Thus, once again we see that the efficacy of *shi* (勢) lies in the useful manipulation of these opposites. One’s success lies in using one’s substantiality (*shi* 實) to hammer through the enemies vacancies (*xu* 虛) so that the enemy is crushed like eggs under a whetstone.

Of course, timing is critical to one’s ability to adapt to the opposites at play and so

Sunzi tells us the following:

激水之疾，至於漂石者，勢也；鷲鳥之疾，至於毀折者，節也。是故善戰者，其勢險，其節短；勢如弩，節如發機。

The velocity of violent water arrives at making boulders drift by way of its *shi* (勢). The velocity of a bird arrives at destroying and breaking (its prey’s neck) by way of timing. Thus, of those who excel in warfare, their *shi* (勢) is narrow and their timing is short; their *shi* (勢) is like a crossbow and their timing—the trigger. (*Sunzi Bingfa*, chapter 5).

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Hence, efficacy is dependent upon *shi* (勢) and timing. Without *shi* one is impotent.

Without excellent timing, one's potency is for naught. The success of the efficacy of *shi* (勢) lies upon rapid adaptation to the oppositional tendencies at play. Thus, those who excel at warfare have *shi* (勢) that is narrow like a taut crossbow. That is to say, when manipulating the opposing forces to their advantage they place themselves on the extreme of one opposite so that when the proper time comes they are immediately able to trigger its reversal and ride that resulting opposite to victory—like a taut crossbow, stretched as far as it can go, ready to release all of its tension and fire its bolt dead through the adversary. Their timing is short and like the trigger of a crossbow, for they are ready to match the changes of the world at any moment, and when the opportune moment arrives, they seize it—like the pulling of a trigger that leads to the guaranteed annihilation of one's adversary.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, “courage” and other such virtues that Clausewitz deems to be so very valuable to men are, in fact, merely matters to be manipulated through *shi*<sup>10</sup> Jullien has discussed this in depth before and it will be clear later that Sunzi places the morale of troops in the hands of *shi* rather in their own qualities of “braveness” or “cowardess.”

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<sup>9</sup> Any martial art worth anything has great *shi* continually expressed within the body. In fact, to truly excel as a fighter, one must have some understanding of this concept, even if it is left untheorized.

Think of fighting. If one brings a heavy force upon the enemy and is able to go straight through the enemy's force, the fight will end. If, however, the enemy blocks one's attack and the enemy's force is too great, one has two options: One option is to stubbornly try to force one's way through the enemy, even though it is clear his force is too strong. This first option will result in one's exhaustion and the enemy will overpower him. The second option, upon the very moment one realizes his enemy's strength is too great, is to immediately relinquish his force, removing it altogether or letting it yield and as the enemy's force suddenly meets with no resistance, one immediately uses the enemy's force to one's advantage.

One can do this in many ways. One can use the enemy's force and redirect him in a new direction that places him in a disadvantageous position. One can literally use that force to power one's own waist so that one can hit the opponent with his own force and one's force combined. One can relax and allow the opponent's force to go off into emptiness with nothing to hit, creating a momentary opening in his defenses.



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Of course, whatever one does, one must adjust either one's position, or the direction in which the enemy's force is traveling, or both, for otherwise one would just get hit by the opponent's force.

Likewise, if the opponent's breath is up, you strike low. If he is solid down low, you strike him up high. If the opponent blocks to the right, you hit to the left.

When seizing and grasping, in order to lock or break the enemy's joints, one starts with one's hands in a very twisted and uncomfortable position as one meets the enemy. This is because the enemy will be in a comfortable position, and as one grabs one then has a long way to twist. Hence, you start out uncomfortable and your opponent comfortable, and end comfortable and with an uncomfortable opponent.

Furthermore, when putting out force, the greater one is twisted, the further one will have to uncoil.

Thus, there is *shi* in putting force out of the body, *shi* in hitting the opponent's deficiencies—deficiencies that come about *exactly because he is substantial* in the respective opposites of such deficiencies. There is also *shi* in turning loss into victory by going with the natural reversal that results from the exhaustion of one's strength in opposed to fighting it.

All of this is something that is very easy to demonstrate and very hard to explain, yet it is the reason why China still produces the best fighters in the world.

<sup>10</sup>Note: 勇怯，勢也 (Sunzi Bingfa, Chapter One)

For now, however, let us make note of more characteristics of *shi* (勢), namely, it always takes place in a situation, formation, or position—that is, it always takes place in a *xing* (形).

## ***Xing* (形), the Positioning in which *Shi* (勢) Participates**

*Xing* (形) is also a very important concept in the Sunzi to which a whole chapter is devoted. *Xing* (形) is the “positioning,” “configuration,” “formation,” or, “situation” wherein the *shi* (勢) efficaciously functions.

Let us begin by looking at some examples of *xing* (形). Immediately, the chapter on *xing* tells us the following:

昔之善戰者，先為不可勝，以待敵之可勝；不可勝在己，可勝在敵。故善戰者，能為不可勝，不能使敵必可勝。故曰：勝可知，而不可為。

Of old, those who excelled in warfare first made themselves unconquerable and thereby awaited the enemy's conquerability.<sup>11</sup> Unconquerability lies within oneself; conquerability lies within the enemy. Therefore, those who excel in warfare make themselves unconquerable, but are unable to ensure the enemy's conquerability.

Therefore it is said, “victory can be known, but it cannot be forced.” (Sunzi Bingfa, Chapter 4).

We are thus told that one can only be responsible for one's own positioning (*xing* 形).

One harmonizes with the *shi* therein so as to become unconquerable while waiting for a lapse in the opponent's positioning (*xing* 形). One cannot force the enemy to discord

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with the *shi* at play in his positioning (*xing* 形), though one might bait him or try to alter such *shi* to render him discordant. As soon as the enemy is rendered discordant as such,

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<sup>11</sup>A moment in which the enemy could be conquered.

he can be seized. This is, of course, assuming that one manages to remain efficaciously concordant with the *shi* of one's own positioning.

Hence, we are left asking, “what is the best way to remain unconquerable while ushering forth a formation (*xing* 形) wherein the enemy's conquerability is ensured?”

The answer to this question is formulated in chapter six:

故形人而我無形

Therefore, I lead the enemy into a formation (*xing* 形) while we are without a formation (*wuxing* 無形). (Sunzi Bingfa, Chapter 6).

Now we must be careful with this talk of being “without a formation,” for it is a common construct in classical Chinese philosophy that does not so much imply “without a formation” as “without a *fixed* formation.” For, after all, one cannot ever lack a formation or a positioning within the world. One always has a *xing* (形). Here, however, Sunzi is recommending that we continually alter our formation (*xing* 形), while fixing the enemy into a formation of their own. If we force the enemy into a fixed position we can manipulate and harmonize with the *shi* (勢) therein and render victory inevitable. If we remain without any fixed formation of our own, always adapting to the *shi* at hand, our own *shi* (or, “efficacy”) will be overwhelming and the *shi* of our positioning will be impossible to manipulate.

## Closure

Let us now bring forth all of the concepts discussed this far and tie them together:

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According to the philosophy implicit in the *Sunzi*, those who are the most efficacious, be it in war, combat, or life, excel at the following: they continually adapt at the opportune moment to place themselves in the ideal position. A position that in turn is concordant with the tendencies at play (*shi* 勢) and a position that grants them the greatest efficacy (also *shi* 勢). Put differently, they continually alter their positioning (*xing* 形) so as to stay perfectly harmonized with the *shi* at play, and therefore it is said that they have great *shi*. This efficacy then, is the efficacy that stems from positioning oneself in the right place at the right time so that the smallest amount of effort need be expended. Through apt positioning one is able to merely follow along (*yin* 因) with the tendencies therein as water flows and follows the curvatures of the ground—victory becomes “easy” and inevitable (*bi* 必). Jullien notes this much, but we must take it further.

In fact, “easiness” itself may be clearly understood when we look at the word for “easy” *yi* (易), which also means “to change.” This word carries both meanings as, quite simply, that which is “easy” is conducive to “change.” Thus in Sunzi, an “easy” victory is achieved through spontaneous and appropriate adaptation to the tendencies (*shi* 勢) at play in the positioning of things (*xing* 形), just as “easy terrain” is terrain upon which one is able to change one’s positioning abundantly and without constraint. Hence, “ease” of victory or to “easily” come by efficacy is not merely an ideal to contrast with Clausewitz’s rants about the difficult confrontation that is war—bringing great force headstrong against other great force—“ease” is, in fact, change itself.<sup>12</sup>

So now we return to a question asked long ago. How do we know if we are *dao*-ing effectively? We know for if we are not, we are discordant with change, we are failing to adapt appropriately and spontaneously to the changes at play. This failure results in the loss of war and an unnecessarily painful, miserable, or inefficacious life.

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<sup>12</sup> This is quite consistent with the modern Chinese word for “sad” (*nanguo* 難過), which implies that one is experiencing feelings that “do not pass easily,” (literally, these thoughts “difficulty pass”).

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Of course, to adapt successfully, we must also have understanding. A large section of the Sunzi deals with attaining this understanding, or, “prescience” (*xianzhi* 先知). Many sections discuss how important it is to have a general who has such understanding and knowledge. A whole chapter is devoted to spies (chapter 13) as they are able to attain such knowledge. But what is this knowledge of?—this knowledge is of the position of things (*xing* 形) and the tendencies (*shi* 勢) by which opposites are unfolding therein. This understanding is of the *xing* and the *shi* of one’s enemy, the battlefield, and oneself.

Of course, though spies are most useful, in the end this understanding is best attained through spontaneous harmonizing with the *xing* and the *shi* of the moment, rather than theories, prior facts, or earlier states of understanding. As Zhuangzi cleverly puts it: “Everyone reveres their knowledge of what they know, but none know (how) to know by relying on the understanding of what they do not know.”<sup>13</sup>

With this spontaneous understanding attained, persons set themselves up so that they can follow along (*yin* 因) with the tendencies at play (*shi* 勢) in the situation (*xing* 形) and let the tendencies carry them to a victory that is inevitable (*bi* 必)<sup>14</sup>—this is the height of efficacy—this is the height of *shi* (*shi* 勢)—this is the surest way to win in warfare. With the height or efficacy now explicitly expressed, the reader is better prepared to forge through the text ahead. Yet, after one does, one might be pressed to one more effectuation of enquiry:

We have seen the height of Sunzi’s efficacy in war. But is this the height of *dao* (道)? Is this the height of forging forward upon a flourishing path? Will efficacy always

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<sup>13</sup> 人皆尊其知之所知而莫知恃其知之所不知而後知。 (Zhuangzi, *Zeyang*, Chapter 25)

<sup>14</sup> Luck does not play into it at all as it does with Machiavelli and Clausewitz.

<sup>15</sup> Francois Jullien. *A Treatise on Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese Thinking*. University of Hawai’i Press: 2004.

lead to a flourishing path through life? To this, indirectly, Francois Jullien has ventured an answer. In his work, *A Treatise on Efficacy*, he summons forth the following:

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But, of course, there is always a price to pay (for this efficacy of the Chinese). And it is a price that, sad to say, none of the Chinese thinkers, whatever his tendencies, seems ever to have noticed. To confront the world is a way to free oneself from it. Not only does this provide the substance of heroic stories and the jubilation of the subject, but, through resistance, we can make our way to liberty. After all, we should remember all that this extremely coherent Chinese concept kills. By dint of identifying with that coherence and allowing ourselves to be carried along by it, possibly or even manifestly to the point of being unable to do without it, we may well forget all that we have jettisoned along the way: under the heading of “subject,” the infinite possibilities of subjectivity; passion, of course; and the pleasures derived from exerting ourselves...It is certainly enough to make one dream of Hercules, mounting his pyre, happy to have exerted himself for nothing...One can imagine what his retort to a Chinese general might have been: “And what if not just the greatest pleasure, but even the greatest ‘profit,’ as you would say, was not to win but to lose: really to lose—and to lose forever, so as to experience the weight of that ‘forever,’ as Sisyphus and Prometheus did (not so that the loss, thanks to the ricochets of reality, should later turn to gain?) And what if the best way to feel alive—finally beyond the world—was not efficacy but its very opposite?” In this case, this essay would have to be rewritten the other way around. It would be titled: *In Praise of Resistance*—or the nontolerance of reality—*In Praise of Counterefficacy*<sup>15</sup>

This is noteworthy, to be sure, and when the reader thoroughly considers the implications within the text that follows and how they affect one’s life, this final passage of Jullien must be reexamined.

Of course, the importance of Jullien’s critique notwithstanding, it seems the good Frenchman has forgotten at least one thinker in the Chinese tradition:

山木自寇也，  
膏火自煎也。  
桂可食，  
故伐之；  
漆可用，  
故割之。  
人皆知有用之用，  
而莫知无用之用也。

- 莊子

The trees of the mountains harm themselves,  
Grease in fire roasts itself.  
Cinnamon can be eaten,  
Hence, it is cut down.  
Lacquer can be used,  
Hence, it is stripped.  
Everyone knows the use of the useful,

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But no one knows the use of the useless.

