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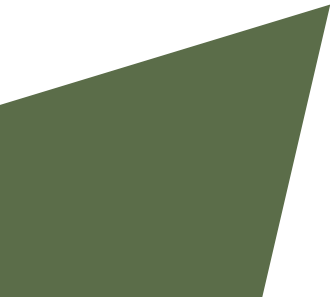
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**The Art Of War-Exploring A Path To Spiritually Through Conflict:
Reconnoitring Whether Peace Can Be Sought From A Was Manual In The
21st Centuary**

Parthik Choudhury

INTRODUCTION

Twice, one wintery snowy evening, I got embroiled in my cup of hot chocolate and was scavenging for some new reads, it was this when I stumbled upon a little black leather book. Its title was very simple, *The Art of War by Sun Tzu*¹. As I went about, I found that the book had been written in 515 BCE by a relatively honorable & enlightened Chinese Scholar & Military general, Sun Tzu², and that particular edition was translated by Roger T. Ames. Although I was very keen in conflict and military literature from a very tender age, and movies based on the same were a thing of wonder for me, I had heard of “The Art of War” from a mention in the movie “Battleship” starring Liam Nelson a few years before, the title made me curious, a whole lot more, to read & learn more. Thus, I picked up the book, suddenly sat down on the warm wooden floor, and began to orbit through it, not realizing that it was still snowing heavily outside.

Long before, the snowing subsided, and the clock from 4 struck 8, my dumb-witted curiosity turned into fascination, a student of Std. 9th, embroiling himself in literature that any normal person would label “Beyond his years”, absorbed my entire conscience and sanity, as I went page after page in its compelling observations, that, despite the book’s title, seemed to be more about sheer benevolent wisdom than about aggression and combat:

“Those who win every battle are not really skillful – those who render other’s armies helpless without fighting are the best of all;

So the rule is not to count on opponents not coming but to rely on having ways of dealing with them;

*Anger can revert to joy, wrath can revert to delight, but a nation destroyed cannot be restored to existence, and the dead cannot be restored to life.*³

This is just an example as to the countless echelons of sheer, untouched pure wisdom that the text beholds. By the time I had completed browsing & by time finishing the book, I solemnly

¹ Under the Wade-Giles romanization system first established in the 1860s, The Art of War is transliterated as “Ping Fa.” *Ping Fa* literally means “Warfare Principles.” The newer Pinyin system, approved by the Chinese government in 1958, transliterates the words as “Bing Fa.”

² A close Chinese pronunciation of Sun Tzu is SOON-zuh. The transliteration “Sun Tzu” is most commonly used and is from the Wade-Giles romanization system.

³ Thomas Cleary, *The Art of War* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1988) Pg. 128.

realized that what I had in my hands was something truly special & omnipotently unadulterated in its philosophical judgement. As a military manual, The Art of War has withstood the sands of time, being a one of its kind journal still required and referred in military academies around the world. Its sound and intellectual tactical strategies have been proven effective in other settings as well – a trip to a book store will quickly reveal a plethora of management, administration, finance, motivational titles applying Sun Tzu's teachings to their texts. I wasn't in the military or engaged in any trade or business, yet. But for me, the book's resonance went deeper, because Sun Tzu's words and lines echoed with my own life, it was if, I had found a new way, a profound one, to carry out myself with. Here, encompassed in thirteen chapters, was a perspicacious insight of a cogitative spiritual nature that could and has helped me live my life past the petty differences & the mundane constraints of life like envy, jealousy, backstabbing, rumor-mongering, petty constraints that hinders a man to truly realize his throne in this sagacious world, an everyday life unconstrained by conflict, either with other fellow beings or more primarily with my own self.

If you, with a determined heart and courageous mind, want to learn an effective, disciplined, spiritual, and a compassionate way to handle conflicts & intense competition in your life, and to experience clarity in purpose & peace of mind, even in the most compelling of circumstances, this text is for you.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Art of War, a master brainchild of Sun Tzu (544-496 BCE)⁴, was a Chinese military general & philosopher who lived during a tumultuous era in China, near the end of the Spring & Autumn period (770-476 BCE). For him, Sun was his family name & Tzu was his honorary title and his birth name was Wu. Thus, the literal meaning of *Sun Tzu* is "Master Sun".

During the entire length of the Spring & Autumn period⁵, pre the rule of the Golden Emperor, China consisted of over one hundred and fifty factional states that vied for supremacy under a weak Chou dynasty. They engaged in intense & constant battle until only thirteen major states remained. Of the thirteen states, seven possessed elite divisions and legions of troops &

⁴ John Minford, *The Art of War: The Essential Translation of the Classic Book of Life* (New York: Viking/Penguin Group, 2002), liv.

⁵ Smith, Kidder (1999). "The Military Texts: The *Sunzi*". In *de Bary, Wm. Theodore* (ed.). *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600, Volume 1* (2nd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press. pp. 213–24. ISBN 978-0-231-10938-3.

resources over the other six, reinforcing the stage for further hostilities & engagement along with consolidation in the Warring States period (475-221 BCE)⁶.

Sun Tzu was born into a noble family from the state of Ch'i⁷; his grandfather was a provincial governor, his father an accomplished military general. Through his father, Sun Tzu had firsthand knowledge of the inner *modus operandi* of the Chinese Army, whose numbers in troop models numbered usually in hundreds of thousands by the end of the Spring & Autumn period. This knowledge, ramified with his own individual engaged research & readings of past battles, helped him to gain quite a reputation as an accomplished brilliant tactician & strategist at an early age.

On the primary recommendation of a loyal trusted imperial advisor who mentioned Sun Tzu more than seven times, the King of the Wu State⁸, Ho Lu, finally relented & met with Sun Tzu. It was at this meeting that Sun Tzu presented his book, the first ever edition, *The Art of War*. He was only thirty years old, when this fateful exchange happened. Impressed by the book, Ho Lu laterally hired Sun Tzu to formulate strategies that later aided the relatively small Wu state to capture Ying, the capital city of the mightily superincumbent state of Ch'u⁹, and to counter foresighted advances from the states of Ch'i, Chin, & Yueh. It has to be commended that because of Sun Tzu's gifted & penetrating successes, his name quickly spread throughout China such that his reputation remains glorified & etched deeply in history today, still after 2,500 years later.

