

SUN TZU
THE ART OF WAR

TRANSLATED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY
SAMUEL B. GRIFFITH

WITH A FOREWORD BY
B. H. LIDDELL HART

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW YORK AND OXFORD

1-16

cowards. They have been in my country for only three days and more than half their officers and soldiers have deserted!'

He thereupon left behind his heavy infantry and wagons, and with lightly armed shock troops only followed by forced marches.¹ Sun Pin had calculated that P'ang Chüan would arrive at Ma Ling in the evening. The Ma Ling road is narrow, and on both sides there are many gorges and defiles where troops may be placed in ambush.

Sun Pin cut the bark off a great tree, and on the trunk wrote: 'P'ang Chüan dies under this tree.' He then placed the most skilful archers of the army with ten thousand crossbows in ambush on both sides of the road, and ordered that when in the evening they saw fire, all were to shoot at it. P'ang Chüan actually arrived that night and when he saw writing on a tree, ignited a torch to read what was written there. Before he had finished the ten thousand crossbowmen of Ch'i discharged their arrows simultaneously, and the army of Wei was thrown into the utmost confusion. P'ang Chüan, at his wit's end, realized that his troops would be defeated. Whereupon he cut his throat, and as he expired, said: 'So I have contributed to the fame of that wretch!' Sun Pin, taking advantage of this victory, completely destroyed the Wei army and captured the heir apparent, Shen, after which he returned to Ch'i.²

Because of this, Sun Pin's reputation was world wide-and generations have transmitted his strategy.

¹ The SC reads 'infantry wagons [chariots]' or 'infantry and wagons [chariots]'. I assume this means that heavily armed and armoured infantry and the supply trains were left while P'ang Chüan pressed on.

² This great battle took place in north-east Shantung in 341 B.C.

I

ESTIMATES¹

SUN TZU said:

1. War is a matter of vital importance to the State; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin.² It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied.

Li Ch'üan: 'Weapons are tools of ill omen.' War is a grave matter; one is apprehensive lest men embark upon it without due reflection.

2. Therefore, appraise it in terms of the five fundamental factors and make comparisons of the seven elements later named.³ So you may assess its essentials.

3. The first of these factors is moral influence; the second, weather; the third, terrain; the fourth, command; and the fifth, doctrine.⁴

Chang Yü: The systematic order above is perfectly clear. When troops are raised to chastise transgressors, the temple council first considers the adequacy of the rulers' benevolence

¹ The title means 'reckoning', 'plans', or 'calculations'. In the Seven Military Classics edition the title is 'Preliminary Calculations'. The subject first discussed is the process we define as an Estimate (or Appreciation) of the Situation.

² Or 'for [the field of battle] is the place of life and death [and war] the road to survival or ruin'.

³ Sun Hsing-yen follows the *T'ung T'ien* here and drops the character *shih* (事): 'matters', 'factors', or 'affairs'. Without it the verse does not make much sense.

⁴ Here *Tao* (道) is translated 'moral influence'. It is usually rendered as 'The Way', or 'The Right Way'. Here it refers to the morality of government; specifically to that of the sovereign. If the sovereign governs justly, benevolently, and righteously, he follows the Right Path or the Right Way, and thus exerts a superior degree of moral influence. The character *fa* (法), here rendered 'doctrine', has as a primary meaning 'law' or 'method'. In the title of the work it is translated 'Art'. But in v. 8 Sun Tzu makes it clear that here he is talking about what we call doctrine.

and the confidence of their peoples; next, the appropriateness of nature's seasons, and finally the difficulties of the topography. After thorough deliberation of these three matters a general is appointed to launch the attack.¹ After troops have crossed the borders, responsibility for laws and orders devolves upon the general.

4. By moral influence I mean that which causes the people to be in harmony with their leaders, so that they will accompany them in life and unto death without fear of mortal peril.²

Chang Yü: When one treats people with benevolence, justice, and righteousness, and reposes confidence in them, the army will be united in mind and all will be happy to serve their leaders. The Book of Changes says: 'In happiness at overcoming difficulties, people forget the danger of death.'

5. By weather I mean the interaction of natural forces; the effects of winter's cold and summer's heat and the conduct of military operations in accordance with the seasons.³

6. By terrain I mean distances, whether the ground is traversed with ease or difficulty, whether it is open or constricted, and the chances of life or death.

Mei Yao-ch'en: . . . When employing troops it is essential to know beforehand the conditions of the terrain. Knowing the distances, one can make use of an indirect or a direct plan. If he knows the degree of ease or difficulty of traversing the ground he can estimate the advantages of using infantry or cavalry. If he knows where the ground is constricted and

¹ There are precise terms in Chinese which cannot be uniformly rendered by our word 'attack'. Chang Yü here uses a phrase which literally means 'to chastise criminals', an expression applied to attack of rebels. Other characters have such precise meanings as 'to attack by stealth', 'to attack suddenly', 'to suppress the rebellious', 'to reduce to submission', &c.

² Or 'Moral influence is that which causes the people to be in accord with their superiors. . . .' Ts'ao Ts'ao says the people are guided in the right way (of conduct) by 'instructing' them.

³ It is clear that the character *t'ien* (天) (Heaven) is used in this verse in the sense of 'weather', as it is today.

where open he can calculate the size of force appropriate. If he knows where he will give battle he knows when to concentrate or divide his forces.¹

7. By command I mean the general's qualities of wisdom, sincerity, humanity, courage, and strictness.

Li Ch'üan: These five are the virtues of the general. Hence the army refers to him as 'The Respected One'.

Tu Mu: . . . If wise, a commander is able to recognize changing circumstances and to act expediently. If sincere, his men will have no doubt of the certainty of rewards and punishments. If humane, he loves mankind, sympathizes with others, and appreciates their industry and toil. If courageous, he gains victory by seizing opportunity without hesitation. If strict, his troops are disciplined because they are in awe of him and are afraid of punishment.

Shen Pao-hsu . . . said: 'If a general is not courageous he will be unable to conquer doubts or to create great plans.'

8. By doctrine I mean organization, control, assignment of appropriate ranks to officers, regulation of supply routes, and the provision of principal items used by the army.

9. There is no general who has not heard of these five matters. Those who master them win; those who do not are defeated.

10. Therefore in laying plans compare the following elements, appraising them with the utmost care.

11. If you say which ruler possesses moral influence, which commander is the more able, which army obtains the advantages of nature and the terrain, in which regulations and instructions are better carried out, which troops are the stronger;²

Chang Yü: Chariots strong, horses fast, troops valiant, weapons sharp—so that when they hear the drums beat the

¹ 'Knowing the ground of life and death . . .' is here rendered 'If he knows where he will give battle'.

² In this and the following two verses the seven elements referred to in v. 2 are named.

attack they are happy, and when they hear the gongs sound the retirement they are enraged. He who is like this is strong.

12. Which has the better trained officers and men;

Tu Yu: . . . Therefore Master Wang said: 'If officers are unaccustomed to rigorous drilling they will be worried and hesitant in battle; if generals are not thoroughly trained they will inwardly quail when they face the enemy.'

13. And which administers rewards and punishments in a more enlightened manner;

Tu Mu: Neither should be excessive.

14. I will be able to forecast which side will be victorious and which defeated.

15. If a general who heeds my strategy is employed he is certain to win. Retain him! When one who refuses to listen to my strategy is employed, he is certain to be defeated. Dismiss him!

16. Having paid heed to the advantages of my plans, the general must create situations which will contribute to their accomplishment.¹ By 'situations' I mean that he should act expediently in accordance with what is advantageous and so control the balance.