- Zhuangzi<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> (*Zhangzi, Renjianshi*, Chapter 4)

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# Sunzi Bingfa

## Translation

《計篇》

Chapter One

On Calculations:

孫子曰：兵者，國之大事也；死生之地，存亡之道，不可不察也。

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Master Sun said: Warfare is a great matter of the state, the grounds of life and death, the *dao* (道) of surviving and perishing—they cannot be left unexamined.

故經之以五，校之以計而索其情：一曰道，二曰天，三曰地，四曰將，五曰法。

Therefore, when surveying warfare we must consider five criteria, we must compare each side by calculating and assessing their states of affairs.<sup>1</sup> The first of these is called *dao* (道), the second is called climate, the third is called terrain, the fourth is called command, the fifth is called regulation.<sup>2</sup>

道者，令民與上同意也，故可與之死，可與之生，而民不畏危；

*Dao* (道) is what makes the people have the same thoughts as their leaders. Thus, you can give them death, or you can give them life, and they will not fear danger.<sup>3</sup>

天者，陰陽、寒暑、時制也；

Climate refers to light and shadow, temperature, and the regulation of the seasons.<sup>4</sup>

地者，高下、遠近、險易、廣狹、死生也；

Terrain is the height of the land, its distancing,<sup>iii</sup> its difficulty and ease, its vastness and narrowness, and the grounds of dying and living.

將者，智、信、仁、勇、嚴也；

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<sup>1</sup>I recognize Professor Coyle dislikes this translation of *qing*, but I am not yet prepared to offer a better one.

<sup>2</sup>Some of these key terms (such as *tian*, *fa*, and *di*) are translated following Ames, mostly because they are good translations.

<sup>3</sup>This can also be translated, “Thus, you can die with them and you can live with them, and they will not fear danger.” Considering the concept of *dao*, I believe this latter translation makes more sense. Of course, one could understand the former in the case of a moral *dao*, the leader possessing a very upright or potent path that others would die for.

<sup>4</sup>“Regulation of the seasons” simply indicates the cyclical passing of one season to the next.

<sup>5</sup>Terrain is the height of the land, its distancing,<sup>5</sup> its difficulty and ease, its vastness and narrowness, and the grounds of dying and living.

將者，智、信、仁、勇、嚴也；

Command consists of wisdom, trustworthiness, benevolence, bravery, and stringency.

法者，曲制、官道、主用也。

Regulation lies in management of the awry,<sup>6</sup> leadership, and logistics.



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凡此五者，將莫不聞；知之者勝，不知者不勝。

All five of these criteria have been heard of by commanders. Those who understand these triumph; those who lack such understanding do not win.

故校之以計而索其情，曰：主孰有道？將孰有能？天地孰得？法令孰行？兵眾孰強？士卒孰練？賞罰孰明？吾以此知勝負矣。

Therefore, we must compare the two sides by calculating and assessing their states of affairs. Hence, it is asked: which ruler has *dao* (道)? Which commander has the greater capability? Who possesses the climate and terrain? Who better effects regulations and orders? Who has the stronger mass of troops? Whose aristocratic officers and foot-soldiers are better trained? Who has the greater clarity in effectuation of reward and punishment? By these we understand victory and defeat.<sup>7</sup>

將聽吾計，用之必勝，留之；將不聽吾計，用之必敗，去之。

If a commander<sup>8</sup> follows my calculations, using them<sup>9</sup> makes victory inevitable—keep him. But if a commander does not heed my calculations, using him makes defeat inevitable—let him go.

計利以聽，乃為之勢，以佐其外。

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Distancing’ refers to how near or far elements of the terrain are in relation to one another. I recognize “distancing” is a bit awkward, but I do not take “proximity” to be much better.

<sup>6</sup> “Awry” strikes me as an appropriate word choice for both semantic and etymological reasons.

<sup>7</sup> Or, “By these we know who will win and who will lose.”

<sup>8</sup> 將 (*Jiang*) can also be a future marker, whence prompting the translation: “If you follow my calculations...If you do not follow my calculations...” If such a reading is the case, I must admit that I am hard-pressed to lend an easy and reasonable reading to the *liuzhi...quzhi*.

<sup>9</sup> This can also read “using him,” referring to the commander.

Having heard the benefits of my calculations, cultivate *shi* (勢) in your soldiers and make use of assistance for that which lies outside of your influence.

勢者，因利而制權也。

*Shi* (勢) depends on attaining advantageous circumstances and governing the weight of influence upon the land (*quan* 權).

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，

Warfare is the *dao* (道) of deception. Therefore, if one has capability, display oneself as incapable. If one is using that capability, display it as being left unused. If you are near, appear to be distant. If you are distant, appear to be near.

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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。此兵家之勝，不可先傳也。

If it is beneficial to do so, provoke the enemy.<sup>10</sup> If he is in disarray, seize him. If he is substantial, prepare for him. If he is strong, avoid him. If he is angry, further his agitation.<sup>11</sup> If he is humble, bring out his arrogance.<sup>12</sup> When he attempts to relax, exhaust him.<sup>13</sup> If intimacy exists within his ranks, pull such relations apart.<sup>14</sup> Attack where he is not prepared, and go where he would not consider. In these, lies the military expert's victory. This cannot be transmitted in advance.<sup>15</sup>

夫未戰而廟筭勝者，得筭多也；未戰而廟筭不勝者，得筭少也。多筭勝，少筭不勝，而況於無筭乎！吾以此觀之，勝負見矣。

Now, before battle has even been waged, the winner by the temple's counting sticks is the one who attains more sticks.<sup>16</sup> With the battle not yet having been fought, the one

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<sup>10</sup>Or, "if one has a desirable advantage, entice the enemy with it."

<sup>11</sup>Some suggest that 'angry' here should be translated "easy to anger." I have left it as 'angry,' because I can think of many instances when one is angry, irritated, or annoyed, and while one is maintaining one's composure, such a person is incredibly easy to provoke and agitate further.

<sup>12</sup> Or, "if your forces are humble, make him arrogant."

<sup>13</sup> Or, "relax, and thereby force him to exert himself."

<sup>14</sup> Or, "If he has those with whom he is intimate, pull them apart."

<sup>15</sup>This could mean that one is unable to express which of these circumstances will exist or how to react to them in advance. This could also mean one must avoid telegraphing one's strategy for winning before the battle.

<sup>16</sup>Following a previous precedent of people like D.C. Lau, reading 筭 (*suan*) as "counting sticks."

## 《作戰篇》

### Chapter Two

#### On Engaging in Warfare:

孫子曰：凡用兵之法，馳車千駟，革車千乘，帶甲十萬，千里饋糧，則內外之費，賓客之用，膠漆之材，車甲之奉，日費千金，然後十萬之師舉矣。

Master Sun said: In general, in using the methods of war, if one has a thousand swift four-horse chariots, a thousand leather-armored chariots, and one hundred thousand armored troops, a thousand *li*<sup>17</sup> worth of provisions, then the expenses of the exterior and interior, the use of guests or spies, the materials of glue and lacquer, and the maintenance of the chariots' armor will be the daily expense of one thousand pieces of gold. Only after [you have such finances] can you raise an army of one hundred thousand men.

其用戰也勝，久Ⓢ則鈍兵挫銳，攻城則力屈，久Ⓢ暴師則國用不足。夫鈍兵挫銳，屈力殫貨，則諸侯乘其弊而起，雖有智者，不能善其後矣。

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When using warfare value [rapid] victory. If combat is prolonged, the sharpness of your weapons will be blunted. If you attack cities, your strength will be bent. If combat is prolonged, the army can become violent and agitated, rendering the country's resources insufficient. Now if the sharpness of one's weapons has been dulled, one's force bent, and one's commodities exhausted, then the various nobles will exploit this disadvantage and rise [in attack]. Though you may have a wise individual, such a person will not be able to ensure excellent consequences.

故兵聞拙速，未睹巧之久<sup>㊦</sup>也。夫兵久<sup>㊦</sup>而國利者，未之有也。故不盡知用兵之害者，則不能盡知用兵之利也。

Thus in war one hears of clumsy haste, but I have yet to hear of a prolongation of ingeniousness.<sup>18</sup> Now, of those who can engage in prolonged warfare while simultaneously benefiting their states, the world has never had such persons. Thus, if one does not have the utmost understanding of the harms of warfare, then one will be unable to have the utmost understanding of the benefits of such warfare.

善用兵者，役不再籍，糧不三載；取用於國，因糧於敵，故軍食可足也。

Of those who excel in using warfare, their enlisters do not reenlist soldiers, nor do they transport provisions more than twice; they carry the essentials of their state and depend

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<sup>17</sup> A *li* is approximately half of a kilometer. (Muller, Charles. "Li" entry of *Lexicon. Shuhai Wenyuan: Classical Chinese Digital Database and Interactive Internet Worktable*. Ed. Brian Bruya. January, 2003. U of Hawai'i. 2 March 2003 <<http://www.shuhai.hawaii.edu>>.)

<sup>18</sup> Or, "a skillful prolongation (of a war)."

on the provisions they rely upon are those of the enemy. Thus, the army's consumption can be sated.

國之貧於師者遠輸，遠輸則百姓貧；近師者貴賣，貴賣則百姓財竭，財竭則急於丘役。力屈財殫，中原內虛於家，百姓之費十去其七；公家之費，破車罷馬，甲冑矢弩，戟楯矛櫓，丘牛大車，十去其六。

A kingdom's poverty stems from its army distantly traveling. If the army is distantly traveling, the common people will be impoverished. If the army is [very] close, there will be inflation and the common people's assets will be exhausted. Their assets being exhausted, they will hurriedly effect district taxation. Your strength spent and assets exhausted, the homes of those in your central plains will be empty. The expenditures of the common people will be seven-tenths of their assets. The expenditures of the nobles for broken chariots, worn-out horses, armor and helmets, crossbows and bolts, halberds and shields, spears and long shields, heavy oxen and large wagons will be sixty percent of their assets.

故智將務食於敵，食敵一鍾，當吾二十鍾；芻稈一石，當吾二十石。

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Therefore, the prudent commander endeavors to eat by way of his enemy's supplies. Eating fifty liters of one's enemy's grain serves as if eating 1,000 liters of one's own. Procuring one hundred liters of the enemy's animal feed is as if acquiring 2,000 of one's own.

故殺敵者，怒也；取敵之利者，貨也。故車戰得車十乘已上，賞其先得者，而更其旌旗。車雜而乘之，卒善而養之，是謂勝敵而益強。故兵貴勝，不貴久<sup>㊦</sup>。故知兵之將，民之司命，國家安危之主也。

Thus, killing the enemy lies in ferocity. Seizing the enemy's profits lies in rewarding the troops with the spoils. Therefore, in chariot battles, if you commandeer ten or more chariots, reward the one who attained the first and change their standards and flags. Mix the chariots back into the army and make use of them. If the enemy's captured foot soldiers are usable, nourish them. This is called conquering the enemy and increasing one's strength. Therefore, in war, value a rapid victory, not a prolonged engagement. Thus, the general who understands warfare governs the lives and fortunes (*ming* 命) of the people and is the head of homeland security.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Really, "head of the state's security." But I could not resist.

### 《謀攻篇》

#### Chapter Three

#### On Planning the Assault:

孫子曰：凡用兵之法，全國為上，破國次之；全軍為上，破軍次之；全旅為上，破旅次之；全卒為上，破卒次之；全伍為上，破伍次之。是故百戰百勝，非善之善者也；不戰而屈人之兵，善之善者也。

Master Sun said: In general, when utilizing the methods of war, a country intact<sup>20</sup> is best and a broken country only second to it; an army intact is best and a broken army only second to it; an intact contingent of 500 troops is best and a broken contingent is only second to it; an intact company of one hundred troops is best and a broken company only second to it; an intact squad of five men is the best and a broken squad only second to it. It is for this reason that fighting and winning one hundred battles is not the most excellent excellence. To not fight and reflex the enemy's troops, this is the most excellent excellence.<sup>21</sup>

故上兵伐謀，其次伐交，其次伐兵，其下攻城。攻城之法，為不得已。修櫓轆輶，具器械，三月而後成；距闔，又三月而後已。將不勝其忿而蟻附之，殺士三分之一，而城不拔者，此攻之災也。

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Thus, the highest warfare lies in attacking plans; the next best lies in attacking alliances; the next best lies in attacking soldiers; and lowest of all lies in attacking cities. The method of attacking cities should only be effected as a last resort. To build large shields and siege vehicles and to be fully equipped with weapons and tools will take three months until completion. To prepare mounds of earth against the city walls will take another three months until it is finished. If your general is unable to conquer his anger and sends his troops swarming like ants against their walls, one of every three soldiers will die and the city will still not be taken. Such are the catastrophes of siege.

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<sup>20</sup> Translating ‘*quan*’ (全) as ‘intact’ here, following Ames (Ames, *Sunzi Bingfa*, p. 112), as it is the only translation that really makes sense.

<sup>21</sup> This is the reading that seems to be popular, but I could also see Sunzi saying, “to bend the enemy’s troops to your side without engaging in combat, this is the most excellent form of excellence.” Hence, in this reading, one turns the enemy’s troops to one’s own side, and in the other, one merely forces them into a retreat.