What exactly happened to Sun Tzu? After his employment with Ho Lu, How he died? Where he died? How his final moments would have been? Is & remains unknown. The only proximate introgression in China's historical records was uncovered in the text of

Yueh Chueh Shu (The End of the Kingdom of Yueh) pronouncing, "Outside of the city gate of Wu is a large tomb – the tomb of King Wu's foreign official, Sun Tzu – which lies ten miles from the country. He was an expert at military strategy."

The original manuscript of *The Art of War* given to King Ho Lu does no longer, lost in the sands of time, we cannot exactly validate & proclaim whether changes were introduced to the main primary text by scribes. *Per contra*, a juxtaposition of the earliest known copy of the *Art of*

⁶ Lewis, Mark Edward (1999). "Warring States Political History". In Loewe, Michael; Shaughnessy, Edward (eds.). *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 587–650. ISBN 978-0-521-47030-8.

⁷ Mair, Victor H. (2007). *The Art of War: Sun Zi's Military Methods*. New York: Columbia University Press. ISBN 978-0-231-13382-1.

⁸ Yuen, Derek M. C. (2014). *Deciphering Sun Tzu: How to Read 'The Art of War'*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 9780199373512.

⁹ Durrant, Stephen (1977). "Manchu Translations of Chou Dynasty Texts". *Early China* 3. [Cambridge University Press, Society for the Study of Early China]: 52–54. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23351361>.

War (ca. 140 BCE) with the official Sung dynasty¹⁰ copy produced 1,000 years later shows no significant varied heterogeneity.

Nonetheless, the scribes did annex “Sun Tzu said,” to the rudiment of every chapter, insinuating that the Art was a myriad inventory of verbal instructions. But this raised questions and prompted further contemplation. “The Father of Chinese History” Ssu-ma Ch’ien¹¹ (145 –ca. 86 BCE), recorded that once Ho Lu told Sun Tzu that he has read his 13 chapters deeply in its plentitude completeness & integrity¹². Ssu-ma Ch’ien further observed that Ho Lu’s statement reinforces that Sun Tzu’s “contemplations” & “sayings” connotes the heavy reliance ancient Chinese posted on learning lessons from speech, since very few people at that time were literate and even knew how to read. Illiteracy was so rampant that Sun Tzu had to later clarify his literature to Ho Lu with an oral presentation.

This has to be noted with due care that in reality Sun Tzu was an academician first & a warrior second. Such order of skill anabasis may seem draconian to the Western World, but 20th Cen. Asian leaders with the likes of Mao Tse Tung and Ho Chi Minh—both athirst disciples of The Art of War – followed an analogous track. Predictably, Mao Tse Tung based his *On Guerilla Warfare* on the bed rock genesis of The Art of War, at times mirroring the verses almost to the letter. Beyond yonder, Ho Chi Minh himself interpreted The Art of War for his Vietnamese Officers¹³. Despite their shortfall of first-hand experience in warfare, owing to their similar credentials having earmarks of academician, they both devised ingenious strategies demonstrating brilliant tactics during the Chinese Civil War (1927–1949)¹⁴ & at the onset of the battle of Dien Bien Phu¹⁵ (1953-1954), respectively.

As mentioned earlier, Sun Tzu’s fame & rapport stature for his wisdom in the intricacies of warfare was cyclopean and due to the same it was not surprising that his book was soon revered & idolized immeasurably by countless those who wished to seek his teachings. It has, till date, remained in interminable & unwaning application, its existence is as immortal as the earth itself, very few literature get to savor this honor, unlike the fate of many Chinese works also.

¹⁰ Smith, Kidder (1999). "The Military Texts: The *Sunzi*". In de Bary, Wm. Theodore (ed.). *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600, Volume 1* (2nd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press. pp. 213–24. ISBN 978-0-231-10938-3.

¹¹ Steven Shankman & Stephen Durrant, *The Siren & the Sage: Knowledge & Wisdom in Ancient Greece & China* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000), Pg. 81

¹² Samuel B. Griffith, *The Art of War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), Pg. 57

¹³ Ho Chi Minh: A life (New York: Hyperion Press, 2000)

¹⁴ Lew, Christopher R. *The Third Chinese Revolutionary Civil War, 1945–49: An Analysis of Communist Strategy and Leadership* (Routledge, 2009).

¹⁵ Boylan, Kevin; Olivier, Luc (2018). *Valley of the Shadow: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu*. Oxford: Osprey Press. ISBN 978-1472824370.

Furthermore, even famous and noteworthy Chinese military strategists such as Cao Cao & Zhuge Liang of the Three Kingdoms period¹⁶ (184 – 280 CE) engaged its apparatus & expounded on its verses. During the time of the Sung Dynasty (960-1279 CE), it was made part of The Seven Military Classics¹⁷, as the imperative obligatory literature for the imperial examinations that were incumbent on in order to become a ranking government official. Even the Japanese were not spare by its allurements. Through frequent knowledge-building expeditions to China, the Japanese added the part & parcel of the text into their collection as early as 400 CE. Two of the best-known strategists of feudal Japan, Minamoto Yoshitsune (1159-1189 CE) & Takeda Shingen (1521-1573 CE), made The Art of War their main text of choice.¹⁸

After an over of two millennia until The Art of War made its first appearance from China into the bookshelves of the Western Civilization. Father J.J Amiot, a French Jesuit priest who used to live in China, translated & reiterated the entirety of the work into French in 1772. This paved the way for many scholars to speculate upon the fact that Napoleon Bonaparte, France's unsurpassed & foremost military general & emperor, read & employed Sun Tzu's strategies in his battles, personal & physical alike.