17. All warfare is based on deception.

18. Therefore, when capable, feign incapacity; when active, inactivity.

19. When near, make it appear that you are far away; when far away, that you are near.

20. Offer the enemy a bait to lure him; feign disorder and strike him.

Tu Mu: The Chao general Li Mu released herds of cattle

¹ Emending *i* (以) to *i* (已). The commentators do not agree on an interpretation of this verse.

with their shepherds; when the Hsiung Nu had advanced a short distance he feigned a retirement, leaving behind several thousand men as if abandoning them. When the Khan heard this news he was delighted, and at the head of a strong force marched to the place. Li Mu put most of his troops into formations on the right and left wings, made a horning attack, crushed the Huns and slaughtered over one hundred thousand of their horsemen.¹

21. When he concentrates, prepare against him; where he is strong, avoid him.

22. Anger his general and confuse him.

Li Ch'uan: If the general is choleric his authority can easily be upset. His character is not firm.

Chang Yü: If the enemy general is obstinate and prone to anger, insult and enrage him, so that he will be irritated and confused, and without a plan will recklessly advance against you.

23. Pretend inferiority and encourage his arrogance.

Tu Ma: Toward the end of the Ch'in dynasty, Mo Tun of the Hsiung Nu first established his power. The Eastern Hu were strong and sent ambassadors to parley. They said: 'We wish to obtain T'ou Ma's thousand-*li* horse.' Mo Tun consulted his advisers, who all exclaimed: 'The thousand-*li* horse! The most precious thing in this country! Do not give them that!' Mo Tun replied: 'Why begrudge a horse to a neighbour?' So he sent the horse.²

Shortly after, the Eastern Hu sent envoys who said: 'We wish one of the Khan's princesses.' Mo Tun asked advice of his ministers who all angrily said: 'The Eastern Hu are unrighteous! Now they even ask for a princess! We implore

¹ The Hsiung Nu were nomads who caused the Chinese trouble for centuries. The Great Wall was constructed to protect China from their incursions.

² Mo Tun, or T'ou Ma or T'ouman, was the first leader to unite the Hsiung Nu. The thousand-*li* horse was a stallion reputedly able to travel a thousand *li* (about three hundred miles) without grass or water. The term indicates a horse of exceptional quality, undoubtedly reserved for breeding.

you to attack them!' Mo Tun said: 'How can one begrudge his neighbour a young woman?' So he gave the woman.

A short time later, the Eastern Hu returned and said: 'You have a thousand *li* of unused land which we want.' Mo Tun consulted his advisers. Some said it would be reasonable to cede the land, others that it would not. Mo Tun was enraged and said: 'Land is the foundation of the State. How could one give it away?' All those who had advised doing so were beheaded.

Mo Tun then sprang on his horse, ordered that all who remained behind were to be beheaded, and made a surprise attack on the Eastern Hu. The Eastern Hu were contemptuous of him and had made no preparations. When he attacked he annihilated them. Mo Tun then turned westward and attacked the Yueh Ti. To the south he annexed Lou Fan . . . and invaded Yen. He completely recovered the ancestral lands of the Hsiung Nu previously conquered by the Ch'in general Meng T'ien.¹

Ch'en Hao: Give the enemy young boys and women to infatuate him, and jades and silks to excite his ambitions.

24. Keep him under a strain and wear him down.

Li Ch'üan: When the enemy is at ease, tire him.

Tu Mu: . . . Toward the end of the Later Han, after Ts'ao Ts'ao had defeated Liu Pei, Pei fled to Yuan Shao, who then led out his troops intending to engage Ts'ao Ts'ao. T'ien Fang, one of Yuan Shao's staff officers, said: 'Ts'ao Ts'ao is expert at employing troops; one cannot go against him heedlessly. Nothing is better than to protract things and keep him at a distance. You, General, should fortify along the mountains and rivers and hold the four prefectures. Externally, make alliances with powerful leaders; internally, pursue an agro-military policy.² Later, select crack troops

¹ Meng T'ien subdued the border nomads during the Ch'in, and began the construction of the Great Wall. It is said that he invented the writing-brush. This is probably not correct, but he may have improved the existing brush in some way.

² This refers to agricultural military colonies in remote areas in which soldiers

and form them into extraordinary units. Taking advantage of spots where he is unprepared, make repeated sorties and disturb the country south of the river. When he comes to aid the right, attack his left; when he goes to succour the left, attack the right; exhaust him by causing him continually to run about. . . . Now if you reject this victorious strategy and decide instead to risk all on one battle, it will be too late for regrets.' Yuan Shao did not follow this advice and therefore was defeated.¹

25. When he is united, divide him.

Chang Yü: Sometimes drive a wedge between a sovereign and his ministers; on other occasions separate his allies from him. Make them mutually suspicious so that they drift apart. Then you can plot against them.

26. Attack where he is unprepared; sally out when he does not expect you.

Ho Yen-hsi: . . . Li Ching of the T'ang proposed ten plans to be used against Hsiao Hsieh, and the entire responsibility of commanding the armies was entrusted to him. In the eighth month he collected his forces at K'uei Chou.²

As it was the season of the autumn floods the waters of the Yangtze were overflowing and the roads by the three gorges were perilous, Hsiao Hsieh thought it certain that Li Ching would not advance against him. Consequently he made no preparations.

In the ninth month Li Ching took command of the troops and addressed them as follows: 'What is of the greatest importance in war is extraordinary speed; one cannot afford

and their families were settled. A portion of the time was spent cultivating the land, the remainder in drilling, training, and fighting when necessary. The Russians used this policy in colonizing Siberia. And it is in effect now in Chinese borderlands.

¹ During the period known as 'The Three Kingdoms', Wei in the north and west, Shu in the south-west, and Wu in the Yangtze valley contested for empire.

² K'uei Chou is in Ssu Ch'uan.

to neglect opportunity. Now we are concentrated and Hsiao Hsieh does not yet know of it. Taking advantage of the fact that the river is in flood, we will appear unexpectedly under the walls of his capital. As is said: 'When the thunder-clap comes, there is no time to cover the ears.' Even if he should discover us, he cannot on the spur of the moment devise a plan to counter us, and surely we can capture him.'

He advanced to I Ling and Hsiao Hsieh began to be afraid and summoned reinforcements from south of the river, but these were unable to arrive in time. Li Ching laid siege to the city and Hsieh surrendered.

'To sally forth where he does not expect you' means as when, toward its close, the Wei dynasty sent Generals Chung Hui and Teng Ai to attack Shu.¹ . . . In winter, in the tenth month, Ai left Yin P'ing and marched through uninhabited country for over seven hundred *li*, chiselling roads through the mountains and building suspension bridges. The mountains were high, the valleys deep, and this task was extremely difficult and dangerous. Also, the army, about to run out of provisions, was on the verge of perishing. Teng Ai wrapped himself in felt carpets and rolled down the steep mountain slopes; generals and officers clambered up by grasping limbs of trees. Scaling the precipices like strings of fish, the army advanced.

Teng Ai appeared first at Chiang Yu in Shu, and Ma Mou, the general charged with its defence, surrendered. Teng Ai beheaded Chu-ko Chan, who resisted at Mien-chu, and marched on Ch'eng Tu. The King of Shu, Liu Shan, surrendered.

27. These are the strategist's keys to victory. It is not possible to discuss them beforehand.

Mei Yao-ch'en: When confronted by the enemy respond to changing circumstances and devise expedients. How can these be discussed beforehand?

¹ This campaign was conducted c. A.D. 255.

28. Now if the estimates made in the temple before hostilities indicate victory it is because calculations show one's strength to be superior to that of his enemy; if they indicate defeat, it is because calculations show that one is inferior. With many calculations, one can win; with few one cannot. How much less chance of victory has one who makes none at all! By this means I examine the situation and the outcome will be clearly apparent.¹

¹ A confusing verse difficult to render into English. In the preliminary calculations some sort of counting devices were used. The operative character represents such a device, possibly a primitive abacus. We do not know how the various 'factors' and 'elements' named were weighted, but obviously the process of comparison of relative strengths was a rational one. It appears also that two separate calculations were made, the first on a national level, the second on a strategic level. In the former the five basic elements named in v. 3 were compared; we may suppose that if the results of this were favourable the military experts compared strengths, training, equity in administering rewards and punishments, and so on (the seven factors).