故善用兵者，屈人之兵而非戰也，拔人之城而非攻也，毀人之國而非久<sup>㊟</sup>也。必以全爭於天下，故兵不頓而利可全，此謀攻之法也。

Therefore, those who excel at conducting warfare bend the enemy’s troops without engaging in combat;<sup>22</sup> they pluck out the enemy’s cities without engaging in siege; they demolish the enemy’s state without lengthy warfare. It is necessary to remain intact whilst struggling under the heavens. Thereby, your weapons will not be blunted and their sharpness can remain intact. Such are the methods of planning the assault.

Thus, in the methods of utilizing war, if you are ten times the adversary’s number, surround him; if you are five times his number, attack him; if your numbers double his, divide him; if you are both equal, you can attack him; if your forces are less, you can evade thereby; and when your forces cannot compare to his, you can avoid him all together. Hence, defenses against a small enemy are the spoils of a large enemy.

夫將者，國之輔也；輔周則國必強，輔隙則國必弱。

Now [the chariot has its side-guards] and the general is the side-guards of the state. If these guards are all-encompassing, the state will inevitably be strong. If, however, these guards are cracked, the state will inevitably be weak.

故君之所以患於軍者三：不知軍之不可以進而謂之進，不知軍之不可以退而謂之退，是謂糜軍。不知三軍之事，而同三軍之政者，則軍士惑矣；不知三軍之權，而同三軍之任，則軍士疑矣。三軍既惑且疑，則諸侯之難至矣。是謂亂軍引勝。

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Therefore, there are three characteristics of a lord that can be taken as calamitous to the army: If he does not know that the army is unable to advance, yet he tells them to advance, if he does not know that the army is unable to take up flight, yet he tells them to flee, this is called, “binding the army.” If he does not know the affairs of the army, yet intervenes in the governance of the army, then the army and its aristocrats will be bewildered. If he does not know the weight of potency (*quan* 權) possessed by his army, yet he meddles with the duties of the army, then the army and its aristocrats will be thrown into disbelief. As the army is both bewildered and in disbelief, hardships of outside nobles’ intent will arrive thereby. This is called, “upheaving the army and repulsing victory.”

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<sup>22</sup>See footnote 18.

故知勝有五：知可以戰與不可以戰者勝，識眾寡之用者勝，上下同欲者勝，以虞待不虞者勝，將能而君不御者勝。此五者，知勝之道也。

Thus, understanding victory entails these five things: those who know when combat can be taken up and when it cannot will win; those who know how to make use of the abundance and deficiency of troop formations will win;<sup>23</sup> those whose superiors and subordinates are of the same desires will win; those who take preparations to await the unprepared will win; and those who have a general with capability, yet a sovereign who does not steer his general’s reins, such are those who will win. To understand these five points is to understand the *dao* (道) of victory.

故曰：知彼知己，百戰不殆；不知彼而知己，一勝一負；不知彼，不知己，每戰必殆。

Therefore, it is said, “if you know the other and know yourself, in one hundred battles you will not be in peril. If you do not know the other but know yourself, you will lose a battle for each you win. If you do not know the other and do not know yourself, in every battle you will certainly be in peril.

《形篇》

#### Chapter Four

On Formations and Positioning (*xing* 形):

孫子曰：昔之善戰者，先為不可勝，以待敵之可勝；不可勝在己，可勝在敵。故善戰者，能為不可勝，不能使敵必可勝。故曰：勝可知，而不可為。不可勝者、守

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也，可勝者、攻也。守則不足，攻則有餘。善守者藏於九地之下，善攻者，動於九天之上，故能自保而全勝也。

Master Sun said: Of old, those who excelled in warfare first made themselves unconquerable and thereby awaited the enemy's conquerability.<sup>24</sup> Unconquerability lies within oneself; conquerability lies within the enemy. Therefore, those who excel in warfare make themselves unconquerable, but are unable to ensure the enemy's conquerability. Therefore it is said, "victory can be known, but it cannot be forced." Unconquerability lies in defense; conquerability lies in the offense. If one's strength is

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<sup>23</sup> See chapter 6.

<sup>24</sup> A moment in which the enemy could be conquered.

insufficient, guard. If one's strength is in surplus, attack.<sup>25</sup> Those who excel in defending conceal themselves under the deepest earth; those who excel in attacking move from the highest heavens. Therefore, they are able to protect themselves and attain complete victory.

見勝不過眾人之所知，非善之善者也；戰勝而天下曰善，非善之善者也，故舉秋毫不為多力，見日月不為明目，聞雷霆不為聰耳。古之所謂善戰者，勝於易勝者也。故善戰者之勝也，無智名，無勇功，故其戰勝不忒。不忒者，其所措必勝，勝已敗者也。

To see a victory does not exceed that which the common people understand, it is not the most excellent excellence. To win a battle so that all under the heavens say "excellent" is not the most excellent excellence. Therefore, to lift up the tip of an autumn hair is not exerting much strength. To see the sun and the moon is not exercising acute eyes. To hear the clap of thunder is not invoking adept ears. Of old, those who were considered to excel in warfare won through easy victories. Hence, the victories of those who excel in warfare are unknown, nameless, and without brave offensives. Thus, their victories in battle are unerring. 'Unerring' as they pursued inevitable victory and conquered those who had already lost.

故善戰者，立於不敗之地，而不失敵之敗也。是故勝兵先勝而後求戰，敗兵先戰而後求勝。善用兵者，修道而保法，故能為勝敗之政。

Therefore, those who excel in warfare stand on undefeatable ground and do not lose sight of the enemy's defeat. It is thus that the victorious army first triumphs then seeks warfare whereas the losing army first engages in warfare and then seeks to triumph. Those who excel in using troops cultivate *dao* (道) and protect military regulations. Thus, they are able to govern victory and defeat.

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<sup>25</sup> This can be read, and has been read, numerous ways. Furthermore, two different versions of the Chinese exist, wherein the characters have been reversed. This could also suggest that when guarding one will have a surplus of strength and that one will be stretched thin when attacking—in some contexts this makes sense. In others, it does not. For example, the US military is presently attacking and stretched thin in Iraq—their potency insufficient. But likewise, continually paying millions and billions to guard obscure events like the President’s second inauguration is a form of defense that exhausts us as well. The very fact that the Chinese is reversed in different texts does itself suggest that all these possibilities have worth in different contexts and should be fully explored thereby.

兵法：一曰度，二曰量，三曰數，四曰稱，五曰勝。地生度，度生量，量生數，數生稱，稱生勝。

Of the regulations of war, the first is called “measurement,”<sup>26</sup> the second is called “amount,”<sup>27</sup> the third is called “numbers,”<sup>28</sup> the fourth is called “the weight of potency,”<sup>29</sup> and the fifth is called “victory.” The ground gives birth to measurement, measurement gives birth to amount, amount gives birth to numbers, numbers give birth to the weight of potency, the weight of potency gives birth to victory.<sup>30</sup>

故勝兵若以鎰稱銖，敗兵若以銖稱鎰。

Therefore, the triumphant army is as if taking a kilogram and weighing it against an ounce, and the losing army is as if taking an ounce and weighing it against a kilogram.<sup>31</sup>

稱勝者戰民也，若決積水於千仞之谿者，形也。

The weight of the victorious, when engaging their troops in battle, is as if obstructed waters bursting throughout a rivulet a thousand yards in height—this is [the potency of] formation (*xing* 形).



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<sup>26</sup> The ‘measurement’ of the distance of the land to be transversed.

<sup>27</sup> The ‘amount’ of food or supplies necessary to support the troops on such a journey.

<sup>28</sup> The ‘numbers’ of the troops in one’s army,

<sup>29</sup> Literally just “weight.”

<sup>30</sup> The point is that the distance of earth that must be traveled tells one how much food is necessary to transverse such a distance. The amount of food and supplies being available will dictate how many men can be supported across such a distance. The number of men available will affect who has the greater weight of power. Whoever has the greater weight of power will triumph.

<sup>31</sup> According to the *Shuhaiwenyuan*, approximate guesses for these measurements are as follows: an *yi* (鎰) is 24 *liang* (兩) and a *zhu* (銖) is 1/24<sup>th</sup> of a *liang* (兩).

## 《 勢 篇 》

### Chapter Five

#### On *Shi* (勢):

孫子曰：凡治眾如治寡，分數是也；鬥眾如鬥寡，形名是也；三軍之眾，可使必<sup>32</sup>受敵而無敗者，奇正是也；兵之所加，如以礮投卵者，虛實是也。

Master Sun said: In general, to command a multitude as if only a few lies in dividing up their number. To enter into combat with one’s multitude as if entering combat with only a few lies in the art of flags and banners.<sup>33</sup> To have one’s army receive the total force of the enemy without suffering defeat lies in the orthodox (*zheng* 正) and unorthodox (*qi* 奇).<sup>34</sup> To have one’s troops attack as if taking a whetstone and flinging it upon eggs lies in the vacant (*xu* 虛) and the substantial (*shi* 實).

凡戰者，以正合，以奇勝。故善出奇者，無窮如天地，不竭如江河。終而復始，日月是也；死而復生，四時是也。

Generally, when one engages in battle, one takes the orthodox (*zheng* 正) as one meets the enemy and then invokes the unorthodox (*qi* 奇) to win.<sup>35</sup> Thus, those who excel at bringing forth the unorthodox (*qi* 奇) are as limitless as the heavens and the earth and as inexhaustible as the rivers and seas.<sup>36</sup> They end and begin anew, just as the sun and moon. They die and are reborn, just as the four seasons.

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<sup>32</sup> Reading 畢.

<sup>33</sup> Following Ames and others.

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<sup>34</sup>This has been translated as “surprise” and “straightforward operations” (Ames, p. 119). The next passage will provide some clarity.

<sup>35</sup> Hence, the point becomes that one generally meets the enemy with something straightforward, normal, and seemingly obvious, and then attains victory through unusual, strange, and surprising tactics.

<sup>36</sup> This version literally says, “rivers and lakes,” but another version says “rivers and seas” and I feel it sounds more auspicious.

聲不過五，五聲之變，不可勝聽也；色不過五，五色之變，不可勝觀也；味不過五，五味之變，不可勝嘗<sup>㊦</sup>也；戰勢不過奇正，奇正之變，不可勝窮也。奇正相生，如環之無端，孰能窮之？

Sounds do not exceed five in number, but the changes of the five sounds are unable to exhaust<sup>37</sup> the hearing. Colors do not exceed five in number, but the changes of the colors are unable to exhaust the sight. Flavors do not exceed five in number, but the changes of the flavors are unable to exhaust the taste. The *shi* of warfare does not exceed the unorthodox (*qi* 奇) and orthodox (*zheng* 正), yet the changes of unorthodoxy (*qi* 奇) and orthodoxy (*zheng* 正) are unable to exhaust the exhaustible. The unorthodox (*qi* 奇) and orthodoxy (*zheng* 正) are unable to exhaust the exhaustible. The unorthodox (*qi* 奇) and orthodoxy (*zheng* 正) are unable to exhaust the exhaustible. The velocity of violent water arrives at making boulders drift by way of its *shi* (勢). The velocity of a bird arrives at destroying and breaking [its prey’s neck] by way of timing. Thus, of those who excel in warfare, their *shi* (勢) is narrow and their timing is short; their *shi* (勢) is like a crossbow and their timing—the trigger.

紛紛紜紜，鬥亂而不可亂也；渾渾沌沌，形圓而不可敗也。

Amongst the confusing disorder, they struggle through chaos but cannot be thrown into chaos. Amongst the murky obscurity, their positioning (*xing* 形) is complete<sup>38</sup> and they cannot lose.

亂生於治，怯生於勇，弱生於彊。

From order, chaos is born; from bravery, fear; and from strength, weakness.

治亂，數也；勇怯，勢也；彊弱，形也。

Order and chaos are a matter of numbers. Bravery and fear are a matter of *shi* (勢). Strength and weakness are a matter of positioning (*xing* 形).

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<sup>37</sup>Reading “勝” as “盡”

<sup>38</sup> Literally, “round” or “full.”

故善動敵者，形之，敵必從之；予之，敵必取之。以利動之，以卒待之。

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Therefore, those who excel in moving the enemy force him into a formation (*xing* 形),<sup>39</sup> and the enemy inevitably follows them; granting things to him, the enemy inevitably snatches them. They use profitable things to move him and troops to await him.

故善戰者，求之於勢，不責於人，故能擇人而任勢。任勢者，其戰人也，如轉木石。木石之性：安則靜，危則動，方則止，圓則行。故善戰人之勢，如轉圓石於千仞之山者勢也。

Therefore, those who excel in warfare seek it<sup>40</sup> through *shi* (勢) and do not hold it as the duty of their men. Thus, they are able to choose men and take upon the duties of *shi* (勢). As to they who are entrusted with *shi* (勢), their warriors are as if rolling trees and boulders. The nature of trees and boulders is to be stable when level, and to move when precipitous; if square, they stop; if round, they go. Therefore, the *shi* (勢) of those persons who excel in warfare is as if the *shi* (勢) of round boulders rolling off a mountain thousands of feet high.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Literally, they “*xing* (形) him.” This character could indicate, as many have said, that they make the enemy “appear,” “render them apparent,” or, “force them to show themselves.” I, however, have chosen to remain consistent to the term *xing* (形) as it is generally used throughout Sunzi, and I believe it makes great sense that one who excels in warfare must be able to force the enemy into assuming fixed formations or positions that may be manipulated thereby.