The first English translation of The Art of War came & was brought out by a British Captain E. F. Calthrop, who rendered it while pursuing academics in Japan in 1905. Today, in the present century, it has been translated into every major language & dialect. Moreover, the number of editions keep on growing every year.

From Gen. George Patton, Che Guevara to John Murtha, Pat Riley, Ronald Reagan, to Dusty Baker, Robert Gates & Tupac Shakur, this list of famous names from fields as diverse as the military, professional sports & the music industry, epitomizes how Sun Tzu's book can be applied in various goals yet with equal relevancy.

¹⁶ Tanner, Harold Miles (13 March 2009). China: A History. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing. pp. 141–142. [ISBN 978-0872209152](#).

¹⁷ Sawyer, Ralph D. The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993

¹⁸ Stephen R. Turnbull, The Samurai: A Military History (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002)

HOW THE TEXT IS ORGANIZED?

Sun Tzu's translation of The Art of War is the product of over a millennia of dedicated sheer pure scholarship & academic ingenuity. All explanations are given in the context of Sun Tzu's primary stimulant, purpose. It also, does not shy away from voicing & contemplating on some of Sun Tzu's much controversial topics such as deception & spies in chapters four, six, eight & thirteen and why even they alongwith all of Sun Tzu's wise concepts are critical particulars of the strategized tactics to not overwhelm but overcome & outflank your opponents and possible make them your allies. What hidden in these seemingly unsavory aspects of Sun Tzu's philosophy is that it can be so much compatible with a spiritual approach, if taken & adopted by one, to the edifice of conflict. What matters more is, **Your Motivation**.

The entirety of the text in its works is precisely divided into 13 chapters¹⁹, with each chapter surveying on a primary theme or element of strategy. Per contra, it's of high momentousness to take cognizance that flipping through The Art of War isn't a benevolent step-by-step accession towards conflict management. In lieu of, Sun Tzu synthesized his wise perspicacity penetrating in an organic manner, occasionally constructing on quondam concepts, at times reiterating data & erudition, evermore depending on his reader to decipher & delineate and to mull over on his poetic, resounding manner of elucidating particulars. In his own sayings & way²⁰, The Art of War in itself is somewhat deceptive²¹: it is brief & succinct to be summarized in a warm afternoon, but yet, attenuated & shadowed enough to be studied for years, decades, centuries, a millennia, overall to last a lifetime.

For the purposes of explaining the relevancy of Sun Tzu's The Art of War's relevancy to the 21st Century & as to how harmony and peace can be interpreted from the same, the author has taken the first five chapters in primary consideration.

CHAPTER-1

To grade and venture upon chapter wise, In **Chapter 1**, titled "**Calculations**", Sun Tzu presents five arch-cardinal principalities that determine the outcome in any conflict. Calculations involve

¹⁹ Mastering the Art of War: Zhuge Liang's & Liu Ji's Commentaries on the Classic by Sun Tzu. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1989.

²⁰ Zen Lessons: The Art of Leadership. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1989

²¹ Benioff, Marc, and Carlye Adler. The Business of Changing the World: Twenty Great Leaders on Strategic Corporate Philanthropy. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006.

silent deliberations, as a priest or devotee would do inside a temple, prior to taking worship or engagement in any field of conflict or warfare with warring sides. Here, Sun Tzu articulates that when a person comes in contact with a conflict in his life, before he must act, he should seek out a place so solitary that balances & aggrandizes the mind to spiritually deliberate upon things through. For Sun Tzu, this process is much more than what seems to the human eye, it's not just mere collection of thoughts. By sagaciously reviewing five specific factors known as **Way**- Unity in a moral purpose, **Heaven**- The Environment/Atmosphere, **Ground**- Landscape or factors building up your environment, **General**- Five Qualities of a Leader, which further includes **Wisdom** (Good Judgement), **Credibility** (Good Reputation), **Benevolence** (Good Intent), **Courage** (Good Fortitude) & **Discipline** (Good Reliability); and **Law**- Management of Strength, one can adumbrate the causatum of any hostility even before executing your first move in the field. Sun Tzu highlights the destructiveness of war & thus the magnitude of investigating & understanding it. Warfare stretches way more far than the literal meaning of combat. It also encompasses social, economic, political, and even emotional aspects that influence & often predisposes the sequel of a military endeavor²². Allowing a conflict to dillydally around without resolution only flares up those issues. Avoiding or concurring with recalcitrance to rancorous people, may temporarily suspend discomfort, but in the long run fuel your own indignation & may even incite suspicion of people in general.

It's of *prima facie* primarity that we define an *enemy* or *belligerent*, before stepping further. An adversary is someone who seeks to voluntarily do you harm. Although belligerents are always involved in hostilities, not all conflicts involve adversaries²³. An individual will find himself in combat with non-hostiles, such as family, peers, friends who will impede you when you undertake a peculiar course of action, but whose motivations implicate your best interests. In such a scenario, not all tactics embedded in this text & book will be appropriate, but if one can lucubrate to peacefully resolve conflicts with their vilifier, conflict resolution with your near & dear ones gets much simpler & tactful.

With knowledge comes responsibility; as quoted in the Bible Luke 12:48,²⁴ “from everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required”²⁵. Therefore, not only should you read about those five factors but make them your best allies & keep them close. On deep analysis, it

²² Ames Roger T. *The Art of War*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993.

²³ The Tao of War: Martial Tao Te Ching. Boulder: Westview Press, 2003

²⁴ Ulrich Luz, Axel Michaels, and Linda Maloney, trans., *Encountering Jesus & Buddha: Their Lives & Teachings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006)

²⁵ Benioff, Marc, and Carlye Adler. *The Business of Changing the World: Twenty Great Leaders on Strategic Corporate Philanthropy*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006

also implies the need for an individual to display complete honesty & probity when assessing the echelons of his & his adversary's strength in each of the mentioned five factors, though its comparative diagnosis might bruise his ego²⁶, finding a weakness is actually considered to be a benediction since then you can address the issue instead of remaining aloof & weak.