II

WAGING WAR

SUN TZU said:

1. Generally, operations of war require one thousand fast four-horse chariots, one thousand four-horse wagons covered in leather, and one hundred thousand mailed troops.

Tu Mu: . . . In ancient chariot fighting, 'leather-covered chariots' were both light and heavy. The latter were used for carrying halberds, weapons, military equipment, valuables, and uniforms. The *Ssu-ma Fa* said: 'One chariot carries three mailed officers; seventy-two foot troops accompany it. Additionally, there are ten cooks and servants, five men to take care of uniforms, five grooms in charge of fodder, and five men to collect firewood and draw water. Seventy-five men to one light chariot, twenty-five to one baggage wagon, so that taking the two together one hundred men compose a company.'¹

2. When provisions are transported for a thousand *li* expenditures at home and in the field, stipends for the entertainment of advisers and visitors, the cost of materials such as glue and lacquer, and of chariots and armour, will amount to one thousand pieces of gold a day. After this money is in hand, one hundred thousand troops may be raised.²

Li Ch'üan: Now when the army marches abroad, the treasury will be emptied at home.

Tu Mu: In the army there is a ritual of friendly visits from vassal lords. That is why Sun Tzu mentions 'advisers and visitors'.

¹ The ratio of combat to administrative troops was thus 3:1.

² Gold money was coined in Ch'u as early as 400 B.C., but actually Sun Tzu does not use the term 'gold'. He uses a term which meant 'metallic currency'.

3. Victory is the main object in war.¹ If this is long delayed, weapons are blunted and morale depressed. When troops attack cities, their strength will be exhausted.

4. When the army engages in protracted campaigns the resources of the state will not suffice.

Chang Yü: . . . The campaigns of the Emperor Wu of the Han dragged on with no result and after the treasury was emptied he issued a mournful edict.

5. When your weapons are dulled and ardour damped, your strength exhausted and treasure spent, neighbouring rulers will take advantage of your distress to act. And even though you have wise counsellors, none will be able to lay good plans for the future.

6. Thus, while we have heard of blundering swiftness in war, we have not yet seen a clever operation that was prolonged.

Tu Yu: An attack may lack ingenuity, but it must be delivered with supernatural speed.

7. For there has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited.

Li Ch'üan: The Spring and Autumn Annals says: 'War is like unto fire; those who will not put aside weapons are themselves consumed by them.'

8. Thus those unable to understand the dangers inherent in employing troops are equally unable to understand the advantageous ways of doing so.

9. Those adept in waging war do not require a second levy of conscripts nor more than one provisioning.²

¹ I insert the character *kuei* (貴) following the 'Seven Martial Classics'. In the context the character has the sense of 'what is valued' or 'what is prized'.

² The commentators indulge in lengthy discussions as to the number of provisionings. This version reads 'they do not require three'. That is, they require only two, i.e. one when they depart and the second when they return. In the meanwhile they live on the enemy. The TPYL version (following Ts'ao Ts'ao) reads: 'they do not require to be *again* provisioned', that is during a campaign. I adopt this.

10. They carry equipment from the homeland; they rely for provisions on the enemy. Thus the army is plentifully provided with food.

11. When a country is impoverished by military operations it is due to distant transportation; carriage of supplies for great distances renders the people destitute.

Chang Yü: . . . If the army had to be supplied with grain over a distance of one thousand *li*, the troops would have a hungry look.¹

12. Where the army is, prices are high; when prices rise the wealth of the people is exhausted. When wealth is exhausted the peasantry will be afflicted with urgent exactions.²

Chia Lin: . . . Where troops are gathered the price of every commodity goes up because everyone covets the extraordinary profits to be made.³

13. With strength thus depleted and wealth consumed the households in the central plains will be utterly impoverished and seven-tenths of their wealth dissipated.

Li Ch'üan: If war drags on without cessation men and women will resent not being able to marry, and will be distressed by the burdens of transportation.

14. As to government expenditures, those due to broken-down chariots, worn-out horses, armour and helmets, arrows and crossbows, lances, hand and body shields, draft animals and supply wagons will amount to sixty per cent. of the total.⁴

15. Hence the wise general sees to it that his troops feed on the enemy, for one bushel of the enemy's provisions is equivalent to twenty of his; one hundredweight of enemy fodder to twenty hundredweight of his.

¹ This comment appears under V. 10 but seems more appropriate here.

² Or, 'close to [where] the army [is]', (i.e. in the zone of operations) 'buying is expensive; when buying is expensive . . .'. The 'urgent [or 'heavy'] exactions' refers to special taxes, forced contributions of animals and grain, and portage.

³ This comment, which appears under the previous verse, has been transposed.

⁴ Here Sun Tzu uses the specific character for 'crossbow'.

Chang Yü: . . . In transporting provisions for a distance of one thousand *li*, twenty bushels will be consumed in delivering one to the army. . . . If difficult terrain must be crossed even more is required.

16. The reason troops slay the enemy is because they are enraged.¹

Ho Yen-hsi: When the Yen army surrounded Chi Mo in Ch'i, they cut off the noses of all the Ch'i prisoners.² The men of Ch'i were enraged and conducted a desperate defence. T'ien Tan sent a secret agent to say: 'We are terrified that you people of Yen will exhume the bodies of our ancestors from their graves. How this will freeze our hearts!'

The Yen army immediately began despoiling the tombs and burning the corpses. The defenders of Chi Mo witnessed this from the city walls and with tears flowing wished to go forth to give battle, for rage had multiplied their strength by ten. T'ien Tan knew then that his troops were ready, and inflicted a ruinous defeat on Yen.

17. They take booty from the enemy because they desire wealth.

Tu Mu: . . . In the Later Han, Tu Hsiang, Prefect of Chin Chou, attacked the Kuei Chou rebels Pu Yang, P'an Hung, and others. He entered Nan Hai, destroyed three of their camps, and captured much treasure. However, P'an Hung and his followers were still strong and numerous, while Tu Hsiang's troops, now rich and arrogant, no longer had the slightest desire to fight.

Hsiang said: 'Pu Yang and P'an Hung have been rebels for ten years. Both are well-versed in attack and defence. What we should really do is unite the strength of all the prefectures and then attack them. For the present the troops shall be encouraged to go hunting.' Whereupon the troops both high and low went together to snare game.

As soon as they had left, Tu Hsiang secretly sent people

¹ This seems out of place.

² This siege took place in 279 B.C.

to burn down their barracks. The treasures they had accumulated were completely destroyed. When the hunters returned there was not one who did not weep.

Tu Hsiang said: 'The wealth and goods of Pu Yang and those with him are sufficient to enrich several generations. You gentlemen did not do your best. What you have lost is but a small bit of what is there. Why worry about it?'

When the troops heard this, they were all enraged and wished to fight. Tu Hsiang ordered the horses fed and everyone to eat in his bed, and early in the morning they marched on the rebels' camp.¹ Yang and Hung had not made preparations, and Tu Hsiang's troops made a spirited attack and destroyed them.

Chang Yü: . . . In this Imperial Dynasty, when the Eminent Founder ordered his generals to attack Shu, he decreed: 'In all the cities and prefectures taken, you should, in my name, empty the treasuries and public storehouses to entertain the officers and troops. What the State wants is only the land.'

18. Therefore, when in chariot fighting more than ten chariots are captured, reward those who take the first. Replace the enemy's flags and banners with your own, mix the captured chariots with yours, and mount them.

19. Treat the captives well, and care for them.

Chang Yü: All the soldiers taken must be cared for with magnanimity and sincerity so that they may be used by us.

20. This is called 'winning a battle and becoming stronger'.

21. Hence what is essential in war is victory, not prolonged operations. And therefore the general who understands war is the Minister of the people's fate and arbiter of the nation's destiny.

Ho Yen-hsi: The difficulties in the appointment of a commander are the same today as they were in ancient times.²

¹ They ate a pre-cooked meal in order to avoid building fires to prepare breakfast?