<sup>40</sup> This is what it literally says. One might consider the ‘it’ as “victory,” “excellence in warfare,” or perhaps a general statement that those who excel at warfare always seek in a *shi*-ful way any time they seek anything in war.

<sup>41</sup> My translation omits the final comma and assumes an implicit possessive. Take this line from Chapter four as an example: 故善戰者之勝也. The standard alternative reading is to read this *shi* as an emphatic reiteration, e.g.: “*shi* indeed,” or, “this is *shi*.”

《虛實篇》

### Chapter Six

On Vacancy and Substantiality:<sup>42</sup>

孫子曰：凡先處戰地而待敵者、佚，後處戰地而趨戰者、勞。

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Master Sun said: Generally, those who first set upon the battlefield and await the enemy will be well rested. Those who last set upon the battlefield and hastily engage in warfare will be overworked.

故善戰者，致人而不致於人。能使敵人自至者，利之也；能使敵人不得至者，害之也。故敵佚能勞之，飽能飢之，安能動之。出其所必趨。行千里而不勞者，行於無人之地也；攻而必取者，攻其所不守也；守而必固者，守其所不攻也。故善攻者，敵不知其所守；善守者，敵不知其所攻。

Therefore, those who excel in warfare manipulate the enemy but are not manipulated by him. They are able to make the enemy arrive of his own accord by baiting him with advantages. They are able to make the enemy unable to procure arrival by harming him. Thus, in order to overwork an enemy at rest, famish an enemy in satiety, and move an enemy at ease, one goes where he must invariably hasten.<sup>43</sup> Those who travel one thousand *li* while not becoming overworked accomplish such by traveling through terrain bereft of adversaries. To attack and inevitably seize the enemy lies in attacking that which he is unable to defend. To defend and be inevitably firm lies in guarding that which he is unable to be attack. Therefore, for those who excel in attacking, their enemies do not know what to defend. For those who excel in defending, their enemies do not know what to attack.

微乎微乎，至於無形；神乎神乎，至於無聲；故能為敵之司命。

Subtle! Subtle! They arrive at having no formation (*wuxing* 無形). Mysterious! Mysterious! They arrive at the point of having no sound. Hence, they are able to become the governor of the enemy's life and fortune (*ming* 命).

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<sup>42</sup> Many people translate these terms as “strong and weak points.” The point is simple: strike where the opponent is devoid (*xi*) of preparations or strength and only let him attack the substantial (*shi*).

<sup>43</sup> This is one reading that would suggest one must move in a way that forces the enemy to hastily pursue at the price of his well being. Another potential reading is, such things lie in “bringing out that of his which will invariably hasten him.” Put simply, if he has some quality that can be exploited to make him hurried, one can turn the tables on the enemy thereby.

進而不可禦者，衝其虛也；退而不可追者，速而不可及也。故我欲戰，敵雖高壘深溝，不得不與我戰者，攻其所必救也；我不欲戰，畫地而守之，敵不得與我戰者，乖其所之也。

To advance so that the enemy is unable to defend lies in bursting through the enemy's vacancies (*xu* 虛). To flee and not be caught lies in rapidity and being unreachable. Therefore, if I wish to fight, though the enemy's ramparts are high and moats are deep, he is unable to not engage in warfare with me—I attack that which he must inevitably save. If I do not wish to fight, I draw a line across the ground and defend it, and the enemy is unable to engage in combat with me—I redirect him from where he is heading.

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故形人而我無形，則我專而敵分；我專為一，敵分為十，是以十擊一也；則我眾而敵寡，能以眾擊寡者，則吾之所與戰者約矣。

Therefore, I lead the enemy into a formation (*xing* 形) while we are without a formation (*wuxing* 無形). Thus we are assembled and the enemy is divided. We are assembled into one and the enemy is divided into ten. This thereby lets us use ten to attack his one. Therefore, we use many to attack the enemy's few. If we can take many to attack the enemy's few, then anyone who engages with us in battle will buckle.

吾所與戰之地不可知，不可知，則敵所備者多；敵所備者多，則吾所與戰者寡矣。故備前則後寡，備後則前寡，備左則右寡，備右則左寡，無所不備，則無所不寡。寡者，備人者也；眾者，使人備己者也。故知戰之地，知戰之日，則可千里而會戰；不知戰地，不知戰日，則左不能救右，右不能救左，前不能救後，後不能救前，而況遠者數十里，近者數里乎！

The place where we will engage in warfare cannot be known. As it cannot be known, the places the enemy will prepare are many. The places the enemy will prepare being many, the places where we will engage them are few. Therefore, if they are prepared in the front, they will be deficient in the back. If they are prepared in the back, they will be deficient in the front. If they are prepared to the left, they will be deficient to the right. If they are prepared to the right, they will be deficient to the left. If there is nowhere in which they are not prepared, they will be deficient everywhere. The deficient are those who prepare against others. The abundant are those who make others prepare against them. Therefore, if one understands the site of battle and the day of combat, he can march one thousand *li* and fight. If one does not understand the site of battle and does not know the day of combat, then his left will be unable to save his right, his right unable to save his left, his front unable to save his rear, his rear unable to save his front, and all the more so if they are tens of *li* or even just a few *li* apart.

以吾度之，越人之兵雖多，亦奚益於勝哉？故曰：勝可為也；敵雖眾，可使無鬥。

By my measurements, the troops of Yue may be many, but how is this to be taken as an advantage to conquest? Therefore, it is said, "victory can be forced." For while the enemy is abundant, we can make him not have the opportunity to struggle with us.

故策之而知得失之計，作之而知動靜之理，形之而知死生之地，角之而知有餘不足之處。

Therefore, plan against the enemy and understand the calculations of what can be gained and lost. Provoke him and discern the patterns of his movements. Force him into a position (*xing* 形) and understand the surrounding terrain's killing zones and grounds of vitality. Carefully consider and comprehend the enemy's spots of surplus (strength) and insufficiency.

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故形兵之極，至於無形；無形則深間不能窺，智者不能謀。因形而措勝於眾，眾不能知；人皆知我所以勝之形，而莫知吾所以制勝之形。故其戰勝不復，而應形於無窮。

Therefore, when formations (*xing* 形) in warfare reach their utmost, they arrive at having no formation (*wuxing* 無形). By not having a formation (*wuxing* 無形), deep spies will not be able to spy anything out and the wise will be unable to plan. When [one is changing] in accord (*yin* 因) with formation (*xing* 形) and displays it before the masses, the masses are unable to understand. Everyone understands the formations (*xing* 形) by which I have won, but none understand how I governed the formations (*xing* 形) of victory. Therefore, a victory in warfare cannot be repeated, yet apt formations (*xing* 形) are inexhaustible.<sup>44</sup>

夫兵形象水，水之形，避高而趨下，兵之勝，避實而擊虛，水因地而制行，兵因敵而制勝。

Now, the formations (*xing* 形) of war are like water. The formations (*xing* 形) of water avoid the high and hasten downward. [Likewise,] the victory<sup>45</sup> of warfare lies in avoiding

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<sup>44</sup>This appears to literally say, “yet the formations are apt ad infinitum.”

<sup>45</sup> Other versions say the “formation” (*xing* 形) of troops.

the substantial (*shi* 實) and attacking the vacant (*xu* 虛). Water comports (*yin* 因) with the land and this dictates its flow. War comports (*yin* 因) with the enemy and this dictates success.<sup>46</sup>

故兵無常勢，無恆形。能因敵變化而取勝者，謂之神。故五行無常勝，四時無常位，日有短長，月有死生。

Therefore, war does not have a constant *shi* (*shi* 勢), nor a permanent formation (*xing* 形). Comporting (*yin* 因) with the changes of the opponent and seizing victory—this is what is called being “mysterious.” Hence, the five elements do not have a constant victor,<sup>47</sup> the four seasons do not have a constant station,<sup>48</sup> days are short and long, and the moon wanes and waxes.

### 《軍爭篇》

#### Chapter Seven

#### On Military Contest:

孫子曰：凡用兵之法，將受命於君，合軍聚眾，交和而舍，莫難於軍爭。軍爭之難者，以迂為直，以患為利。故迂其途而誘之以利，後人發，先人至，此知迂直之計者也。

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Master Sun said: In general, when utilizing the methods of war, the general receives his orders from the sovereign. He unites the army and gathers the masses together. He then sets up his camp juxtaposed to the enemy. Yet nothing is as difficult as engaging two armies in military contention; the difficulty of armed contention lies in taking the circuitous (*yu* 迂) and making straight (*zhi* 直) and taking the calamitous and making it profitable (*li* 利). Thus, we contort (*yu* 迂) the enemy's path and entice him with profits

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<sup>46</sup> All throughout this paragraph 'war' can be read as 'soldiers' to provide slightly different results and insights.

<sup>47</sup> The five phases (*wuxing* 五行): metal (金), wood (木), water (水), fire (火), and soil (地). It was believed that these elements interacted cyclically, each besting or generating one another. In this case they say there is no constant victor, and hence, the cycle they have in mind is probably the following: Fire melts metal, metal cuts down wood, wood(en) tools dug up soil, soil dammed up or absorbed water, and water put out fire.

<sup>48</sup> *Id est*, it is not always winter, it is not always spring, et cetera.

(*li* 利). (Thus, while) we depart behind the enemy, we arrive in front of him.<sup>49</sup> This is to understand the stratagems of the circuitous (*yu* 迂) and straight (*zhi* 直).

故軍爭為利，軍爭為危。舉軍而爭利則不及，委軍而爭利則輜重捐。是故卷甲而趨，日夜不處，倍道兼行，百里而爭利，則擒三將軍，勁者先，罷者後，其法十一而至；五十里而爭利，則蹶Ⓢ上軍將，其法半至；三十里而爭利，則三分之二至。是故軍無輜重則亡，無糧食則亡，無委積則亡。

Therefore, engaging in military contest can be profitable and it can be dangerous. If you equip the entire army to compete for some advantage (*li* 利), they will not arrive. If you abandon your equipment and compete for some advantage (*li* 利), their armor and stores will be lost. For this reason, if you roll up the armor and hasten, not stopping day or night, doubling the amount of road (道) you can travel at once, and travel one hundred *li* and competed for some advantage (*li* 利), then the general of your armies will be seized, the strong soldiers would be first to arrive, and the weary would arrive last. With this method, only one out of ten would arrive in time. If you traveled fifty *li* and competed for some advantage (*li* 利), then the front of the army and its commander would be lost. With this method, only half of your forces would arrive. If you traveled thirty and competed for some advantage (*li* 利), then two-thirds of your soldiers would arrive. For this reason, if an army is without its armor and stores; it will perish; if it is without its stores of food, it will perish; and if it is without its stores of goods, it will perish.

故不知諸侯之謀者，不能豫交；不知山林險阻沮澤之形者，不能行軍；不用鄉導者，不能得地利。

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Thus, if one does not know the plans of the various nobles, one will not be able to form alliances with them. If you do know the formations (*xing* 形) of the mountains and forests, the narrow passages and obstructions, and the marshes and swamps, you will not be able to dispatch your army. If you do not use a local guide, you will be unable to attain the advantages (*li* 利) of the terrain.

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<sup>49</sup>This seems to be a popular saying in the *taijiquan* (太極拳) circles. The idea is that you only emit force after your opponent already has, though your force is the first to land. Here, however, its usage appears to be very contextual.

故兵以詐立、以利動、以分合為變者也。

Therefore, the soldier uses deception to dictate his standing, uses advantage (*li* 利) to dictate his movement, and uses dividing and uniting to change.

故其疾如風，其徐如林；侵掠如火，不動如山，難知如陰，動如雷霆。掠鄉分眾，廓地分利，懸權而動。

Thus, his velocity is as if the wind; his calm is as if the trees; encroaching and raiding like fire, unmoving as the mountains, as difficult to understand as the shadows, he moves like the thunder and the lightning. When raiding the countryside, divide your troops. When expanding your territory, divide its advantages (*li*) amongst your troops. Hang the weight of potency (*quan* 權) in your favor, then make your move.<sup>50</sup>

先知迂直之計者勝，此軍爭之法也。

The one who first understands the stratagems of the circuitous and the straight will triumph.<sup>51</sup>

The *Junzheng*<sup>52</sup> says, “if words cannot be mutually heard, then make use of gongs and drums. If gazes cannot be mutually met, then make use of banners and flags.” Now gongs, drums, banners, and flags are that which is used to unify the soldiers’ ears and eyes. With the soldiers as an indistinguishable one, the brave will not advance alone and

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<sup>50</sup> 懸權而動 *Xuan quan er dong*. This is an interesting passage in that, first of all, it is metaphorical in that *quan* (權) or ‘weight,’ can also mean ‘power,’ ‘influence,’ or more literally, ‘the weight of potency’ that is possessed by either side. So to ‘hang the weights’ (*xuan quan* 懸權) could mean more than its literal sense. This phrase is often interpreted as stating that one should weigh out the advantages and disadvantages at hand. More literally, one ‘hangs the weights’ by measuring out such advantages and disadvantages, and



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then moves in accords with such calculations. Now, one can understand this in the literal fashion of “measuring by hanging weights,” or one can understand this in a more metaphorical sense as I have. My translation is deviant. I am suggesting that one ‘hangs’ (*xuan* 權) the ‘weights’ (*quan* 權) in one’s favor, and moves thereby. As we say in English, one “tilts the scales in his favor.”