Once you have assessed all the five factors you can formulate a strategy to guide you to victory. The sole purpose of victory should be achieve a quick peace, regaining harmony & not to fuel further prejudice and a sheer display of dominance. The famous verse from The Art of War "Warfare is the Way of deception"²⁷ is often quoted in the general media sources & highlighted by individuals who tend to carry out of context & primarily suggest that The Art of War contains a good deal of devious techniques. Deception, per contra, aims at a suspicious tactic that runs antipodean to the ideals of uprightness & coherence. Nonetheless, Sun Tzu, he employed the services of deception for the assistance of a higher moral good, accordingly for him, this was not surreptitious, because a tool like this in the inventory of a noble leader is wise & congenial. According to his wise principles of not engaging in a conflict as a first measure, deception allows an army or an individual as a matter of fact to remain **"Formless"**²⁸, owing to which your adversary can't attack you, thwarting which, you forbear both your opponent & yourself the paroxysm & vicissitude of the bloodshed in a skirmish. This serves as a positive artillery in your arsenal.

Thus, a far-sighted & vigilant leader, individual, military general should not wage war lightly or hastily, owing to the fast depletion of much valued human life & resources. One needs to spend time away in isolation or as Sun Tzu spoke of quietly deliberating in a temple on the five factors through which one should determine on which side one has advantage upon. By amputating yourself from an immediate melancholic rundown, an individual takes out the emotion that will always prompt him to make hasty, reckless & insuppressible calls.²⁹ As articulated by Sun Tzu, it doesn't matter if the temple is real or proverbial, what matters is that it should lift an individual above the fray & enabling him to see the world for what it is & not the deep hidden disparity that surrounds it since we tend to see it through that perspective. One should always remember

²⁶ Huang, J. H. Sun Tzu: The New Translation. New York: Quill, 1993

²⁷ Huynh, Thomas. The Art of War: Spirituality for Conflict; Annotated & Explained. Nashville- USA. Jaico Publishing House, 2019. p. 13

²⁸ "Those who are good": Derek Lin, Tao Te Ching – Annotated & Explained (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2006). p. 137

²⁹ The Tao of War: The Martial Tao Te Ching. Boulder: Westview Press, 2003.

& take note that the Buddha believed that timely detachment & composure always go hand in hand & only with both could a person emerge with compassion³⁰.

CHAPTER-2

Titled as **“Doing Battle”**, this chapter primarily takes the discussion to the sphere as to how a heavy toll one would incur should that individual want to confront his *enemy*. If he must then he should be to radically act swiftly like the wind in order to prevent himself running out of energy & resources. As in accordance with the texts in *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu, a skillful military will only engage in battle with his opponents when there exists no other alternative. Without escalating a disagreement into a full blown confrontation & open conflict, there is nothing that can't be solved, otherwise it will strike & requisition quite a heavy toll on both the sides. If an individual can ramify his conscience and his position with superior mental, psychological, physical & moral topography, even if your antagonist is hell bent on engaging you in conflict, that superior person can still have all odds to his favor to seize the initiative & win without actually engaging in any skirmish³¹. This has found a sagacious bearing in many simulated scenarios where the opposing power is a nation, an army or an individual in your day to day life. Nonetheless, if you feel that engaging in a skirmish is unavoidable, follow the *modus operandi* prescribed in this chapter and the victory will be swift with minimum devastation.

Primarily in this chapter, what interpretation yields is that, if an individual must engage his adversary in combat because there exists no other option, the main takeaway of this battle should be a quick settlement. When there occurs a certain tension in your life, Sun Tzu was pragmatic in his assessment that, the sooner you bridge your differences with your opponent & resolve it the sooner you can get on with your life³². For e.g- A general, should aim to fasten the process of a quick resolution or victory, not only to limit the expenses of war, but to conserve the morale among his troops³³. One can resolve and end, once and for all, conflicts by possessing a transparent notion of what he wants to achieve & finally channelizing all his efforts

³⁰ Buddha Believed?: Ulrich Luz, Axel Michaels, and Linda Maloney, trans., *Encountering Jesus & Buddha: Their Lives & Teachings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), p. 86

³¹ Cleary, Thomas. *The Art of War: Complete Texts & Commentaries*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2003.

³² Benioff, Marc, and Karen Southwick. *Compassionate Capitalism: How Corporations Can Make Doing Good an Integral Part of Doing Well*. Franklin Lakes, NJ: Career Press, 2004

³³ Denma Translation Group. *The Art of War: A new Translation*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2001.

on accomplishing the same. To ensure you don't perpetuate the conflict, execute only those actions that assist & not the ones that don't. An individual should be better off being frugal with time, energy & resources.

Having said that, in the texts, Sun Tzu has cautioned its patrons & readers against exhausting one's energy on one enemy since there's a high possibility that there are other individuals simply waiting in ambush for the ideal moment & atmosphere to attack you³⁴. How you handle the outcome in this scenario either sedately or desperately solely depends on your readiness. According to the noble texts, Sun Tzu has strongly advocated that no passel of poise can underside the ineluctable when an army, morally lost & enervated without spare resources when charged at by a well-prepared & opportunistic one³⁵. One should always prepare for the unforeseen inevitable, even if he doesn't want to do battle, by maintaining a state of readiness. What I have interpreted from Sun Tzu's statements here is that wisdom is always enthused & not aggressive. What opens one's mind to the most logically feasible options, provided your current locus & enables one's reflexes to respond with utmost precision to circumlocute & dodge dire scenarios, is sheer wisdom. But with no viable option, even the wise might be in a sticky situation. Individuals who stretch the conflict instead of trying to make peace with it may be driven by a malevolent thirst to win at any cost, something that I have personally experienced & been through. What different belligerents should desire, according to Sun Tzu, is the end of warfare i.e., victory & not a mere hazardous harsh subjugation of the enemy after many long & exhausting engagements.