² Ho Yen-hsi probably wrote this about A.D. 1050.

III

OFFENSIVE STRATEGY

SUN TZU said:

1. Generally in war the best policy is to take a state intact; to ruin it is inferior to this.

Li Ch'üan: Do not put a premium on killing.

2. To capture the enemy's army is better than to destroy it; to take intact a battalion, a company or a five-man squad is better than to destroy them.

3. For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.

4. Thus, what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy;¹

Tu Mu: . . . The Grand Duke said: 'He who excels at resolving difficulties does so before they arise. He who excels in conquering his enemies triumphs before threats materialize.'

Li Ch'üan: Attack plans at their inception. In the Later Han, K'ou Hsün surrounded Kao Chun.² Chun sent his Planning Officer, Huang-fu Wen, to parley. Huang-fu Wen was stubborn and rude and K'ou Hsün beheaded him, and informed Kao Chun: 'Your staff officer was without propriety. I have beheaded him. If you wish to submit, do so immediately. Otherwise defend yourself.' On the same day, Chun threw open his fortifications and surrendered.

All K'ou Hsün's generals said: 'May we ask, you killed his envoy, but yet forced him to surrender his city. How is this?'

¹ Not, as Giles translates, 'to balk the enemy's plans'.

² This took place during the first century A.D.

K'ou Hsün said: 'Huang-fu Wen was Kao Chun's heart and guts, his intimate counsellor. If I had spared Huang-fu Wen's life, he would have accomplished his schemes, but when I killed him, Kao Chun lost his guts. It is said: "The supreme excellence in war is to attack the enemy's plans."'

All the generals said: 'This is beyond our comprehension.'

5. Next best is to disrupt his alliances:¹

Tu Yu: Do not allow your enemies to get together.

Wang Hsi: . . . Look into the matter of his alliances and cause them to be severed and dissolved. If an enemy has alliances, the problem is grave and the enemy's position strong; if he has no alliances the problem is minor and the enemy's position weak.

6. The next best is to attack his army.

Chia Lin: . . . The Grand Duke said: 'He who struggles for victory with naked blades is not a good general.'

Wang Hsi: Battles are dangerous affairs.

Chang Yü: If you cannot nip his plans in the bud, or disrupt his alliances when they are about to be consummated, sharpen your weapons to gain the victory.

7. The worst policy is to attack cities. Attack cities only when there is no alternative.²

8. To prepare the shielded wagons and make ready the necessary arms and equipment requires at least three months; to pile up earthen ramps against the walls an additional three months will be needed.

9. If the general is unable to control his impatience and orders his troops to swarm up the wall like ants, one-third of them

¹ Not, as Giles translates, 'to prevent the junction of the enemy's forces'.

² In this series of verses Sun Tzu is not discussing the art of generalship as Giles apparently thought. These are objectives or policies—*cheng* (政)—in order of relative merit.

will be killed without taking the city. Such is the calamity of these attacks.

Tu Mu: . . . In the later Wei, the Emperor T'ai Wu led one hundred thousand troops to attack the Sung general Tsang Chih at Yu T'ai. The Emperor first asked Tsang Chih for some wine.¹ Tsang Chih sealed up a pot full of urine and sent it to him. T'ai Wu was transported with rage and immediately attacked the city, ordering his troops to scale the walls and engage in close combat. Corpses piled up to the top of the walls and after thirty days of this the dead exceeded half his force.

10. Thus, those skilled in war subdue the enemy's army without battle. They capture his cities without assaulting them and overthrow his state without protracted operations.

Li Ch'üan: They conquer by strategy. In the Later Han the Marquis of Tsan, Tsang Kung, surrounded the 'Yao' rebels at Yüan Wu, but during a succession of months was unable to take the city.² His officers and men were ill and covered with ulcers. The King of Tung Hai spoke to Tsang Kung, saying: 'Now you have massed troops and encircled the enemy, who is determined to fight to the death. This is no strategy! You should lift the siege. Let them know that an escape route is open and they will flee and disperse. Then any village constable will be able to capture them!' Tsang Kung followed this advice and took Yüan Wu.

11. Your aim must be to take All-under-Heaven intact. Thus your troops are not worn out and your gains will be complete. This is the art of offensive strategy.

12. Consequently, the art of using troops is this: When ten to the enemy's one, surround him;

13. When five times his strength, attack him;

Chang Yü: If my force is five times that of the enemy I alarm

¹ Exchange of gifts and compliments was a normal preliminary to battle.

² *Yao* (妖) connotes the supernatural. The Boxers, who believed themselves impervious to foreign lead, could be so described.

him to the front, surprise him to the rear, create an uproar in the east and strike in the west.

14. If double his strength, divide him.¹

Tu Yu: . . . If a two-to-one superiority is insufficient to manipulate the situation, we use a distracting force to divide his army. Therefore the Grand Duke said: 'If one is unable to influence the enemy to divide his forces, he cannot discuss unusual tactics.'

15. If equally matched you may engage him.

Ho Yen-hsi: . . . In these circumstances only the able general can win.

16. If weaker numerically, be capable of withdrawing;

Tu Mu: If your troops do not equal his, temporarily avoid his initial onrush. Probably later you can take advantage of a soft spot. Then rouse yourself and seek victory with determined spirit.

Chang Yü: If the enemy is strong and I am weak, I temporarily withdraw and do not engage.² This is the case when the abilities and courage of the generals and the efficiency of troops are equal.

If I am in good order and the enemy in disarray, if I am energetic and he careless, then, even if he be numerically stronger, I can give battle.

17. And if in all respects unequal, be capable of eluding him, for a small force is but booty for one more powerful.³

Chang Yü: . . . Mencius said: 'The small certainly cannot equal the large, nor can the weak match the strong, nor the few the many.'⁴

¹ Some commentators think this verse 'means to divide one's own force', but that seems a less satisfactory interpretation, as the character *chih* (之) used in the two previous verses refers to the enemy.

² *Tu Mu* and *Chang Yü* both counsel 'temporary' withdrawal, thus emphasizing the point that offensive action is to be resumed when circumstances are propitious.

³ Lit. 'the strength of a small force is . . .'. This apparently refers to its weapons and equipment.

⁴ CC II (Mencius), i, ch. 7.

18. Now the general is the protector of the state. If this protection is all-embracing, the state will surely be strong; if defective, the state will certainly be weak.

Chang Yü: . . . The Grand Duke said: 'A sovereign who obtains the right person prospers. One who fails to do so will be ruined.'

19. Now there are three ways in which a ruler can bring misfortune upon his army:¹

20. When ignorant that the army should not advance, to order an advance or ignorant that it should not retire, to order a retirement. This is described as 'hobbling the army'.

Chia Lin: The advance and retirement of the army can be controlled by the general in accordance with prevailing circumstances. No evil is greater than commands of the sovereign from the court.

21. When ignorant of military affairs, to participate in their administration. This causes the officers to be perplexed.

Ts'ao Ts'ao: . . . An army cannot be run according to rules of etiquette.

Tu Mu: As far as propriety, laws, and decrees are concerned, the army has its own code, which it ordinarily follows. If these are made identical with those used in governing a state the officers will be bewildered.

Chang Yü: Benevolence and righteousness may be used to govern a state but cannot be used to administer an army. Expediency and flexibility are used in administering an army, but cannot be used in governing a state.

22. When ignorant of command problems to share in the exercise of responsibilities. This engenders doubts in the minds of the officers.²

¹ Here I have transposed the characters meaning 'ruler' and 'army', otherwise the verse would read that there are three ways in which an army can bring misfortune upon the sovereign.

² Lit. 'Not knowing [or 'not understanding' or 'ignorant of'] [where] authority [lies] in the army'; or 'ignorant of [matters relating to exercise of] military authority . . .'. The operative character is 'authority' or 'power'.