<sup>51</sup> Notice how it says “the one who **first** understands.” It is possible that the meaning is narrower, suggesting that only if one first understands the stratagems of the circuitous and straight that are currently at play in any situation, will one triumph. Rather than, the first to understand such stratagems in the general.

<sup>52</sup> *Junzheng* (軍政)—Assumed to be an ancient text on the “troop governance.”

the fearful will not retreat alone.<sup>53</sup> Thus, in nighttime combat, use fire and drums. In daytime combat, use banners and flags. They are that which is used to alter the people’s ears and eyes.

故三軍可奪氣，將軍可奪心。是故朝氣銳，晝氣惰，暮氣歸。故善用兵者，避其銳氣，擊其惰歸，此治氣者也；以治待亂，以靜待譁，此治心者也；以近待遠，以佚待勞，以飽待饑，此治力者也；無邀正正之旗，勿擊堂堂之陳，此治變者也。

Thus, the army’s morale (*qi* 氣) can be taken away and the commander’s heart lost. For this reason, morale (*qi* 氣) is sharp in the morning, lazy midday, and morale (*qi* 氣) returns at dusk. Therefore, those who excel in using troops, avoid the sharp morale (*qi* 氣) of the morning, and strike as it is lazy or returning. This is the way to handle morale (*qi* 氣).<sup>54</sup> Use orderliness to await the chaotic, and tranquility to await the clamorous. This is the way to manage one’s heart-and-mind; take the near to await the afar; take restfulness to await the toiled; take satiety to await the starved; this is the way to govern strength. Do not obstruct an army with well-ordered banners; do not attack an army of broad formations; this is the way to govern change.

故用兵之法：高陵勿向，背丘勿逆，佯北勿從，銳卒勿攻，餌兵勿食，歸師勿遏，圍師遺闕，窮寇勿迫，此用兵之法也。

Therefore, when utilizing the methods of war, do not face an enemy on a high hill; do not go against an enemy to whose back there is a hill; if the enemy faints retreat, do not follow; do not attack his elite soldiers; do not let your soldiers eat the enemy’s bait; do not obstruct an army that is returning home; when surrounding the enemy, leave him an opening; do not press an enemy whose options are exhausted; these are the methods of using troops.

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<sup>53</sup> One might ask, why in the world would one want one’s “fearful to not retreat alone?” But I think the point is that if a retreat is in fact mandatory, the troops will only retreat properly if they are united. If they are not united, when the retreat is called, they will not respond to it in the same fashion, nor will all of them

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realize the retreat has been signaled. It would be the height of disaster to go into a retreat, having all of the cowards withdraw, and leaving all of your brave soldiers behind to die.

<sup>54</sup> It is possible that part of this has to do with actual medical beliefs as to the functions of *qi* (氣). It is also quite possible that it is merely indicating that people's morale is fresh when they have just woken, midday makes them a bit lazy, and as night approaches they tire.

知吾卒之可以擊，而不知敵之不可擊，勝之半也；知敵之可擊，而不知吾卒之不可以擊，勝之半也；知敵之可擊，知吾卒之可以擊，而不知地形之不可以戰，勝之半也。

To know our troops' ability to attack, though not knowing the enemy's ability to attack, is to have half a victory. To know the enemy's ability to attack, though to not know our troops' inability to attack, is to have half a victory. To know the enemy's ability and our troops' ability to attack, though to not know that the formation (*xing* 形) of the terrain is one in which one cannot combat, is to have half a victory.

故知兵者，動而不迷，舉而不窮。

Thus, those who understand war act and are not perplexed, they move and are inexhaustible.

故曰：知彼知己，勝乃不殆；知天知地，勝乃可全。

Therefore it is said, "know the other and know yourself, then victory will not be imperiled. Know the climate and know the terrain, then the victory can be complete.

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《九變篇》

Chapter Eight

On the Nine Changes:<sup>55</sup>

孫子曰：凡用兵之法，將受命於君，合軍聚眾。圯地無舍，衢地合交，絕地無留，圍地則謀，死地則戰。塗有所不由，軍有所不擊，城有所不攻，地有所不爭，君命有所不受。

Master Sun said: Generally, when employing the methods of war, the general receives his orders from the sovereign, he unites the troops and gathers the masses. He does not reside on destructive ground, he enters into diplomacy on the terrain of neighboring states, he does not remain on cut off ground, on encompassed ground he plans, and on the grounds of life and death he fights.

故將通於九變之利者，知用兵矣；將不通於九變之利者，雖知地形，不能得地之利矣；治兵不知九變之術，雖知五利，不能得人之用矣。

Therefore, if the general understands the advantages of the nine changes, he will understand the use of soldiers. If the general does not understand these nine changes, though he may understand the formations (*xing* 形) of the terrain,<sup>56</sup> he will not be able to attain advantages that terrain provides. To govern troops and not understand the art of the nine changes, though they may understand the five advantages,<sup>57</sup> they will be unable to tap the usefulness of their men.

是故智者之慮，必雜於利害；雜於利而務可信也，雜於害，而患可解也。是故屈諸侯者以害，役諸侯者以業，趨諸侯者以利。

For this reason the considerations of the wise must be all-encompassing in regards to (possible) benefits and harms. Being all-encompassing in regards to benefits, he can do his duty in a trustworthy manner. Being all-encompassing in regards to harms, he can cut

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<sup>55</sup>“Changes” (變) makes a lot of sense to me, but it is possible I have been corrupted by the way Chinese discuss change when discussing *Baguazhang* (八卦掌). It is for this reason that I recommend reading it as “methods,” “techniques,” “strategies,” et cetera. As we discuss it in *Baguazhang*, “*bian*” connotes changing or changes that are made in accordance with the circumstances at play in a situation. Hence, the chapter might be discussing manners in which to aptly change.

<sup>56</sup> This might also mean “the formations at play on the terrain.”

<sup>57</sup> Not sure what this refers to. It may mean the five types of ‘ground/terrain’ mentioned in the chapter’s beginning.

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off catastrophe. Forasmuch as this, to bend external neighbors to your will, use the harmful. To make them work for you, position them in roles of servitude. To haste them, use the beneficial.

故用兵之法，無恃其不來，恃吾有以待也；無恃其不攻，恃吾有所不可攻也。

Therefore, when using military methods, do not rely on the enemy's not coming, rely on having that by which we can await him. Do not rely on his not attacking, rely on our having that which cannot be attacked.

故將有五危：必死，可殺也，必生，可虜也，忿速，可侮也，廉潔，可辱也，愛民，可煩。凡此五者，將之過也，用兵之災也。覆軍殺將，必以五危，不可不察也。

Thus, there are five dangers perils of the common general: If he believes he will certainly die, he can be killed: If he believes he will certainly live, he can be captured: If he is quick to infuriate, he can be insulted: If he is uncorrupt and gallant, he can be defiled: If he loves the people, he can be worried. These five common, perilous occurrences are the faults of generals and catastrophes of military usage. A routed army and a slaughtered general invariably follow from these five perils—they cannot be left unexamined.

#### 《行軍篇》

#### Chapter Nine

#### On Dispatching Troops:

孫子曰：凡處軍、相敵，絕山依谷，視生處高，戰隆無登，此處山之軍也。

Master Sun said: Generally, when placing troops and examining the enemy:

Upon transversing mountains stick to the valleys; face the sunny side of the terrain and dwell on high ground; when fighting on high ground, do not be the one ascending towards the enemy; such is an army placed on mountainous terrain.

絕水必遠水；客絕水而來，勿迎之於水內，令半濟而擊之，利；欲戰者，無附於水而迎客；視生處高，無迎水流，此處水上之軍也。

Upon crossing water, one must (*bi* 必) then distance oneself from that water. If the enemy is crossing the water and coming to you, do not meet him in the middle of the waves; allow half his army to cross and then attack him—this is advantageous (*li* 利). If you wish to fight the enemy, do not stick close to the water to meet the enemy; face the sunny side of the terrain and dwell on high ground, do not meet him amongst the flowing waters; such is an army placed on aquatic terrain.

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絕斥澤，惟亟去無留；若交軍於斥澤之中，必依水草，而背眾樹，此處斥澤之軍也。

Upon crossing salt marshes, merely hasten and go without leaving any behind. If you engage armies in the midst of a salt marsh, you must (*bi* 必) stick to the waters and grass with your back facing the forests; such is an army placed at salt marshes.

平陸處易，而右背高，前死后生，此處平陸之軍也。

Upon flatlands, place yourself on readily transversable ground, your primary force with their backs to high ground, and with the killing zone in front and vital grounds in back; such is an army placed upon flatlands.

凡此四軍之利，黃帝之所以勝四帝也。

These four advantages (*li* 利) allowed for The Yellow Emperor's conquest of four emperors.<sup>58</sup>

凡軍好高而惡下，貴陽而賤陰，養生而處實，軍無百疾，是謂必勝。

Generally, armies love the high ground and detest the low; they value the sunny ground, and depreciate the shadowy; on grounds that nurture life and are abundant in material, the troops will be without a multiplicity of illnesses; this is called, “inevitable (*bi* 必) victory.”

丘陵堤防，必處其陽，而右背之。此兵之利，地之助也。上雨，水沫至，欲涉者，待其定也。

Upon hills and embankments, you must (*bi* 必) place yourself on the sunny side and with your main force's back to the high ground. These advantages (*li* 利) of war are assistances the terrain provides. When it rains on high and waters rush forth, should you desire to cross them, await their settling.

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<sup>58</sup>The Yellow Emperor is a mystical ancestor of the Chinese. The “four emperors” are commonly supposed to be rulers of kingdoms to the four directions neighboring the Yellow Emperor's domain. (See *Xinyi Sunziduben*. Publisher: Sanmin, Taiwan, 2003. pg. 60.)

凡地有絕澗、天井、天牢、天羅、天陷、天隙，必亟去之，勿近也。吾遠之，敵近之；吾迎之，敵背之。軍旁有險阻、潢井、林木、葭葦、鬱蒼者，必謹覆索之，此伏姦之所也。

Generally with terrain, when passing through small mountain streams, well systems, enclosures, entangling growth, quagmires, or schisms, do not stay close to them. We distance ourselves from them and force the enemy near them; we face them and force our

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enemy's back to them. If the army has its side to narrow or obstructing ground, ponds and wells, forests, reeds, or overgrown vegetation, one must (*bi* 必) cautiously and repeatedly search them—this is where hidden treachery abides.

敵近而靜者，恃其險也；<sup>59</sup>

If the enemy is close and tranquil,  
He is relying upon terrain through which it is difficult to pass.

遠而挑戰者，欲人之進也；

If he is distant though trying to stir up warfare,  
He desires his adversary's advance.

其所居易者，利也。

Their dwelling upon the transversable ground gives them the advantage (*li* 利).

眾樹動者，來也；

If there is movement amongst the trees,  
The enemy comes.

眾草多障者，疑也；

If there are many obstacles amongst the grasses,  
Doubt is wreaked.

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<sup>59</sup> I am breaking into verse here, first, because Ames does such, and second, the grammatical structure here lends itself quite easily to this formulation. Finally, it just looks better in translation this way.

鳥起者，伏也；

If the birds fly off,  
He awaits us.

獸駭者，覆也；

If the animals startle,  
It is an ambush.

塵高而銳者，車來也；

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If the dust rises rapidly,  
Chariots are coming.

卑而廣者，徒來也；

If it is low and broad,  
His infantry are coming.

散而條達者，薪來也；

If it is dispersed and extends in small ribbons,  
His firewood squads are coming.

少而往來者，營軍也。

If a small bit comes and goes,  
He is building up his camp.

辭卑而益備者，進也；

If his ministers are humble, though he continues to prepare for war,  
He will advance.

辭強而進驅者，退也；

If he is strong, though advances in a hurried gallop,  
He will be forced to retreat.

輕車先出，居其側者，陣也；

If his light chariots are the first to go out and they dwell to his flanks,  
He is enacting a formation.

無約而請和者，謀也；

If he is not bound, though asks for peace,  
He is planning.

奔走而陳兵者，期也；

If he is rapidly moving, though with troops in formation,  
He is securing the time of battle.

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半進半退者，誘也。

If half his troops are advancing and half retreating,  
It is enticement.

杖而立者，飢也；

If his soldiers lean on their weapons to stand,  
They hunger.

汲而先飲者，渴也；

If the water-bearers first drink themselves,  
They thirst.

見利而不進者，勞也；

If they see advantage (*li* 利), though they do not advance,  
They have been overworked.