Before an individual or a military general perhaps, decides to take resolute maneuver to come face to face with their adversaries, they will have to take a call whether they would impoverish their vitality & collateral before he gains triumph. It's actually recommended by Sun Tzu that sometimes it's pivotal to feed off from the spoils of war i.e., depend on your enemy to persevere your advance³⁶. Notwithstanding that Sun Tzu promotes deriving sustenance off your adversary's resources, he doesn't literally support or encourage marauding & depredate the opponent's citizens. He, by my interpretation, again renounces the honor & rectitude by

³⁴ Ralph D. Sawyer, *The Art of War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

³⁵ Huang, J. H. *Sun Tzu: The New Translation*. New York: Quill, 1993.

³⁶ Griffith, Samuel B. *The Art of War*. London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

disseminating in the formidable cost of procuring & not snatching resources be it food or supplies from your adversary's citizens, even during a hostile campaign. What Sun Tzu primarily implicates is the safety for the citizens, the non-combatants, which we have adopted in the 4th Geneva Convention of 1949³⁷.

Sun Tzu furthermore, articulates that his belief that conflicts don't secure or upgrade a state's protective defense & security, but that being an act of sowing seeds for a fresh harvest of future yield of conflict, actually weakens the very idea of a secured state³⁸. Thus, skillful leader or a general as a matter of fact should not aim, aimlessly to conquer the battlefield but he should vouch for never to ever terraform a land where a conflict might take place, whenever possible. The same individual should aim for a swift achievable victory when a call to arms cannot be avoided. Moreover, the same person is titled & pronounced as the sentinel of people & guardian of their souls because he strives to safeguard the sanctity & security of his nation and not because he merely defeated his adversary.

Furthermore, if the primary contention of your enemy is to just inflict sheer harm & bring malice to your fortitude, a quick resolution should be the primary weapon in your arsenal & not mere retaliation³⁹. Always uphold your integrity of superincumbent power by promoting peace & latitudinal harmony and an ever prevailing sense of forgiveness through pretensionless & wholehearted genuflections of altruism & generosity and not to bring forth more calamity & mortified malaise.

CHAPTER- 3

Titled as **"Planning Attacks"**, here the reader of the text imbibes that the highest transcendence is achieved not torpedoing every enemy that you come across, but by effectuating victory without a skirmish. Since annihilation is something that you don't or even wish to seek but victory is, relinquishing things as they are increases your odds in gains & assists an individual

³⁷ N. B. Dennys, *Folklore of China & Its Affinities with That of the Aryan & Semitic Races* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003).

³⁸ Ralph D. Sawyer, *The Art of War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

³⁹ Lin, Derek. *Tao Te Ching – Annotated & Explained*. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2006.

to ameliorate his balustrade with his oppugner. Sun Tzu, wisely reiterates here that when for an individual, a call to arms is imminent & irrevocable, to craft a meticulously punctilious plan, is the best way to clinch a swift victory. Crafting attacks, though contains unambiguous action, it also embodies reasoned & timely torpor.

Sun Tzu in his entire life & in the texts had no requital & reprisal in his heart & soul, he always aimed for perpetuation & magnanimity even in the field of a battle, ruled by violence. There exists a rational side of being compassionate, though some may find it ironical in a war manual. According to Sun Tzu, no good ever came from a destroyed city & bereft of its one thriving population. A general, honorable & compassionate in his deeds as a leader, would warrant that city to stand tall & its population appurtenant to his men & army.⁴⁰ It was also Lao Tzu, who once propounded that,

*“So when evenly matched armies meet, where none has numerical advantage;
The side that is compassionate shall win.”⁴¹*

What one can interpret is, that Sun Tzu invites competition to the idea that a lot of individuals in order to win make the “beating your competition” as the sole purposeful strategy in their inventory. What they actually fail to understand is inflicting extraneous & unrequired harm & suffering deteriorates your own position, rather than reinforcing it, by giving birth to more hatred for you. Once an individual learns to set aside sentient & histrionic wails for wrath & retribution, he will be able to make his own decisions honorably & will unearth the skill of introspecting his own choices & judgements and bearing without devastating his opponent.

According to Sun Tzu, when an individual climbs to the apostle of ‘highest of excellence’, through claiming victory without engaging in a skirmish compared to attaining subjacent excellence through means of conquering one hundred battles, with its irrevocable share of catastrophe, loss & devastation, people, with fullness & profusion, will praise you more for the latter than the former, because for the mundane mind, a display of dominance quenches the brains thirst for excellence⁴². Ergo, honest & indubitable excellence shines from the equitable

⁴⁰ Cleary, Thomas. *The Art of War: Complete Texts & Commentaries*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2003.

⁴¹ Anne Birrell, *Chinese Mythology: An Introduction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999)

⁴² Zen Lessons: *The Art of Leadership*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2001.

pronouncement of yourself & not necessarily from what others may perceive of & from you. In our everyday life, it is best to court & resolve conflicts as soon as possible, its considered wise not to launch a frontal assault on your enemy i.e., his core-sentiments or beliefs & character but to concentrate on his actions & behavioral patterns i.e., his contingency which are external to his existence. Diplomatic actions like these will prevent your adversary perceiving these onslaughts as a personal vendetta & you on the other hand will get desistance of the abhorrent behaviour.

In 500 BCE China, Hantan, the capital city of the state of Chou, had staggering & astounding walls measuring upto sixty-five feet thick & fifty feet high⁴³.