Wang Hsi: . . . If one ignorant of military matters is sent to participate in the administration of the army, then in every movement there will be disagreement and mutual frustration and the entire army will be hamstrung. That is why Pei Tu memorialized the throne to withdraw the Army Supervisor; only then was he able to pacify Ts'ao Chou.¹

Chang Yü: In recent times court officials have been used as Supervisors of the Army and this is precisely what is wrong.

23. If the army is confused and suspicious, neighbouring rulers will cause trouble. This is what is meant by the saying: 'A confused army leads to another's victory.'²

Meng: . . . The Grand Duke said: 'One who is confused in purpose cannot respond to his enemy.'

Li Ch'üan: . . . The wrong person cannot be appointed to command. . . . Lin Hsiang-ju, the Prime Minister of Chao, said: 'Chao Kua is merely able to read his father's books, and is as yet ignorant of correlating changing circumstances. Now Your Majesty, on account of his name, makes him the commander-in-chief. This is like glueing the pegs of a lute and then trying to tune it.'

24. Now there are five circumstances in which victory may be predicted:

25. He who knows when he can fight and when he cannot will be victorious.

26. He who understands how to use both large and small forces will be victorious.

Tu Yu: There are circumstances in war when many cannot attack few, and others when the weak can master the strong.

¹ The 'Army Supervisors' of the T'ang were in fact political commissars. Pei Tu became Prime Minister in A.D. 815 and in 817 requested the throne to recall the supervisor assigned him, who must have been interfering in army operations.

² 'Feudal Lords' is rendered 'neighbouring rulers'. The commentators agree that a confused army robs itself of victory.

One able to manipulate such circumstances will be victorious.

27. He whose ranks are united in purpose will be victorious.
Tu Yu: Therefore Mencius said: 'The appropriate season is not as important as the advantages of the ground; the weather is not as important as harmonious human relations.'¹

28. He who is prudent and lies in wait for an enemy who is not will be victorious.

Ch'en Hao: Create an invincible army and await the enemy's moment of vulnerability.

Ho Yen-hsi: . . . A gentleman said: 'To rely on rustics and not prepare is the greatest of crimes; to be prepared beforehand for any contingency is the greatest of virtues.'

29. He whose generals are able and not interfered with by the sovereign will be victorious.

Tu Yu: . . . Therefore Master Wang said: 'To make appointments is the province of the sovereign; to decide on battle is that of the general.'

Wang Hsi: . . . A sovereign of high character and intelligence must be able to know the right man, should place the responsibility on him, and expect results.

Ho Yen-hsi: . . . Now in war there may be one hundred changes in each step. When one sees he can, he advances; when he sees that things are difficult, he retires. To say that a general must await commands of the sovereign in such circumstances is like informing a superior that you wish to put out a fire. Before the order to do so arrives the ashes are cold. And it is said one must consult the Army Supervisor in these matters! This is as if in building a house beside the road one took advice from those who pass by. Of course the work would never be completed!²

¹ CC II (Mencius), ii, ch. 1, p. 85.

² A paraphrase of an ode which Legge renders:

They are like one taking counsel with wayfarers
about building a house

Which consequently will never come to completion.

(CC IV, ii, p. 332, Ode I.)

To put a rein on an able general while at the same time asking him to suppress a cunning enemy is like tying up the Black Hound of Han and then ordering him to catch elusive hares. What is the difference?

30. It is in these five matters that the way to victory is known.

31. Therefore I say: 'Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril.'

32. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal.

33. If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.'

Li Ch'üan: Such people are called 'mad bandits'. What can they expect if not defeat?

IV

DISPOSITIONS¹

SUN TZU said:

1. Anciently the skilful warriors first made themselves invincible and awaited the enemy's moment of vulnerability.

2. Invincibility depends on one's self; the enemy's vulnerability on him.

3. It follows that those skilled in war can make themselves invincible but cannot cause an enemy to be certainly vulnerable.

Mei Yao-ch'en: That which depends on me, I can do; that which depends on the enemy cannot be certain.

4. Therefore it is said that one may know how to win, but cannot necessarily do so.

5. Invincibility lies in the defence; the possibility of victory in the attack.²

6. One defends when his strength is inadequate; he attacks when it is abundant.

7. The experts in defence conceal themselves as under the ninefold earth; those skilled in attack move as from above the ninefold heavens. Thus they are capable both of protecting themselves and of gaining a complete victory.³

Tu Yu: Those expert at preparing defences consider it

¹ The character *hsing* (形) means 'shape', 'form', or 'appearance' or in a more restricted sense, 'disposition' or 'formation'. The Martial Classics edition apparently followed Ts'ao Ts'ao and titled the chapter *Chun Hsing* (軍形), 'Shape [or 'Dispositions'] of the Army'. As will appear, the character connotes more than mere physical dispositions.

² 'Invincibility is [means] defence; the ability to conquer is [means] attack.'

³ The concept that Heaven and Earth each consist of 'layers' or 'stages' is an ancient one.

fundamental to rely on the strength of such obstacles as mountains, rivers and foothills. They make it impossible for the enemy to know where to attack. They secretly conceal themselves as under the nine-layered ground.

Those expert in attack consider it fundamental to rely on the seasons and the advantages of the ground; they use inundations and fire according to the situation. They make it impossible for an enemy to know where to prepare. They release the attack like a lightning bolt from above the nine-layered heavens.

8. To foresee a victory which the ordinary man can foresee is not the acme of skill;

Li Ch'üan: . . . When Han Hsin destroyed Chao State he marched out of the Well Gorge before breakfast. He said: 'We will destroy the Chao army and then meet for a meal.' The generals were despondent and pretended to agree. Han Hsin drew up his army with the river to its rear. The Chao troops climbed upon their breastworks and, observing this, roared with laughter and taunted him: 'The General of Han does not know how to use troops!' Han Hsin then proceeded to defeat the Chao army and after breakfasting beheaded Lord Ch'eng An.

This is an example of what the multitude does not comprehend.¹

9. To triumph in battle and be universally acclaimed 'Expert' is not the acme of skill, for to lift an autumn down requires no great strength; to distinguish between the sun and moon is no test of vision; to hear the thunderclap is no indication of acute hearing.²

Chang Yü: By 'autumn down' Sun Tzu means rabbits' down, which on the coming of autumn is extremely light.

¹ Han Hsin placed his army in 'death ground'. He burned his boats and smashed his cooking pots. The river was at the rear, the Chao army to the front. Han Hsin had to conquer or drown.

² To win a hard-fought battle or to win one by luck is no mark of skill.

10. Anciently those called skilled in war conquered an enemy easily conquered.¹

11. And therefore the victories won by a master of war gain him neither reputation for wisdom nor merit for valour.

Tu Mu: A victory gained before the situation has crystallized is one the common man does not comprehend. Thus its author gains no reputation for sagacity. Before he has bloodied his blade the enemy state has already submitted.

Ho Yen-hsi: . . . When you subdue your enemy without fighting who will pronounce you valorous?

12. For he wins his victories without erring. 'Without erring' means that whatever he does insures his victory; he conquers an enemy already defeated.

Chen Hao: In planning, never a useless move; in strategy, no step taken in vain.

13. Therefore the skilful commander takes up a position in which he cannot be defeated and misses no opportunity to master his enemy.

14. Thus a victorious army wins its victories before seeking battle; an army destined to defeat fights in the hope of winning.

Tu Mu: . . . Duke Li Ching of Wei said: 'Now, the supreme requirements of generalship are a clear perception, the harmony of his host, a profound strategy coupled with far-reaching plans, an understanding of the seasons and an ability to examine the human factors. For a general unable to estimate his capabilities or comprehend the arts of expediency and flexibility when faced with the opportunity to engage the enemy will advance in a stumbling and hesitant manner, looking anxiously first to his right and then to his left, and be unable to produce a plan. Credulous, he will place confidence in unreliable reports, believing at

¹ The enemy was conquered easily because the experts previously had created appropriate conditions.

one moment this and at another that. As timorous as a fox in advancing or retiring, his groups will be scattered about. What is the difference between this and driving innocent people into boiling water or fire? Is this not exactly like driving cows and sheep to feed wolves or tigers?'