鳥集者，虛也；

If birds gather,  
There is a vacancy.

夜呼者，恐也；

If there are screams at night,  
The enemy is afraid.

軍擾者，將不重也；

If the enemy's army is agitated,  
The commander is not respected.

旌旗動者，亂也；

If his banners and flags are moving about,  
He is in chaos.

吏怒者，倦也；

If his officials are angry,  
The army will be exhausted.



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殺馬肉食者，軍無糧；

If they are killing horses and eating their meat,  
Then his troops have no provisions.

懸缶而不返其舍者，窮寇也；

When they do not spend the time to hang up their glasses, or return to camp,  
They are an impoverished enemy.

諄諄翕翕，徐言入入者，失眾也；

If their commander, quietly and in low spirits, speaks hesitantly with his men,  
They will lose the support of their troops.

數賞者，窘也；

If he gives out too many rewards,  
He will be in financial straits.

數罰者，困也；

If he gives out too many punishments,  
He will be hard pressed.

先暴而后畏其眾者，不精之至也；

If he is first abrupt with his troops and then afterwards fears them,  
Such is the height of numbskullary.

來委謝者，欲休息也。

If the enemy sends persons who apologize,  
They desire the cessation of warfare and peace.

兵怒而相迎，久而不合，又不相去，必謹察之。

If an enraged enemy faces off with you, but for a long time neither engages you nor  
leaves, you must cautiously examine him.

兵非貴益多也，惟無武進，足以併力、料敵、取人而已。夫惟無慮而易敵者，必擒  
於人。

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In war, one does not value the benefits of many troops. If one merely does not get caught up in a violent state and advance, it is enough to unite one's strength, assess the enemy's condition, and seize the hearts of one's men. Now, only those who do not think ahead and consider the enemy an easy conquest will inevitably (*bi* 必) be seized by the enemy.

卒未親附而罰之，則不服，不服則難用也。卒已親附而罰不行，則不可用也。故令之以文，齊之以武，是謂必取。令素行以教其民，則民服；令素不行以教其民，則民不服。令素行者，與眾相得也。

If you do not have close relations with your troops and you punish them, they will not listen to you. If they do not listen, they will be difficult to use. If the troops are already in close relations to you, if you fail to enforce punishments, you will be unable to make use of them. Thus, command them by nurturing relationships and put them in order through military discipline; this is called, “inevitably (*bi* 必) seizing their hearts.” If commands are effected in the training of one's people, then such people will be obedient. If commands are frequently not effected in the training of one's people, the people will not obey. With commands continually being effected, one will attain a mutual relationship between the commander and his men.

### 《地形篇》

#### Chapter Ten

On the Formations (*xing* 形) of Terrain:

孫子曰：地形有通者，有掛者，有支者，有隘者，有險者，有遠者。

Master Sun said: Amongst the formations (*xing* 形) of terrain there is the freely transversable, the in-hooking, that wherein both sides are checked, the narrow, the precipitous, and the distant.

我可以往，彼可以來，曰通；通形者，先居高陽，利糧道，以戰則利。

If the terrain allows for us to go and the enemy to come it is called, “freely transversable.” As for transversable form (*xing* 形) of ground, the one who first dwells in the high sunshine and has the *dao* (道) of advantages (*li* 利) and provisions will have the advantage (*li* 利) should he take to warfare.

可以往，難以返，曰挂；挂形者，敵無備，出而勝之；敵若有備，出而不勝，難以返，不利。

If one can go into it though have great difficult returning, this is terrain called. “in-hooking.” As for the form (*xing* 形) of ground that hooks one inward, if the enemy has

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no preparations, go out and defeat him. If the enemy seems as if he has preparations, going out one may lose and then have difficulty returning—such is not advantageous (*li* 利).

我出而不利，彼出而不利；曰支；支形者，敵雖利我，我無出也，引而去之，令敵半出而擊之，利。

If either we nor the enemy can go out into it and attain an advantage, it is called, “mutually en-checking ground.” As for this form (*xing* 形) of ground that places both sides in mutual check, even should the enemy bait us (*li* 利), we will not go after him. If we can attract him and get him to leave this terrain, making half of the enemy come out, should we attack him we will have the advantage (*li* 利).

隘形者，我先居之，必盈之以待敵；若敵先居之，盈而勿從，不盈而從之。

As for the narrow form (*xing* 形) of terrain, if we are the first to dwell in it, we must (*bi* 必) fill it up and await the enemy thereby. If the enemy is the first to dwell in it, and if he has filled in the area, do not pursue him. If he has not filled in the area, pursue him.

險形者，我先居之，必居高陽以待敵；若敵先居之，引而去之，勿從也。

As for the precipitous form (*xing* 形) of ground, should we be the first to inhabit it, we must (*bi* 必) dwell in the high and bright area to await the enemy. If the enemy is the first to inhabit it, we must tempt him and force him to leave it, though we must not follow.

遠形者，勢均，難以挑戰，戰而不利。

As for the distant form (*xing* 形) of ground, if the *shi* (勢) of both sides is equal, it will be difficult to instigate combat, and such combat would be disadvantageous (“not *li* 利”).

凡此六者，地之道也，將之至任，不可不察也。

Generally, these six formations are the *dao* (道) of the terrain. They are the general’s utmost duty and they cannot be left unexamined.

故兵有走者，有弛者，有陷者，有崩者，有亂者，有北者。凡此六者，非天地之災，將之過也。

Thus, in warfare there is flight,<sup>60</sup> slackness, ensnarement, eradication, upheaval, and rout. These are not calamities of the heavens, but the errors of the general.

夫勢均，以一擊十，曰走；

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Now if the *shi* (勢) of both sides is equal, to take one to attack ten is called, “(inducing) flight.”

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<sup>60</sup> It is possible this refers to deserters, i.e.: “there is desertion.”

卒強吏弱，曰弛；

If the troops are strong though the officials weak, this is called, “(inducing) slackness.”

吏強卒弱，曰陷；

If the officials are strong though the troops weak, this is called, “ensnarement.”

大吏怒而不服，遇敵懟而自戰，將不知其能，曰崩；

If your prominent officials are furious and not following orders, and upon meeting the enemy they become resentful and fight amongst themselves so that the general no longer knows the capabilities of his army, this is called, “eradication.”

將弱不嚴，教道不明，吏卒無常，陳兵縱橫，曰亂；

If the general is weak and not strict, his instructions and *dao* (道) unenlightened, his officials and troops will have no consistence and the formations of his troops will be loose and unrestrained. This is called, “upheaval.”

將不能料敵，以少合眾，以弱擊強，兵無選鋒，曰北。

If the general is unable to comprehend the enemy and he takes a small force to engage a large one, a weak force to strike a strong one, or his troops are without a vanguard, this is called, “(inducing) rout.”

凡此六者，敗之道也，將之至任，不可不察也。

Generally, these six errors encompass the *dao* (道) of defeat and (to avoid them) is the utmost duty of the general. They cannot be left unexamined.

夫地形者，兵之助也。料敵制勝，計險易遠近，上將之道也。知此而用戰者必勝，不知此而用戰者必敗。

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Now, the formation (*xing* 形) of the terrain is an ally of the army. To comprehend the enemy and govern victory, to calculate difficulty and proximity in battle, such is the *dao* (道) of superior generals. Those who know this and utilize warfare will inevitably (*bi* 敗) win, whereas those who do not know this will inevitably (*bi* 敗) lose.

故戰道必勝，主曰無戰，必戰可也；戰道不勝，主曰必戰，無戰可也。

Therefore, if the *dao* (道) of combat will inevitably (*bi* 必) lead to victory,<sup>61</sup> though the ruler says, “do not fight,” inevitably (*bi* 必) combat is permissible. If the *dao* (道) of combat will not lead to victory, though the ruler says, “you must (*bi* 必) fight,” to not fight is permissible.

故進不求名，退不避罪，唯民是保，而利合於主，國之寶也。視卒如嬰兒，故可與之赴深谿；視卒如愛子，故可與之俱死。厚而不能使，愛而不能令，亂而不能治，譬若驕子，不可用也。

Thus, (the general who) advances and does not think of fame, who retreats and does not avoid punishment, who only focuses upon protecting his people and uniting that which is advantageous (*li* 利) to his ruler, such a person is the treasure of the state. Looking after his troops as if they were infants, they will go with him into the deep(est) ravines. Looking after his troops as he would love his son, he can die together with them. If he is very good to them though he is unable to manipulate them, if he loves them though he is unable to command them, then they will be in chaos and ungovernable. (As such) they are like stuck up children and cannot be used.

知吾卒之可以擊，而不知敵之不可擊，勝之半也；知敵之可擊，而不知吾卒之不可以擊，勝之半也；知敵之可擊，知吾卒之可以擊，而不知地形之不可以戰，勝之半也。

To know our troops' ability to attack, though not knowing the enemy's ability to attack, is to have half a victory. To know the enemy's ability to attack, though to not know our troops inability to attack, is to have half a victory. To know the enemy's ability and our troops' ability to attack, though to not know that the formation (*xing* 形) of the terrain is one in which one cannot combat, is to have half a victory.

故知兵者，動而不迷，舉而不窮。

Thus, those who understand war act and are not perplexed, they move and are inexhaustible.

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<sup>61</sup> This literally suggests that the *dao* (道), “the *dao* (道) of combat,” is a victorious *dao* (道).

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故曰：知彼知己，勝乃不殆；知天知地，勝乃可全。

Therefore it is said, “know the other and know yourself, then victory will not be imperiled. Know the climate and know the terrain, then the victory can be complete.

《九地篇》

Chapter Eleven

On the Nine Types of Terrain:

孫子曰：用兵之法，有散地，有輕地，有爭地，有交地，有衢地，有重地，有圯地，有圍地，有死地。

Master Sun said: In the methods of employing war, one has dispersed terrain, shallow terrain, contested terrain, intersecting terrain, terrain where boundaries of power are delimited, crucial terrain, terrain of ruin, encompassed terrain, and terrain that is a killing zone.

諸侯自戰其地，為散地。

When the feudal lords battle one another for their terrain, this becomes terrain upon which their forces are dispersed.

入人之地不深者，為輕地。

When one's entrance into another's terrain is not deeply, this is shallow terrain.

我得則利，彼得亦利者，為爭地。

If occupation of the terrain is advantageous (*li* 利) to both us and others, this is contested terrain.

我可以往，彼可以來者，為交地。

If it is terrain upon which others can come and we can go, it is intersecting terrain.

諸侯之地三屬，先至而得天下眾者，為衢地。

Terrain upon which the borders of numerous noble lords intersect, where the first who arrives shall secure the multitudes of the world to one's cause, is terrain where boundaries of power are delimited.

入人之地深，背城邑多者，為重地。

When one's entrance into another's terrain is deep and one has many walled cities of the enemy at his back, this becomes crucial terrain.

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山林、險阻、沮澤，凡難行之道者，為圯地。

Mountains and forests, narrow passages and obstacles, swamps and marshes, all of these make the roads (道) of travel difficult.<sup>62</sup> They are the terrain of ruin.

所從由入者隘，所從歸者迂，彼寡可以擊我之眾者，為圍地。

Ground upon which our means of entry are very limited, whereupon our return is circuitous, wherein the other's few can strike our many, is encompassed terrain.

疾戰則存，不疾戰則亡者，為死地。

Ground wherein warfare of rapidity grants survival and dallied combat brings death, such is terrain that is a killing zone.

是故散地則無戰，輕地則無止，爭地則無攻，交地則無絕，衢地則合交，重地則掠，圯地則行，圍地則謀，死地則戰。

It is for this reason that if the ground is dispersed, do not fight; If it is shallow terrain, do not halt; If it is contested terrain, do not be the one to launch an attack;<sup>63</sup> if the terrain hosts intersecting paths, do not allow yourself to be cut off; if it is terrain where boundaries of power are delimited, form alliances; if the terrain is crucial, effect rapine; If the terrain can usher in ruin, depart it at once; if the terrain is encompassed, plan; if the terrain is a killing zone, unleash hell.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Or, "all of these make the *dao* (道) of maneuvering difficult."

<sup>63</sup> Judging by the description of 'contested ground,' I do not deem this part to imply one should not fight over or within such terrain, but rather, as the terrain offers advantages to both sides, one should merely not initiate attack. If one refrains from going on the offensive, the enemy shall be forced to abandon their advantageous positions to attack you in your advantageous positions.

<sup>64</sup> Literally this passage reads, "if the terrain is a killing zone, war/fight." I have favored this line of Maximus, "unleash hell," for the concept of a complete and total exercise of combative capabilities seems to be implied. Note the list above. In every circumstance one is to avoid expending whatever force possible except for this last one. This is consistent with classical Chinese thought. Cultivate your potency to the highest level possible and avoid expending it whenever possible. Only when there is no choice whatsoever does one release this potency. And, if one has been saving it up for just such an occasion, the release of potency will be overwhelming.