It was an era where modern or ancient artillery had been incepted & only quintessential siege contrivance existed. One can only imagine the harrowing travail & process of attacking & taking over such a significant city. A Chinese general required a considerable quantum of time & struggle for ensuring preparedness otherwise just sending in men without patience would result in a major bloodbath & they would have just died in vain.⁴⁴ As interpreted, when an individual faces an ostensibly inconceivable encumbrance, metaphorically a sixty-five foot wall, launching an all-out assault with haste will only be a futile execution, exhausting all your precious resources & ardor. Accordingly, Sun Tzu rater articulates to wait patiently & silently when approaching a dilemma or conflict like a Tiger in ambush. Breaking down the entire contention in fragments & components will automatically resolve the entire nexus of the affair in succession. A person, engulfed in emotion & selfdom, will invariably, till hell freezes over, even when he is decrepit & lackadaisical seek horizontal confrontation. If an individual, after solicitously contemplating of the situation that avoidance of a confrontation will avert disastrous circumstances, there's no shame or cowardice in avoiding a skirmish. Therefore, your victory & success in deciphering & concluding confrontations, primarily those for which there exists a certain degree of unpreparedness, depends on your feat of not taking action rather than executing one.

⁴³ Ralph Sawyer, *The Essential Art of War* (Cambridge: Basic Books/Perseus Books Group, 2005)

⁴⁴ Taleb, Nassim Nicholas. *Foiled by Randomness: The Hidden Role of Chance in Life & in Markets*. New York: Random House, 2004.

A ruler in China had power, immeasurably, alongwith tremendous influence over his people, more so than any Prime Minister or President of state in today's era. The ruler had the authority to summarily execute or pardon anyone, apart from heaven⁴⁵, he was not answerable to anyone. He was the epitomized personified edifice of divinity due to which, obedience came without question. The general worked in accordance with the directions of the emperor and had unquestionable allegiance to him⁴⁶. Nonetheless, it has been articulated & scrutinized by Sun Tzu that an unruly & unwise ruler interfering in the matters of the military can put the existence of a nation into jeopardy. Undying allegiance doesn't mean forsaking reasonable hindsight of wisdom & conscience. Obedience should not jeopardize judicious rationality, because loyalty should run deep, so much, that it should circumnavigate the protection & well-being of the nation & ruler & not in following directives with a clouded vision⁴⁷. Interpreting further, what Sun Tzu meant here was that a person should have faith in himself and not blindly submit himself to others contentions. In, particularly, small episodes, a person might just go where the room might be heading towards, but in a matter which holds paramount importance which in fact debilitates your welfare & prosperity alongwith of those around you, one should have the courage & fortitude to rely on his own mandate achieved by sheer critical-analysis.

CHAPTER- 4

Titled as **“Formation”**, here the reader learns the cardinal vitality of early preparation and making secure a position of tenacity & fortitude. According to Sun Tzu, Formation meant more than the echelon of invincibility your opponent cannot circumnavigate. The concerned state of tactical supremacy that you have, diminishes the amount of skirmishes you might have to face, because here your belligerent will see the ineffectuality of trying to engage you. If such a scenario does flare up where your adversary does try to initiate a duel with you, you can fortify your defenses with utmost ease because this individual only confronts and battles those who are already, in their cause, defeated. A person's very ability to button down his foundation of valiancy and fortitude begins with him alone. Through early precautions, preparedness & rehearsals an individual gains tenacity & intrepidity which ensures his security & safety. This concerned fearlessness gives him covering fire to patiently choose the right moment to take

⁴⁵ Yves Bonnefoy, *Asian Mythologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993)

⁴⁶ Denma Translation Group. *The Art of War: A New Translation*. Boston: Shambhala Publications

⁴⁷ Roger Ames, *The Art of War* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993)

decisive action so he can honorably & scrupulously settle confrontations & standstills with even those individuals who have their conscience laced with malevolence.

An army, figuratively & metaphorically, can be unassailable but that doesn't necessarily mean that it can overpower and outflank another army in the similar footing. Sun Tzu here with much deliberation, admonitions against arrogance. Thus, regardless of your forethoughtfulness, circumspection & strength success is really never predictable & in turn guaranteed. Presuming that one will always dominate & prevail in the field can lead to ruin & possible founder & devastation. It's not an act of cowardice but highly advised that if you aren't vigorous & reinforced than your enemy you should wait instead of engaging him but if the situation is the other way around, you take resolute and decisive action. Whatever, the scenario persists, one cannot to independently control it and so it's in the best interest to adapt to it. The cardinal difference between attacking & initiating defense is one's level of concentration & stability. When an individual resorts to defend his area of fortitude, he can therefore completely fixate at one area completely where he's brought to bear sufficient verdure & built enough succor to protect. On the other hand, when you choose to rather attack, an individual is still in requirement to protect & defend himself. But now since the locus is divided into two separate contingencies and to execute both of them with omnipotence, more sturdiness is warranted. True skill, as Sun Tzu reiterates, and wisdom lies in the competency & endowment to fathom even the slightest contradistinctions & dissimilitude in your environment & in the hostiles facing you in order to thwart predicaments in the bud itself before they become discernible & scathing.

CHAPTER-5

Titled as "**Formation**", this chapter explains the approach of claiming unstoppable propulsion through concentration & frivolity. Sun Tzu here conceptualizes the brainchild that once an individual establishes a bridgehead towards an indomitable locus, one can proceed without any second thoughts to bring to bear & exercise force i.e. a maneuver with overwhelming momentum⁴⁸ for e.g, "Blitzkrieg" employed by German Forces during World War II. An individual creates force by formulation, harmonizing & consolidating all his energy & resources

⁴⁸ Krause, Donald G. "The Art of War for Executives: Ancient Knowledge for Today's Business Professional." New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1995

towards an individual effort alongwith infusing & interweaving something what Sun Tzu articulated as “Common” & “Uncommon”⁴⁹ ways to discombobulate & throw an adversary’s very balance of power into utter disarray. Then, with timing with utmost precision & irrefutable clout against your opponents Achilles heel, you can, by over-flanking, the likes of a steamroller, end conflicts much sooner.

According to Sun Tzu, an army’s momentum all in itself is futile if the general cannot channelize it with disciplined control for e.g raw power in a mass riot. By far in contrast, an honorable and effective general has the capability to discipline even brute force when he aligns it with his soldier’s vehemence & toughness and fuses them by means of contact of communications with them through officers, orders, penchants & flags. His physical presence in the field is the least of worries till the time he’s delivering every deliberated contingency & counter-contingency the way as if he was himself pronouncing them personally. Ergo, the general is able to maintain control & bring unity among all ranks be it a thousand or a hundred thousand men.