15. Those skilled in war cultivate the *Tao* and preserve the laws and are therefore able to formulate victorious policies.

Tu Mu: The *Tao* is the way of humanity and justice; 'laws' are regulations and institutions. Those who excel in war first cultivate their own humanity and justice and maintain their laws and institutions. By these means they make their governments invincible.

16. Now the elements of the art of war are first, measurement of space; second, estimation of quantities; third, calculations; fourth, comparisons; and fifth, chances of victory.

17. Measurements of space are derived from the ground.

18. Quantities derive from measurement, figures from quantities, comparisons from figures, and victory from comparisons.

Ho Yen-hsi:¹ 'Ground' includes both distances and type of terrain; 'measurement' is calculation. Before the army is dispatched, calculations are made respecting the degree of difficulty of the enemy's land; the directness and deviousness of its roads; the number of his troops; the quantity of his war equipment and the state of his morale. Calculations are made to see if the enemy can be attacked and only after this is the population mobilized and troops raised.

19. Thus a victorious army is as a hundredweight balanced against a grain; a defeated army as a grain balanced against a hundredweight.

20. It is because of disposition that a victorious general is able

¹ This comment appears in the text after V. 18. The factors enumerated are qualities of 'shape'.

to make his people fight with the effect of pent-up waters which, suddenly released, plunge into a bottomless abyss.

Chang Yü: The nature of water is that it avoids heights and hastens to the lowlands. When a dam is broken, the water cascades with irresistible force. Now the shape of an army resembles water. Take advantage of the enemy's unpreparedness; attack him when he does not expect it; avoid his strength and strike his emptiness, and like water, none can oppose you.

V

ENERGY¹

SUN TZU said:

1. Generally, management of many is the same as management of few. It is a matter of organization.²

Chang Yü: To manage a host one must first assign responsibilities to the generals and their assistants, and establish the strengths of ranks and files. . . .

One man is a single; two, a pair; three, a trio. A pair and a trio make a five,³ which is a squad; two squads make a section; five sections, a platoon; two platoons, a company; two companies, a battalion; two battalions, a regiment; two regiments, a group; two groups, a brigade; two brigades, an army.⁴ Each is subordinate to the superior and controls the inferior. Each is properly trained. Thus one may manage a host of a million men just as he would a few.

2. And to control many is the same as to control few. This is a matter of formations and signals.

Chang Yü: . . . Now when masses of troops are employed, certainly they are widely separated, and ears are not able to hear acutely nor eyes to see clearly. Therefore officers and men are ordered to advance or retreat by observing the flags and banners and to move or stop by signals of bells and

¹ *Shih* (勢), the title of this chapter, means 'force', 'influence', 'authority', 'energy'. The commentators take it to mean 'energy' or 'potential' in some contexts and 'situation' in others.

² *Fen Shu* (分數) is literally 'division of [or by] numbers' (or 'division and numbering'). Here translated 'organization'.

³ Suggestive that the 'pair' and the 'trio' carried different weapons.

⁴ A ten-man section; one hundred to the company; two hundred to the battalion; four hundred to the regiment; eight hundred to the group; sixteen hundred to the brigade; thirty-two hundred to the army. This apparently reflects organization at the time Chang Yü was writing. The English terms for the units are arbitrary.

drums. Thus the valiant shall not advance alone, nor shall the coward flee.

3. That the army is certain to sustain the enemy's attack without suffering defeat is due to operations of the extraordinary and the normal forces.¹

Li Ch'üan: The force which confronts the enemy is the normal; that which goes to his flanks the extraordinary. No commander of an army can wrest the advantage from the enemy without extraordinary forces.

Ho Yen-hsi: I make the enemy conceive my normal force to be the extraordinary and my extraordinary to be the normal. Moreover, the normal may become the extraordinary and vice versa.

4. Troops thrown against the enemy as a grindstone against eggs is an example of a solid acting upon a void.

Ts'ao Ts'ao: Use the most solid to attack the most empty.

5. Generally, in battle, use the normal force to engage; use the extraordinary to win.

6. Now the resources of those skilled in the use of extraordinary forces are as infinite as the heavens and earth; as inexhaustible as the flow of the great rivers.²

7. For they end and recommence; cyclical, as are the movements of the sun and moon. They die away and are reborn; recurrent, as are the passing seasons.

8. The musical notes are only five in number but their melodies are so numerous that one cannot hear them all.

9. The primary colours are only five in number but their combinations are so infinite that one cannot visualize them all.

¹ The concept expressed by *cheng* (正), 'normal' (or 'direct') and *ch'i* (奇), 'extraordinary' (or 'indirect') is of basic importance. The normal (*cheng*) force fixes or distracts the enemy; the extraordinary (*ch'i*) forces act when and where their blows are not anticipated. Should the enemy perceive and respond to a *ch'i* manoeuvre in such a manner as to neutralize it, the manoeuvre would automatically become *cheng*.

² Sun Tzu uses the characters *chiang* (江) and *ho* (河), which I have rendered 'the great rivers'.

10. The flavours are only five in number but their blends are so various that one cannot taste them all.

11. In battle there are only the normal and extraordinary forces, but their combinations are limitless; none can comprehend them all.

12. For these two forces are mutually reproductive; their interaction as endless as that of interlocked rings. Who can determine where one ends and the other begins?

13. When torrential water tosses boulders, it is because of its momentum;

14. When the strike of a hawk breaks the body of its prey, it is because of timing.¹

Tu Yu: Strike the enemy as swiftly as a falcon strikes its target. It surely breaks the back of its prey for the reason that it awaits the right moment to strike. Its movement is regulated.

15. Thus the momentum of one skilled in war is overwhelming, and his attack precisely regulated.²

16. His potential is that of a fully drawn crossbow; his timing, the release of the trigger.³

17. In the tumult and uproar the battle seems chaotic, but there is no disorder; the troops appear to be milling about in circles but cannot be defeated.⁴

Li Ch'üan: In battle all appears to be turmoil and confusion. But the flags and banners have prescribed arrangements; the sounds of the cymbals, fixed rules.

18. Apparent confusion is a product of good order; apparent cowardice, of courage; apparent weakness, of strength.⁵

¹ Or regulation of its distance from the prey.

² Following Tu Mu.

³ Here again the specific character meaning 'crossbow' is used.

⁴ Sun Tzu's onomatopoeic terms suggest the noise and confusion of battle.

⁵ Following Tu Mu.

Tu Mu: The verse means that if one wishes to feign disorder to entice an enemy he must himself be well-disciplined. Only then can he feign confusion. One who wishes to simulate cowardice and lie in wait for his enemy must be courageous, for only then is he able to simulate fear. One who wishes to appear to be weak in order to make his enemy arrogant must be extremely strong. Only then can he feign weakness.

19. Order or disorder depends on organization; courage or cowardice on circumstances; strength or weakness on dispositions.

Li Ch'üan: Now when troops gain a favourable situation the coward is brave; if it be lost, the brave become cowards. In the art of war there are no fixed rules. These can only be worked out according to circumstances.

20. Thus, those skilled at making the enemy move do so by creating a situation to which he must conform; they entice him with something he is certain to take, and with lures of ostensible profit they await him in strength.

21. Therefore a skilled commander seeks victory from the situation and does not demand it of his subordinates.

Ch'en Hao: Experts in war depend especially on opportunity and expediency. They do not place the burden of accomplishment on their men alone.

22. He selects his men and they exploit the situation.¹

Li Ch'üan: . . . Now, the valiant can fight; the cautious defend, and the wise counsel. Thus there is none whose talent is wasted.

Tu Mu: . . . Do not demand accomplishment of those who have no talent.