所謂古之善用兵者，能使敵人前後不相及，眾寡不相恃，貴賤不相救，上下不相收，卒離而不集，兵合而不齊。合於利而動，不合於利而止。敢問：“敵眾整而將來，待之若何？”曰：“先奪其所愛，則聽矣。”

Those who were said to excel at utilizing warfare in ancient days could manipulate the enemy's front and rear so that they could not reach one another in time; they could make

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the enemy's many unable to support his few and the few unable to support the many;<sup>65</sup> they could make the worthy and lowly valued units unable to save one another; they could render those higher and lower in command unable receive one another's orders; they could make the enemy's forces, when disjoined, unable to gather; and when the enemy's forces did unite, they were unable to be placed in order. If it comported with advantage (*li* 利), such persons would move; If it did not comport with advantage (*li* 利), they would stop. If one ventured to ask, "if the enemy's numbers are great and he is well-ordered while advancing towards us, how shall we await him as such?" They would say, "first seize that which he loves, then he shall submit in accordance."

兵之情主速、乘人之不及、由不虞之道、攻其所不戒也。

Among the conditions of war, chief are speed, taking advantage of that which is out of the enemy's reach, relying on the *dao* (道) of surprise,<sup>66</sup> and attacking that which he does not guard.<sup>67</sup>

凡為客之道：深入則專，主人不克。掠於饒野，三軍足食。謹養而勿勞，併氣積力，運兵計謀，為不可測。投之無所往，死且不北。死，焉不得士人盡力。兵士甚陷則不懼，無所往則固，深入則拘，不得已則鬥。

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<sup>65</sup> The point is that such commanders would make the individual soldiers unable to function in an helpful fashion to shape the success of the army as a whole and the whole unable to function in a way that would allow for the functionality and success of the individual elements of that army.

<sup>66</sup> This could also imply, "relying on those paths that the enemy has not planned for."

<sup>67</sup> I have changed the punctuation here from the standard interpretation. The point is, rather than valuing speed as of the chief importance as one can use it to do these other things, speed as well as these other things is of the chief importance. I have decided upon this reading as it seems silly to me that things such as, "attacking what they do not guard," hardly seem to be logically concomitant with speed's importance. However, the other reading also makes some sense, as speed is an attribute and the other three are actual strategies. If, however, the traditional interpretation is correct, it might be necessary to re-evaluate the common reading of this line in light of another line from chapter 6: 進而不可禦者，衝其虛也；退而不可追者，速而不可及也。 I translated this line as, "to advance so that the enemy is unable to defend lies in bursting through the enemy's vacancies (*xu* 虛). To flee and not be caught lies in rapidity and being unreachable." If the standard interpretation of this section is correct, however, we might wish to read this above line as using rapidity so as to "take advantage of the enemy's inability to reach us," perhaps referring to retreat.

The general *dao* (道) of being a guest uninvited in the enemy's terrain is as follows: Enter deeply and then unite your forces, the host's men will not be able to subdue you thereby. Through depredation of their most fecund fields, your army will have enough to eat. Cautiously nourish your men and do not overwork them. Unite your *qi* (氣),<sup>68</sup> accumulate your strength, move your troops, calculate your plans. The enemy will not be about to comprehend you thereby. Throw your troops into a place where they cannot leave. In a position of death, they will not retreat. When on the brink of death, how can you not attain your soldiers' utmost force? Though they are completely ensnared, they are not afraid. If they have nowhere to go, they will be unbending. Entering deeply into



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the enemy's domain, they are bound to one another. If they have no other options, they shall contend with the enemy.

是故其兵不修而戒，不求而得，不約而親，不令而信。禁祥去疑，至死無所之。

For this reason, without being corrected our troops will be on guard. Not searching for the way out, they are able to attain it. Not having demands placed upon them, they are able to participate intimately within their ranks. Without orders forced upon them, they are trustworthy. Ban all talk of luck or fortune, dispense with the soldiers' suspicions, and even arriving at death they shall not flee.

吾士無餘財，非惡貨也；無餘命，非惡壽也。令發之日，士卒坐者涕沾襟，偃臥者淚交頤。投之無所往者，諸、蒞之勇也。

My soldiers do not have a surplus of assets, but they do not hate material goods; they do not have a surplus of life, but they do not hate longevity; On the day you send them into battle, the soldiers sitting down will have tears that are moistening their collars and the soldiers lying and resting will have tears that pass across their cheeks. Yet, if you throw them into a place where there is no retreat, they shall have the bravery of Zhu and Gui.<sup>69</sup>

故善用兵者，譬如率然。率然者，常山之蛇也。擊其首則尾至，擊其尾則首至，擊其中則首尾俱至。敢問：“兵可使如率然乎？”曰：“可。”夫吳人與越人相惡也，當其同舟而濟，遇風，其相救也，如左右手。是故方馬埋輪，未足恃也。齊勇如一，政之道也，剛柔皆得，地之理也。故善用兵者，攜手若使一人，不得已也。

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<sup>iii</sup> Commentators often read this as “military morale.” I do not think it is a particularly good reading here. I think *qi* should be read as “force” here. Force as in one's striking ability. Hence, the whole army prepares to strike in harmonious accord and stores upon their strength so as to make the assault overwhelming. 併氣積力。

<sup>iii</sup> Both of these men are discussed in the *Shiji* for their bravery and their total lack of concern for their own lives as their only thoughts were the success of their respective tasks. Those who excel at utilizing warfare can be likened to the shuairan. The shuairan is a snake of Heng Mountain. If you strike at its head, then its tail arrives. If strike at its tail, then it head arrives. If you attack its middle, both its head and tail arrive. If we dare to ask, “can troops be manipulated to be as if a shuairan?”—We may say, “they can.” Now, people of Wu and Yue hate one another. Yet, if they are both in the same boat crossing a river and they encountered a strong wind, they would both strive to save one another as the left hand assists the right. For this reason one has never been able to sufficiently depend on binding the horses and burying the wheels of the chariots. To have orderly bravery as if in a total union, such is the *dao* (道) of governing (soldiers).<sup>70</sup> The hard and soft are both attained through the patterns (*li* 理) of the terrain. Therefore, one who excels in utilizing warfare leads one's troops by the hand as if manipulating but a single person—they have no alternatives.

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將軍之事：靜以幽，正以治。能愚士卒之耳目，使之無知。易其事，革其謀，使人無識。易其居，迂其途，使人不得慮。帥與之期，如登高而去其梯。帥與之深入諸侯之地，而發其機，焚舟破釜。若驅群羊，驅而往，驅而來，莫知所之。聚三軍之眾，投之於險，此謂將軍之事也。九地之變，屈伸之力，人情之理，不可不察也。

As for the military affairs of the general, by being tranquil he is abstruse; by being upright his men are well-governed. He can render the ears and eyes of the soldiers daft and manipulate them into having no understanding. He changes his affairs and modifies his plans, thus people are manipulated into having no knowledge. He changes his place of dwelling and makes use of circuitous paths, thus he manipulates people so that they are unable to acquire foresight. The moment he leads them into battle it as if they ascend to a great height and then he discards their ladder. He enters deeply, leading his men into the terrain of the various nobles and releases their trigger.<sup>71</sup> He burns the ships of his men and destroys their pots. Like driving forward a herd of sheep, he drives them and makes them go, and he drives them and makes them come—no one understands where they are

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<sup>70</sup>The point is that it is not enough to place one's soldiers in a position where retreat is impossible. One must also unite them. Hence, the men of Wu and Yue, though on the same boat, would have proved useless had they no wind to unite them.

<sup>71</sup>Think of the trigger of a crossbow. Also note chapter 5: "The velocity of violent water arrives at making boulders drift by way of its *shi* (勢). The velocity of a bird arrives at destroying and breaking (its prey's neck) by way of timing. Thus, of those who excel in warfare, their *shi* (勢) is narrow and their timing is short; their *shi* (勢) is like a crossbow and their timing—the trigger." Hence, the general manipulates his men into an ideal situation, a situation wherein they have no choice but to struggle for their lives. By relying on the tendencies (*shi* 勢) at play in the world he is able to shift the situation to his advantage and poise his troops for an onslaught—they are drawn tight like a crossbow and can only advance forward with speed and force. The commander awaits the opportune moment, and then he releases the trigger. The tendencies of the world turning to his advantage, his force's might is overwhelming. going. He gathers the masses of troops and throws them into *xian* (險);<sup>72</sup> this is what is called, "the military affairs of the general." The changes (*bian* 變) of the nine terrains, the strengths of bending and stretching, the patterns (*li* 理) at play in the circumstances of men,<sup>73</sup> they cannot be left unexamined.

凡為客之道：深則專，淺則散。去國越境而師者，絕地也；四達者，衢地也；入深者，重地也；入淺者，輕地也；背固前隘者，圍地也；無所往者，死地也。是故散地，吾將一其志；輕地，吾將使之屬；爭地，吾將趨其後；交地，吾將謹其守；衢地，吾將固其結；重地，吾將繼其食；圯地，吾將進其途；圍地，吾將塞其闕；死地，吾將示之以不活。故兵之情：圍則御，不得已則鬥，過則從。

In general, when effecting the *dao* (道) of an uninvited guest: If you enter deeply into enemy territory, the troops will be united; if you enter shallowly, then your soldiers will be dispersed. If you leave your state, cross its borders, and use troops therein, it is cut off ground. Where one passes into other states in all four directions, this is terrain where boundaries of power are delimited. When you enter deeply, you are on crucial ground.

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When your entrance is not deep, you are on shallow ground. When your back is to unyielding terrain and the terrain to your front is limited in maneuverability, this is encompassed terrain. When there is nowhere for your troops to go, this is terrain that is a killing zone. It is for this reason that on dispersed terrain I make the troops of one will. On shallow ground, I manipulate them into being linked together. On contested ground, I would speed up the advancement of the troops in the rear. On intersecting terrain, I would be cautious about our defenses. On terrain where boundaries of power are delimited, I would solidify our alliances. On crucial ground, I would establish a continual source of provisions. On terrain of ruin, I would advance along the road (as quickly as possible). On encompassed terrain, I close off its entrances. On killing grounds, I show my troops that I have no considerations of surviving. Thus, it is the condition of soldiers that if they are surrounded they will defend themselves. They have no choice but to struggle with the enemy. Having passed into this terrain, they will listen.

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<sup>72</sup>I have noted this instance because the character could be translated as “danger,” “difficulty,” or a state of “narrowness” in which the soldiers have no options but to advance.

<sup>73</sup> This could very easily mean the “circumstances of the enemy.” Yet, here it makes sense to be more encompassing with the translation.

Ames appears to be reading the *qing* (情) as *xing* (性) whereas I am translating *qing* (情) as *shikuang* (事況) or *qingkuang* (情況). What this means in plain English is that Ames is translating this line as “human character” (p. 159). He thus takes the passage to be describing the importance of examining the natural psychology of humans. This reading makes sense if you consider that, upon placing them in a position wherein retreat is impossible, you will force them to perform effectively. Nevertheless, my reading also makes sense, as one must look at the way things are in the overall situations surrounding both one’s soldiers and the enemy’s. In fact, the two readings may well have great overlap that has been forgotten in recent times.

是故不知諸侯之謀者，不能預交。不知山林、險阻、沮澤之形者，不能行軍。不用鄉導，不能得地利。四五者，不知一，非霸、王之兵也。夫霸、王之兵，伐大國，則其眾不得聚；威加於敵，則其交不得合。

Forasmuch as this, those who do not understand the plans of the various nobles are unable to form alliances in advance. Those who do not understand the formations (*xing* 形) of mountains and forests, narrow passes and obstacles, and swamps and marshes are unable to send forth troops upon them. Those who do not use guides in the enemy’s countryside are unable to attain the advantageous (*li* 利) ground. Of these matters, if the army does not understand one of them, it is not the army of a tyrant or a king. When a hegemon or king attacks a large state, he does not allow the enemy’s forces to gather. When he presses his prestige upon enemies, they will not be able to attain harmonious alliances.

是故不爭天下之交，不養天下之權，信己之私，威加於敵，則其城可拔，其國可隳。施無法之賞，懸無政之令，犯三軍之眾，若使一人。犯之以事，勿告以言。犯之以利，勿告以害。投之亡地然後存，陷之死地然後生。夫眾陷於害，然後能為勝敗。

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Insofar as this, do not bother to contend for the alliances of the world. Do not bother nourishing your worldly potency (*quan* 權). If you are true to your own affairs and cast prestige upon the enemy, then his city can be taken and his kingdom can be torn. Administer impossible awards and posit impossible orders, then you can move the soldiers of your army as if manipulating a single man. Move them by duty, but do not tell them with words. Move them with advantage (*li* 利), but do not tell them of the dangers. Throw them upon ground of extinction and they will survive. Ensnare them within killing zones and they will live. Now, if your troops fall into danger, only then can they turn defeat into victory.<sup>74</sup>

故為兵之事，在於順佯敵之意，并敵一向，千里殺將，是謂巧能成事者也。

Thus, the affairs of effecting war lie in scrutinizing in accordance with the enemy's intent. If you concentrate what you have into the single direction of the enemy, you can kill his general at a thousand *li*. This is called, "completing one's affairs through ingenuity and capability."

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<sup>74</sup> I can also read this as, "only then can they win or lose."

