

Book Review - The Art of War by Sun Tzu
Reviewed by Walter S. Zapotoczny

The Art of War is a Chinese military treatise written during the 6th century BC by Sun Tzu. Composed of 13 chapters, each of which is devoted to one aspect of warfare, it has long been praised as the classic work on military strategies and tactics of its time. As one of the oldest and most famous studies of strategy, it has had a huge influence on military planning, business tactics, and beyond. First translated into a European language in 1782 by French Jesuit Jean Joseph Marie Amiot, it had been credited with influencing Napoleon, the German General Staff, and even the planning of Operation Desert Storm. Leaders as diverse as Mao Zedong, Vo Nguyen Giap, and General Douglas MacArthur have claimed to have drawn inspiration from the work.

Sun Tzu's first essay titled, "Estimates," begins with the premise that the art of war is vital to the state. He writes there are five constants to weigh in ones deliberations: Moral influence, weather, terrain, command, and doctrine. He writes that all warfare is based on deception. Sun Tzu suggested that war must be fought: In the shortest possible time; at the least possible cost in lives and effort; with infliction on the enemy of the fewest possible casualties.

"Waging War" is the title of the second essay. These themes include being swift in war; never prolong war because it is expensive. Proximity of the army determines the cost. If prices go up, the poor lose. Therefore, use the enemy's resources. Victory is the main object of war. If war is long delayed, weapons are blunted and morale depressed. There has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited.

Sun Tzu's third essay is titled "Offensive Strategy" and states that to capture is better than destruction. Take the country whole and intact. To win without fighting and to break the enemies resistance without the shedding of blood is excellence. The most brilliant scheme is to: recoil the enemies plans, isolate him from his allies, attack in the field the worst is to besiege walled cities because this leads to a prolonged war.

Essay four, "Dispositions," states that one may know how to conquer without being able to do it; knowledge must be coupled with wisdom. One must be skilled in defense to hide and be skilled in offense to attack and burst forth. A clever fighter not only wins but also excels at winning with ease. He wins battles by making no mistakes. Get the power of knowledge to control success.

"Energy" is the title of Sun Tzu's fifth essay. In general, he says control of a large force is the same as a few; it is merely a question of dividing their numbers, managing, and organization. Using a large army requires better, sophisticated communications. Keep the army unshaken while under attack by direct and indirect methods. Know the science of weak points and strong.

In essay six, "Weaknesses and Strengths," he writes whoever is first in the field is strong. Therefore, the clever combatant imposes his will on the enemy. By holding out baits, we can cause the enemy to approach and inflict damage, while the enemy cannot approach. If the enemy rests, harass him; if he has food, starve him out. Be swiftly on the move to places you are least expected. An army can march great distances if there is no enemy in the territory. You can be assured of victory if you attack undefended places.

Essay seven is titled "Maneuver." The general receives his commands from the sovereign. Having collected an army and concentrated his forces, he must blend all and harmonize. Then comes the extreme difficulty of tactical maneuvering. Maneuvering with an army is advantageous, with an undisciplined mob, disastrous. If you send a fully equipped army to snatch a single advantage, the chance is you will be too late. To push the men in forced marches will suffer lose.

"The Nine Variables" is the title of essay eight. In war, the general receives his commands, collects the army, and concentrates his forces. In difficult country, Sun Tzu writes, do not encamp. Sometimes unite with allies; there are roads, which must not be followed, army's that must not be attacked. Understand the advantages of variations of tactics. Hence, the wise leader considers advantages and

disadvantages and blends the two. Let the unknown and undetermined be factored into our calculations. Be flexible. If we are in the midst of difficulties always be ready to seize an advantage.

In essay nine, "Marches," Sun Tzu gives advice on moving troops. Pass quickly over mountains; keep in the neighborhood of valleys. Camp in high places facing the sun. After crossing a river, get far away from it. All army's should prefer high ground and sunny places.

If you are careful and camp on hard ground and thus keep the army healthy, you are on the road to victory. Always take the sunny side of the hill.

"Terrain" is the tenth essay in the book. Sun Tzu classifies ground according to its nature. The six kinds of terrain: accessible ground, entangling ground, temporizing ground, narrow passes, precipitous heights, positions at a great distance from the enemy are discussed along with six calamities and six ways of countering defeat.

Essay eleven, "The Nine Variables of Ground," deals with ground in respect to the employment of troops and may be classified as dispersive, frontier, key, communication, focal, serious, difficult, encircled, and death. He describes each in detail.

In essay twelve, "Attack by Fire," Sun Tzu describes various methods of attacking by fire and the medium used to employ fire. Fire cannot always be used but equipment for setting fires must always be on hand. Be prepared for everything. Enlightened rulers deliberate about plans, and good generals execute them. If you cannot succeed, do not use troops. If you are not in danger, do not fight.

The final essay, "Employment of Secret Agents," deals with the use of spies and secret agents. Sun Tzu writes spies are a most important element of war for upon them depends the army's ability to move.

Written in China over two thousand years ago, Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* provides the first known attempt to formulate a rational basis for the planning and conduct of military operations. His essays contain principles acted upon by such twentieth-century Chinese generals as Mao Zedong. The book is translated by the late Samuel B. Griffith, the author of *The Battle for Guadalcanal* and the editor and translator of Mao Tse-tung: "On Guerilla War." Samuel Griffith offers an insightful translation of this classic, which makes it even more relevant to the modern world. Including an explanatory introduction by Liddell Hart and selected commentaries on the work, this edition makes Sun Tzu's timeless classic extremely accessible to students of Chinese history and culture, as well as to anyone interested the study of military strategy and thought.

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