When Ts'ao Ts'ao attacked Chang Lu in Han Chung,

¹ The text reads: "Thus he is able to select men . . .". That is, men capable of exploiting any situation. A system of selection not based on nepotism or favouritism is the inference.

he left Generals Chang Liao, Li Tien, and Lo Chin in command of over one thousand men to defend Ho Fei. Ts'ao Ts'ao sent instructions to the Army Commissioner, Hsieh Ti, and wrote on the edge of the envelope: 'Open this only when the rebels arrive.' Soon after, Sun Ch'üan of Wu with one hundred thousand men besieged Ho Fei. The generals opened the instructions and read: 'If Sun Ch'üan arrives, Generals Chang and Li will go out to fight. General Lo will defend the city. The Army Commissioner shall not participate in the battle.'¹ All the other generals should engage the enemy.'

Chang Liao said: 'Our Lord is campaigning far away, and if we wait for the arrival of reinforcements the rebels will certainly destroy us. Therefore the instructions say that before the enemy is assembled we should immediately attack him in order to blunt his keen edge and to stabilize the morale of our own troops. Then we can defend the city. The opportunity for victory or defeat lies in this one action.'

Li Tien and Chang Liao went out to attack and actually defeated Sun Ch'üan, and the morale of the Wu army was rubbed out. They returned and put their defences in order and the troops felt secure. Sun Ch'üan assaulted the city for ten days but could not take it and withdrew.

The historian Sun Sheng in discussing this observed: 'Now war is a matter of deception. As to the defence of Ho Fei, it was hanging in the air, weak and without reinforcements. If one trusts solely to brave generals who love fighting, this will cause trouble. If one relies solely on those who are cautious, their frightened hearts will find it difficult to control the situation.'

Chang Yü: Now the method of employing men is to use the avaricious and the stupid, the wise and the brave, and to give responsibility to each in situations that suit him. Do not charge people to do what they cannot do. Select them and give them responsibilities commensurate with their abilities.

¹ Ts'ao Ts'ao took care to keep the political officer out of the picture!

24. He who relies on the situation uses his men in fighting as one rolls logs or stones. Now the nature of logs and stones is that on stable ground they are static; on unstable ground, they move. If square, they stop; if round, they roll.

25. Thus, the potential of troops skilfully commanded in battle may be compared to that of round boulders which roll down from mountain heights.

Tu Mu: . . . Thus one need use but little strength to achieve much.

Chang Yü: . . . Li Ching said: 'In war there are three kinds of situation:

'When the general is contemptuous of his enemy and his officers love to fight, their ambitions soaring as high as the azure clouds and their spirits as fierce as hurricanes, this is situation in respect to morale.

'When one man defends a narrow mountain defile which is like sheep's intestines or the door of a dog-house, he can withstand one thousand. This is situation in respect to terrain.

'When one takes advantage of the enemy's laxity, his weariness, his hunger and thirst, or strikes when his advanced camps are not settled, or his army is only half-way across a river, this is situation in respect to the enemy.'

Therefore when using troops, one must take advantage of the situation exactly as if he were setting a ball in motion on a steep slope. The force applied is minute but the results are enormous.

VI

WEAKNESSES AND STRENGTHS

SUN TZU said:

1. Generally, he who occupies the field of battle first and awaits his enemy is at ease; he who comes later to the scene and rushes into the fight is weary.
2. And therefore those skilled in war bring the enemy to the field of battle and are not brought there by him.
3. One able to make the enemy come of his own accord does so by offering him some advantage. And one able to prevent him from coming does so by hurting him.
Tu Yu: . . . If you are able to hold critical points on his strategic roads the enemy cannot come. Therefore Master Wang said: 'When a cat is at the rat hole, ten thousand rats dare not come out; when a tiger guards the ford, ten thousand deer cannot cross.'
4. When the enemy is at ease, be able to weary him; when well fed, to starve him; when at rest, to make him move.
5. Appear at places to which he must hasten; move swiftly where he does not expect you.
6. That you may march a thousand *li* without wearying yourself is because you travel where there is no enemy.
Ts'ao Ts'ao: Go into emptiness, strike voids, bypass what he defends, hit him where he does not expect you.
7. To be certain to take what you attack is to attack a place the enemy does not protect. To be certain to hold what you defend is to defend a place the enemy does not attack.
8. Therefore, against those skilled in attack, an enemy does not

know where to defend; against the experts in defence, the enemy does not know where to attack.

9. Subtle and insubstantial, the expert leaves no trace; divinely mysterious, he is inaudible. Thus he is master of his enemy's fate.

Ho Yen-hsi: . . . I make the enemy see my strengths as weaknesses and my weaknesses as strengths while I cause his strengths to become weaknesses and discover where he is not strong. . . . I conceal my tracks so that none can discern them; I keep silence so that none can hear me.

10. He whose advance is irresistible plunges into his enemy's weak positions; he who in withdrawal cannot be pursued moves so swiftly that he cannot be overtaken.

Chang Yü: . . . Come like the wind, go like the lightning.

11. When I wish to give battle, my enemy, even though protected by high walls and deep moats, cannot help but engage me, for I attack a position he must succour.

12. When I wish to avoid battle I may defend myself simply by drawing a line on the ground; the enemy will be unable to attack me because I divert him from going where he wishes.

Tu Mu: Chu-ko Liang camped at Yang P'ing and ordered Wei Yen and various generals to combine forces and go down to the east. Chu-ko Liang left only ten thousand men to defend the city while he waited for reports. Ssü-ma I said: 'Chu-ko Liang is in the city; his troops are few; he is not strong. His generals and officers have lost heart.' At this time Chu-ko Liang's spirits were high as usual. He ordered his troops to lay down their banners and silence their drums, and did not allow his men to go out. He opened the four gates and swept and sprinkled the streets.

Ssü-ma I suspected an ambush, and led his army in haste to the Northern Mountains.

Chu-ko Liang remarked to his Chief of Staff: 'Ssü-ma I thought I had prepared an ambush and fled along the

mountain ranges.' Ssü-ma I later learned of this and was overcome with regrets.¹

13. If I am able to determine the enemy's dispositions while at the same time I conceal my own then I can concentrate and he must divide. And if I concentrate while he divides, I can use my entire strength to attack a fraction of his.² There, I will be numerically superior. Then, if I am able to use many to strike few at the selected point, those I deal with will be in dire straits.³

Tu Mu: . . . Sometimes I use light troops and vigorous horsemen to attack where he is unprepared, sometimes strong crossbowmen and bow-stretching archers to snatch key positions, to stir up his left, overrun his right, alarm him to the front, and strike suddenly into his rear.

In broad daylight I deceive him by the use of flags and banners and at night confuse him by beating drums. Then in fear and trembling he will divide his forces to take precautionary measures.

14. The enemy must not know where I intend to give battle. For if he does not know where I intend to give battle he must prepare in a great many places. And when he prepares in a great many places, those I have to fight in any one place will be few.

15. For if he prepares to the front his rear will be weak, and if to the rear, his front will be fragile. If he prepares to the left, his right will be vulnerable and if to the right, there will be few on his left. And when he prepares everywhere he will be weak everywhere.⁴

¹ This story provides the plot for a popular Chinese opera. Chu-ko Liang sat in a gate tower and played his lute while the porters swept and sprinkled the streets and Ssu-ma I's host hovered on the outskirts. Ssu-ma I had been fooled before by Chu-ko Liang and would be fooled again.

² Lit. 'one part of his'.

³ Karlgren GS 1120m for 'dire straits'.

⁴ Lit. 'if there is no place he does not make preparations there is no place he is not vulnerable'. The double negative makes the meaning emphatically positive.

Chang Yü: He will be unable to fathom where my chariots will actually go out, or where my cavalry will actually come from, or where my infantry will actually follow up, and therefore he will disperse and divide and will have to guard against me everywhere. Consequently his force will be scattered and weakened and his strength divided and dissipated, and at the place I engage him I can use a large host against his isolated units.