Accordingly, if an individual, like the aforementioned general, can unite atleast ten more people to support him in his crusade, he can similarly unite a thousand people in the same format. What matters is how clearly you are communicating your objectives & the overall aims in the same message to different people. As mentioned before, one can be successful in accomplishing this unity here if he can combine his efforts with the “Way”, when you make people believe in the integrity & honor of your purpose, they will follow you all along the way. This journey begins with an individual’s self-conviction, one can achieve wonders if he just believes in himself, for if your foundations are shaky you cannot go about building other’s homes. If an individual isn’t determined in his commitment of the righteousness pertaining to his executions, you cannot plausibly fathom to convince other people to fall in line with your ordeal. Sun Tzu recommends that an individual should, as a preliminary stage, achieve equilibrium & concordance in tranquility with first, himself & secondly, with those closer to him. Now you can hope to achieve steadfastness with quiescent proponents & proponent’s alongwith even some opponents, with precision.

⁴⁹ Graff, David A. (2002). *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300-900*. Warfare and History. London: Routledge. [ISBN 978-0415239554](https://doi.org/10.1080/0415239554).

A CLOSELY GUARDED SECRET?

Historically and even in the modern settings, countries always strive to keep military secrets a closely guarded secret for e.g troop framework, distribution of different corps, formations, deployments, inventory, arsenal roster, formulas, missile strategies, placements & location of corps, divisions, brigades, regiments, garrisons etc. A whole lot of people would rather question me as to why would I nourishingly publicize a text that provides gratification & superiority to any person who just read it with a sane foresight. They might also interrogate me by asking that isn't it best to keep the text veiled, abstrused & undisclosed so that my challengers and predictable oppugnants may not get a head-start to circumvent me? It's indeed a proven fact that historically Chinese generals & Japanese Samurais gained insights from the text before even stepping onto the battlefield and so for many centuries altogether The Art was kept obscured from the eyes of a normal citizen, a closely guarded secret you might term.

We have to realize here that the primary cardinal aim of Sun Tzu for formulating such an ingenious text was not to handover just sheer victory to a general or an individual in field of engagement, he indeed intended to handover victory but a victory that would be achieved by achieving peace & harmonized concord between two or more warring parties. For Sun Tzu, when victory is achieved by observing, analyzing and interpreting the futility & despair direct confrontation beholds and by avoiding it through much more augmented negotiations, diplomatic & peaceful means, that's actual victory.

There's no use of me and only me personally learning & inculcating the inner workings of this text and I may even prevail in different situations but I would be forsaking the actual intention that this noble text holds in itself. Peace is never a one-way street, it's always a two-sided virtue, achievable if we can just only learn our wisdom and foresight. If both my adversary and me, together, interpret & understand Sun Tzu's teachings, our chances at finding a much more peaceful approach to our conflicts will be much more accelerated and mundanely possible. Through the same manner, a major skirmish is prevented altogether competently & dexterously

SPIRITUALITY FROM A WAR MANUAL?

It's an expansive theory & conviction that The Art of War is a monograph & dissertation giving insights on as to how to initiate & conduct a campaign, militarily & propitiously. It is indeed so, I am in total agreement, Sun Tzu was after all an accomplished general, way ahead of his time, but this is just only one side of a story and a one sided story is perhaps the most devastating weapon ever formulated by man. Sun Tzu, being a successful general, was no warmonger or as we might term & say in the 21st Century a "Hawk". It's not surprising that a noble individual, scholar, academician and statesman saw war, as far as he was concerned, nothing but rather an instrument of utter wasteful destruction, an egregious and calamitous last haunting surrogate. At most wanting, an utter failure of diplomatic strategy & entrenched pilotage command & authority alongwith dereliction of duty. Yonder, he never saw victories in war as a matter for which satisfaction or festive jubilation was warranted because of the grievous penalty opined & exacted on all the belligerents.

Sun Tzu's cardinal principal & motive behind proposing & treatising The Art of War was never to embellish, bedeck or idealize the crucible of war & its workings but instead was to train military leaders, theoretically, the nonpareil & culminating methodologies to bring an armed conflict to an immediate end as soon as possible or more foresightedly, to prevent in its contaminating outbreak in its early symptomatic stages. A quick & immediate resolution of any hostility or even better, its very prevention was Sun Tzu's exact meaning of victory and not the sheer annihilation of your opponent.

His objectives and vision might be an utter surprise given the title of his book. Sun Tzu's primary objective was actually to discover the path of peace through the fiery crucible of war because he always propounded that in order to understand the profile & character of hostility & conflict we need to study & understand and distinctly all the phrases and chirography given in The Art of War, if read with a calm & composed mind translate peculiarly as to how to avoid a conflict to the best possible means. For e.g, in any pandemic or an outbreak of an epidemic, one needs to investigate, discover, analyze and interpret the "Patient Zero" or in simple language the source of the outbreak alongwith it's sub-disciplines like: What it is? Why it exists? Who it

affects? How it behaves? Where it spreads? are some complimentary sub-disciplines that are also required to be addressed with the same footing of concern. Armed with such knowledge, you have a battering ramified upper-hand in averting at worst what could be an international health emergency. On the other hand, not possessing such insight into the same could render you forlorn & defenseless. The very same example could be co-related in the scenario of an outbreak of hostilities, one can end it if he examines, study's & perceives it.