是故政舉之日，夷關折符，無通其使；勵於廊廟之上，以誅其事。敵人開闔，必亟入之，先其所愛，微與之期。踐墨隨敵，以決戰事。是故始如處女，敵人開戶，後如脫兔，敵不及拒。

Forasmuch as this, the day one orders the deployment of troops, block, close, and break any paths, do not allow their diplomatic envoys to pass about. Hone your skills within the hallways of a temple and discuss such affairs. Accord with the enemy's opening and closing so as to rapidly enter therein. Be the first to reach that which the enemy loves and do not impart your schedule to others. Accord with the enemy's situation and decide your military affairs thereby. Forasmuch as this, start as if a virgin at the enemy's door, and when he opens it, move as if an escaping rabbit—he will not reach you in time to resist.

《火攻篇》

Chapter Twelve

Incendiary Attack:

孫子曰：凡火攻有五：一曰火人，二曰火積，三曰火輜，四曰火庫，五曰火隊。行火必有因，因必素具。發火有時，起火有日。時者，天之燥也；日者，月在箕壁翼軫也，凡此四宿者，風起之日也。

Master Sun said: In general, inflammatory attack has five methods; the first is called, "igniting personal"; the second is called, "igniting stores"; the third is called, "igniting equipment and vehicles"; the fourth is called, "igniting enemy depositories"; the fifth is

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called, “igniting enemy thoroughfares.”<sup>75</sup> To wreak fire you must (*bi* 必) have flammable material or that which can ignite (*yin* 因), this material (*yin* 因) must be ever available.<sup>76</sup> There are times when fire best breaks out. There are days when fire best rises. Such seasons are when the weather is dry. Such days are when the moon is at the constellations of the Winnow Basket, the Wall, the Wings, and the Carriage Crossboard. Generally, these four constellations indicate days wherein the winds will rise.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Such paths could be enemy supply lines, lines of communication, and so forth. The idea is to cut off the passages by means of fire.

<sup>76</sup> An interesting sentence. The ‘yin’ (因) here literally suggests that you must have something from which fire may “follow.” And this thing that allows fire to ‘follow’ must be constantly available.

<sup>77</sup> Apparently an ancient Chinese astronomical belief.

凡火攻，必因五火之變而應之：火發於內，則早應之於外；火發其兵靜，待而勿攻，極其火央，可從而從之，不可從而止；火可發於外，無待於內，以時發之；火發上風，無攻下風；晝風久☉，夜風止。凡軍必知有五火之變，以數守之。

Generally with inflaming attack, one must (*bi* 必) follow (*yin* 因) the changes of these five methods of employing fire and respond to them accordingly. If fire breaks out within the enemy, respond to it as early as possible to the outside.<sup>78</sup> If a fire breaks out and the enemy’s troops remain tranquil, wait and do not attack. Allow the fire to reach its exhaustion and if it can be followed, advance. If it cannot be followed, stop. If fire can be ignited to the outside, do not wait on the inside,<sup>79</sup> take the opportune moment to light the fire. If fire breaks out upwind, do not attack downwind. If during the day the winds are great, at night the winds will cease.<sup>80</sup> Generally, the army must understand the changes of these five methods of employing fire, and make use of situational calculations and await them.

故以火佐攻者明，以水佐攻者強；水可以絕，不可以奪。夫戰勝攻取而不修其功者、凶，命曰費留。

Therefore, those who use fire to assist an offensive are enlightened. Those who use water to assist an offensive are strong. Water can be used to cut off the enemy, but cannot be used to seize him.<sup>81</sup> Now, to triumph in combat and to attack and seize the enemy but fail to build upon such an accomplishment is disaster. Its name is called, “expending whatever remains.”

故曰：明主慮之，良將修之。非利不動，非得不用，非危不戰。

Thus it is said, “the enlightened ruler plans things out and the good general builds upon such plans. If the situation is not advantageous (*li* 利), do not move. If things are not

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attainable, do not employ anything to acquire them. If the situation is not perilous, do not fight.”

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<sup>78</sup> When the center of the enemy camp set alit or bombed, and confusion and chaos abounds, with the enemy trying to respond to the internal matter as rapidly as possible, trying to assess the damage and respond as they can, it becomes the perfect opportunity to attack the enemy from the outside.

<sup>79</sup> This could also mean, “do not await an internal response.” But frankly, I do not see the reasoning at play here.

<sup>80</sup> I do not know if this is an archaic scientific view or if something else is supposed to be implicit here.

<sup>81</sup> There may be an implicit line that follows: “whereas fire can.”

主不可以怒而興師，將不可以愠而致戰；合於利而動，不合於利而止。怒可以復喜，愠可以復悅，亡國不可以復存，死者不可以復生。故明主慎之，良將警之，此安國全軍之道也。

The sovereign cannot take to fury and raise an army thereby. The general cannot take to anger and enter into combat thereby. If it comports with advantage (*li* 利), then move. If it does not, stop. Fury can be restored to enjoyment; anger can be restored to delight; (however,) a kingdom perished cannot be restored to vitality and those dead cannot be restored to life. Therefore, enlightened rulers treat warfare carefully and good generals treat it with vigilance. This is the *dao* (道) of maintaining the country’s safety and the army’s preservation.

《用間篇》

Chapter Thirteen

On the Use of Spies:<sup>82</sup>

孫子曰：凡興師十萬，出征千里，百姓之費，公家之奉，日費千金，內外騷動，怠於道路，不得操事者七十萬家，相守數年，以爭一日之勝，而愛爵祿百金，不知敵之情者，不仁之至也，非人之將也，非主之佐也，非勝之主也。

Master Sun said: In general, when raising an army of one hundred thousand and sending it forth one thousand *li*, the expenses of the common people and offerings of the noble families will reach the daily expense of one thousand pieces of gold. With the interior and exterior of the state tottering about, exhausted subjects along all the roadways (道), with seven hundred thousand families unable to tend their agricultural affairs, and two sides mutually engaged for numerous years just to struggle on a single day of victory,

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This could also apply to cutting off the enemy’s supplies or communications, and to seizing such supplies.

<sup>82</sup> It has been brought to my attention that the reading of ‘*jian*’ (間) as ‘*jiandie*’ 間諜, “spy,” looks suspiciously like Modern and not Classical Chinese. I would like to point out that I do not take this as such a huge deal as it is very easy to see how the regular meaning ‘*jian*,’ “the space between, “an interval or opening,” evolved into this specific reading for agents engaged in espionage. Mainly, spies are those who are “in between.” Or, if we read it verbally, spies are those who are “in between-ing.” I will, however,

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translate ‘jian’ as “spy” throughout the remainder of this text on the ground that it sounds better and that ‘espionage’ is exactly what they are talking about. It is worth noting, however, throughout much of this chapter, ‘jian’ can also be easily read as a verb. Hence, rather than discussing ‘spies’ Sunzi could be said to be discussing ‘spy craft’ or ‘espionage.’ However, more than likely, this is a great example of why Chinese does not always need to adhere to the noun/verb distinction and the richness of the reading is expanded as a result.

though having a general who covets rank and the salary of a hundred gold pieces while not understanding the enemy’s situation, such is the utmost of the inhumane.<sup>83</sup> He is no general of men. He is no assistant of the lord. He is no ruler of victory.

故明君賢將，所以動而勝人，成功出於眾者，先知也。

Thus, enlightened lords and worthy generals conquer the enemy at each movement and have accomplishments standing out from the multitude for they have prescience.

先知者，不可取於鬼神，不可象於事，不可驗於度，必取於人知敵之情者也。

Prescience cannot be seized from ghosts or spirits; it cannot be generalized from worldly affairs; it cannot be tested through measurements; it must be grasped from those persons who know the enemy’s situation.

故用間有五：有鄉間，有內間，有反間，有死間，有生間。五間俱起，莫知其道，是謂神紀，人君之寶也。鄉間者，因其鄉人而用之；內間者，因其官人而用之；反間者，因其敵間而用之；死間者，為誑事於外，令吾間知之，而傳於敵也；生間者，反報也。

Therefore, there are five ways of using spies: You have agents of the countryside, internal agents, double agents, sacrificial agents,<sup>84</sup> and survivors. When all five agents are active, no one can know their *dao* (道). These paths have been deemed: “the mysterious threads.”<sup>85</sup> They are the treasures of the sovereign. For agents of the countryside, rely

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<sup>84</sup> I prefer “sacrificial” to “expendable.” My rationale is that expendable spies are those whom one can afford to lose. Sacrificial spies, however, are spies that are intentionally sent to their deaths. I realize there is some overlap, but the distinction lies in the fact that any spy can serve as a sacrificial spy even if such a spy is not particularly expendable. “Expendable” then appears to convey more of a value judgment about a particular spy’s worth, whereas “sacrificial” denotes that spy’s function. There is a clear difference between saying, “we can afford to let him die by the enemy’s hands,” and, “his mission is to go to his death by spreading falsehoods.”

<sup>85</sup> I believe ‘threads’ (ji 紀) here indicates patterns (li 理) that are presently at play in the world. It has been stated in a glamorous sort of fashion, but I would suggest that such ‘threads’ are understood to be concrete patterns of the world. These are real patterns or paths occurring throughout the world. These particular ‘threads’ are merely the most mysterious and subtle as they are the paths of the spy. Likewise, in Laozi chapter 14, there is talk of the “threads of *dao*” (*daoji* 道紀), which looks surprisingly familiar to the modern Chinese ‘*daoli*’ (道理) or, “*dao*-patterns”, commonly translated as “truth,” “principle,” “sense,” and so forth. If something “has *daoli*” (*you daoli* 有道理) we will often say, “it has some truth to it,” or, it “makes sense,” or, “it is reasonable.” These common translations notwithstanding, the Chinese actually implies that if something ‘has *daoli*’ its patterns (*li* 理) are present within the *daos* (道) of the world. Hence, the claim becomes a strictly empirical one. Just as, ‘*ni de hua meiyou daoli*’ (你的話沒有道理), “what you are saying is total nonsense (or, totally unreasonable),” really implies there are no

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such patterns within the *dao* of anything that could support your claim. Hence, the claim is of a concrete nature.

upon (*vin* 因) the countryside people of the enemy and use them. For internal agents, rely upon the officials of the enemy and use them. For double agents, rely upon the enemy's spies and use them. For sacrificial agents, effect false affairs to the outside and allow our spies to know of them and transmit such information to the enemy.<sup>86</sup> As for survivors, they return and report to us.

故三軍之親，莫親於間，賞莫厚於間，事莫密於間。非聖智不能用間，非仁義不能使間，非微妙不能得間之實。微哉，微哉，無所不用間也。間事未發而先聞者，間 # 【聞】與所告者皆死。

Thus, of the intimacies of the army to the lord, none are more intimate than spies, none have thicker rewards than spies, and none have affairs that are more secretive than spies. Those without sagacious understanding cannot use spies. Those who are improper (*yi* 義) and unconcerned with human relationships (*ren* 仁) cannot manipulate spies. Those who are not subtle and clever cannot attain the truth from spies. Subtle! Subtle! There is no place wherein spies cannot be used. Before the affairs of spies are transmitted, as to those who hear of them along with all those whom they tell—all must die.

凡軍之所欲擊，城之所欲攻，人之所欲殺，必先知其守將、左右、謁者、門者、舍人之姓名，令吾間必索知之。

Generally, when you have an army you wish to attack, a city you wish to assail, or persons you wish to assassinate, you must first know the names of the defending general, his assistance and advisors, the guards at the gates, and the city's sentries. We thus order our spies to necessarily exact such knowledge.

必索敵人之間來間我者，因而利之，導而舍之，故反間可得而用也；因是而知之，故鄉間、內間可得而使也；因是而知之，故死間為誑事，可使告敵；因是而知之，故生間可使如期。

It is necessary to search out the spies of the enemy who have come to spy on us. We can make them dependable by bribing them and then guide them back to implant them in the enemy's midst. Thus, we can attain double agents and make use of them. Depending upon these and understanding them will allow us to acquire and manipulate agents of the countryside and internal agents. Depending upon these and understanding them we can thus beget sacrificial spies to carry out deceptive affairs and such spies can be

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<sup>86</sup> The point is to feign certain types of actions, let the spy think that such actions are actually real, and then let him go back to the enemy to report the information. He is 'sacrificial,' as the enemy, upon realizing the information is false, will most certainly kill him.



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manipulated to report falsehoods to the enemy. By relying upon them and understanding them the surviving spies can thus be manipulated as scheduled.

五間之事，主必知之，知之必在於反間，故反間不可不厚也。

As to the affairs of these five spies, the lord must understand them, and understanding them inevitable lies in understanding the double agent. Thus, the double agent cannot be left unvalued.

昔殷之興也，伊摯在夏；周之興也，呂牙在殷 # 【商】。故明君賢將，能以上智為間者，必成大功。此兵之要，三軍之所恃而動也。

In former times, the ascension of Xing of Yin was due to Yinzhi of the Xia. The ascension of Zhou of the Xing was due to Luya of the Shang. Thus, enlightened and worthy generals who can take the most brilliant persons and make them into spies will certainly cultivate great results. These (spies) are an important factor in warfare. They are that upon which the army relies and bases its action.

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