Furthermore, as propounded and espied by Sun Tzu, the paramount contrivance towards bringing a skirmish to an end for good is to effectuate & obtain a prodigious & imposing asymmetry of power & resources and then to punch that asymmetry over your adversary so swiftly & unambiguously that your challenger is absolutely beaten conclusively & ascertains that it's better to surrender since fighting or engaging in further combat will be futile. When you successfully pull off a campaign based on such virtuous rule of engagement (R.O.E) and protocols, you not only preserve life & property but also win over your adversary's trust and loyalty with such rare acts of kindness, due to which you further avoid future conflicts & achieve an everlasting harmonized peace. Though it's easily said but done but even in an E.C.G machine, a flat line represents abominations & cadaverous weltanschauung, so when the fortitude and security of your fellow citizens is at stake, its highly commendable to undertake such an daunting path which in the end ensures everlasting peace. Though many may find the alternative of engaging in hostile combat contingencies more short & a quick way of resolving conflicts, the taste of conquering your oppugnant is short-lived & fades away before the wine of victory is even finished as it only sows seeds of envy, perturbed umbrage, exacerbation and a foreseen conflict again, these are the perks of concluding & wrapping up campaigns with sheer brute force. This lesson, taking into account the erstwhile Soviet-American involvement in Afghanistan which gave Taliban a breeding ground to flourish as an example, is as true today as it was during, when this book was formulated.

As propounded & mentioned earlier, arrogance & negligence, are the death of everything noble & wise. So just mere immense disposal of resources & numbers at your command doesn't necessarily stand out as beacons of an already achieved victory since they can be squandered at a single wink of an eye. An individual needs fierce prowess & trade-craft, inventiveness & a sense of belongingness alongwith the virtue of magnanimity to succeed in negotiating peace. All that

The Art of War can guide you to, is the road to be taken & not the mode of transport, which depends on how well you interpret & pull it off.

CONCLUSION- A BREATHING LEGACY?

Conflict is something that I would like to rather term as an enduring character which has been important throughout ages when defining the character of a man, it takes birth & blossoms in each of our lives. It's not an inherently necessity or a redundant obligation that one needs to be in the military or armed forces to have an embedded foresight capability & perceiving sanity to appreciate & deplore the amount of harrowing sorrow a conflict can claim, be it on your & your adversary's energy, the people, resources, moreover an extended one. Sun Tzu's entrenched foundations of disciplined teachings through this text is for one & everyone, whoever is in requirement to excavate peace in any scenario just need to flip along the pages of this piece of literature, with a sense of humility & selflessness.

It should be made clear to everyone that what Sun Tzu so outstandingly & nobly strived through his postulates in The Art of War was an effective & universal methodology to prevent and mind “not to avoid” hostile engagements in its preliminary brewing stages, prevail over it as swiftly as conceivable with minimal collateral damage. I have found it rather quite amusing & bewildering at the same time that some of his established rooted principles on conceiving & achieving is rather spiritual at its core. The most striking, constitutional & axiomatic substratal of these wavelengths is the *prima facie* signification of perpetuating quintessential “objective emotional detachment” when premeditating & circumspection of your latitude to your opponents relative position. When an individual is reigned supremely by his sensitivity, passions, sentiments, being in denial of striking vitiated shortcomings, prejudiced strengths and whimsical uncalculated actionable rationale will only lead to an apocalyptic devastation, resulting in an obliterating annihilation. Maintaining a fair sense of justice will empower you to see beyond your persisting scenario with high definition & will also endorse thriving conditions for opportunities for you to make wise call's & adapt to an ever changing environment.

Furthermore, another striking feature on Sun Tzu's teachings underlies your attitude while dealing with your adversary who not only strives to impede you in achieving your goal but strives so laced with a pernicious assertion. In the entire length of the text, what Sun Tzu so observantly pronounces is that throughout a conflict what sets apart you and your adversaries is that they are taken over by the beauger of petulance & intemperance and this should always contrast with your own convictions brought to bear. The teachings laid down & propounded by Sun Tzu in his sagacious manuscripts tell us that such a difference is of paramount primarity because anyone can read but only the true forbearers of peace & harbingers of harmony can exact the true principalities of the text in its truest sense. What really discombobulating & exhilarating here is the hidden affection & spiritual empathy that Sun Tzu articulates so mystifyingly & intelligently behind his seemingly phlegmatic & outspoken tactical strategies. To quote from Luke 6:27 in Jesus's pronouncement, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you". Sun Tzu never strived & meant to annihilate and conquer his enemies but aimed to perpetuate the same. In and during his campaigns, he never used to kill or execute P.O.Ws or enemy spies but rather strived to employ the best means at his disposal to absorb them into his own ranks & treated his own troops and all ranks equivalently as if they were his own children. This tremendous amount of munificence & magnanimity served to safeguard his own people much more effectively than utter viciousness & savagery because it was totally successful in welding together people's allegiance & liability alongwith sealing the obeisance of the enemy, ultimately augmenting the esprit-de corps of his men & the entire army as a whole. In the entire cycle, he was successful in gathering overwhelming sturdiness over the face of his warring adversary's.

Ultimately, Sun Tzu was conscious, schemed, meticulous & explicitly deliberate in his conduct during & outside of hostile engagements. He never ever had to depend over or rather didn't believe it to be cogitative for the prognostications or metaphysical mystics to tell him what contingency to adopt or what path to undertake for a particular campaign. According to Sun Tzu, only those take the wisdom of the supernatural who possess none for themselves. He further articulates that an individual should be self-sufficient in order to exemplify & produce a flawless strategy from the congruent & appurtenant information retrieved from the point of provenance. He always used to assert & decree that from the most ordinary & simplest of particulars, the most unprecedented & stupendous of results can be achieved.

Lastly to conclude, Sun Tzu's inherent sagaciousness edifies that although hostilities are unavoidable, but that doesn't impede or hinder us from contemplating a swift conclusion to the same through compassion & practicality. According to his insights, two warring parties after getting embroiled in battle or combat against each other don't remain enemies anymore, they are just fellow *homo-sapiens* who again face the very same options that their forefathers did before them, either to destroy or prosper with each other, hand in hand, together. If we truly follow his footsteps and incorporate the inherent benevolence that this text contains, we get to be the better individual here. I firmly believe that it's never really too late to listen to your earthly reverberating call, conform & discharge our duties in order to make the right decision for ourselves and for those around us.

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