16. One who has few must prepare against the enemy; one who has many makes the enemy prepare against him.

17. If one knows where and when a battle will be fought his troops can march a thousand *li* and meet on the field. But if one knows neither the battleground nor the day of battle, the left will be unable to aid the right, or the right, the left; the van to support the rear, or the rear, the van. How much more is this so when separated by several tens of *li*, or, indeed, by even a few!

Tu Yü: Now those skilled in war must know where and when a battle will be fought. They measure the roads and fix the date. They divide the army and march in separate columns. Those who are distant start first, those who are near by, later. Thus the meeting of troops from distances of a thousand *li* takes place at the same time. It is like people coming to a city market.¹

¹ Tu Mu tells the following interesting story to illustrate the point:

Emperor Wu of the Sung sent Chu Ling-shih to attack Ch'iao Tsung in Shu. The Emperor Wu said: 'Last year Liu Ching-hsuan went out of the territory inside the river heading for Huang Wu. He achieved nothing and returned. The rebels now think that I should come from outside the river but surmise that I will take them unaware by coming from inside the river. If this is the case they are certain to defend Fu Ch'eng with heavy troops and guard the interior roads. If I go to Huang Wu, I will fall directly into their trap. Now, I will move the main body outside the river and take Ch'eng Tu, and use distracting troops towards the inside of the river. This is a wonderful plan for controlling the enemy.'

Yet he was worried that his plan would be known and that the rebels would learn where he was weak and where strong. So he handed a completely sealed letter to Ling Shih. On the envelope he wrote 'Open when you reach Pai Ti'. At this time the army did not know how it was to be divided or from where it would march.

18. Although I estimate the troops of Yüeh as many, of what benefit is this superiority in respect to the outcome?¹

19. Thus I say that victory can be created. For even if the enemy is numerous, I can prevent him from engaging.

Chia Lin: Although the enemy be numerous, if he does not know my military situation, I can always make him urgently attend to his own preparations so that he has no leisure to plan to fight me.

20. Therefore, determine the enemy's plans and you will know which strategy will be successful and which will not;

21. Agitate him and ascertain the pattern of his movement.

22. Determine his dispositions and so ascertain the field of battle.²

23. Probe him and learn where his strength is abundant and where deficient.

24. The ultimate in disposing one's troops is to be without ascertainable shape. Then the most penetrating spies cannot pry in nor can the wise lay plans against you.

25. It is according to the shapes that I lay the plans for victory, but the multitude does not comprehend this. Although everyone can see the outward aspects, none understands the way in which I have created victory.

26. Therefore, when I have won a victory I do not repeat my tactics but respond to circumstances in an infinite variety of ways.

When Ling Shih reached Pai Ti, he opened the letter which read: "The main body of the army will march together from outside the river to take Ch'eng Tu. Tsang Hsi and Chu Lin from the central river road will take Kuang Han. Send the weak troops embarked in more than ten high boats from within the river toward Huang Wu."

Chiao Tsung actually used heavy troops to defend within the river and Ling Shih exterminated him.

¹ These references to Wu and Yüeh are held by some critics to indicate the date of composition of the text. This point is discussed in the Introduction.

² Lit. 'the field of life and death'.

27. Now an army may be likened to water, for just as flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands, so an army avoids strength and strikes weakness.

28. And as water shapes its flow in accordance with the ground, so an army manages its victory in accordance with the situation of the enemy.

29. And as water has no constant form, there are in war no constant conditions.

30. Thus, one able to gain the victory by modifying his tactics in accordance with the enemy situation may be said to be divine.

31. Of the five elements, none is always predominant; of the four seasons, none lasts forever; of the days, some are long and some short, and the moon waxes and wanes.

VII

MANŒUVRE¹

SUN TZU said:

1. Normally, when the army is employed, the general first receives his commands from the sovereign. He assembles the troops and mobilizes the people. He blends the army into a harmonious entity and encamps it.²

Li Ch'üan: He receives the sovereign's mandate and in compliance with the victorious deliberations of the temple councils reverently executes the punishments ordained by Heaven.

2. Nothing is more difficult than the art of manœuvre. What is difficult about manœuvre is to make the devious route the most direct and to turn misfortune to advantage.

3. Thus, march by an indirect route and divert the enemy by enticing him with a bait. So doing, you may set out after he does and arrive before him. One able to do this understands the strategy of the direct and the indirect.

Ts'ao Ts'ao: . . . Make it appear that you are far off. You may start after the enemy and arrive before him because you know how to estimate and calculate distances.

Tu Mu:³ He who wishes to snatch an advantage takes a devious and distant route and makes of it the short way. He turns misfortune to his advantage. He deceives and fools the enemy to make him dilatory and lax, and then marches on speedily.

¹ Lit. 'struggle' or 'contest of the armies' as each strives to gain an advantageous position.

² This verse can be translated as I have, following Li Ch'uan and Chia Lin, or 'He encamps the army so that the Gates of Harmony confront one another' following Ts'ao Ts'ao and Tu Mu. After assembling the army the first task of a commander would be to organize it, or to 'harmonize' its diverse elements.

³ This comment appears under v. 2 in the text.

4. Now both advantage and danger are inherent in manœuvre.¹

Ts'ao Ts'ao: One skilled will profit by it; if he is not, it is dangerous.

5. One who sets the entire army in motion to chase an advantage will not attain it.

6. If he abandons the camp to contend for advantage the stores will be lost.

Tu Mu: If one moves with everything the stores will travel slowly and he will not gain the advantage. If he leaves the heavy baggage behind and presses on with the light troops, it is to be feared the baggage would be lost.

7. It follows that when one rolls up the armour and sets out speedily, stopping neither day nor night and marching at double time for a hundred *li*, the three commanders will be captured. For the vigorous troops will arrive first and the feeble straggle along behind, so that if this method is used only one-tenth of the army will arrive.²

Tu Mu: . . . Normally, an army marches thirty *li* in a day, which is one stage. In a forced march of double distance it covers two stages. You can cover one hundred *li* only if you rest neither day nor night. If the march is conducted in this manner the troops will be taken prisoner. . . . When Sun Tzu says that if this method is used only one out of ten will arrive he means that when there is no alternative and you must contend for an advantageous position, you select the most robust man of ten to go first while you order the remainder to follow in the rear. So of ten thousand men you select one thousand who will arrive at dawn. The remainder

¹ Giles based his reading on the TT and translated: 'Manœuvring with an army is advantageous; with an undisciplined multitude most dangerous.' Sun Hsing-yen also thought this was the meaning of the verse. This too literal translation completely misses the point. Ts'ao Ts'ao's interpretation is surely more satisfactory. The verse is a generalization which introduces what follows. A course of action which may appear advantageous usually contains within itself the seeds of disadvantage. The converse is also true.

² By 'rolling up armour' Sun Tzu undoubtedly meant that heavy individual equipment would be bundled together and left at base.

will arrive continuously, some in late morning and some in mid-afternoon, so that none is exhausted and all arrive in succession to join those who preceded them. The sound of their marching is uninterrupted. In contending for advantage, it must be for a strategically critical point. Then, even one thousand will be sufficient to defend it until those who follow arrive.

8. In a forced march of fifty *li* the commander of the van will fall, and using this method but half the army will arrive. In a forced march of thirty *li*, but two-thirds will arrive.¹

9. It follows that an army which lacks heavy equipment, fodder, food and stores will be lost.²

Li Ch'üan: . . . The protection of metal walls is not as important as grain and food.

10. Those who do not know the conditions of mountains and forests, hazardous defiles, marshes and swamps, cannot conduct the march of an army;

11. Those who do not use local guides are unable to obtain the advantages of the ground.

Tu Mu: The *Kuan Tzu* says: 'Generally, the commander must thoroughly acquaint himself beforehand with the maps so that he knows dangerous places for chariots and carts, where the water is too deep for wagons; passes in famous mountains,³ the principal rivers, the locations of highlands and hills; where rushes, forests, and reeds are luxuriant; the road distances; the size of cities and towns; well-known cities and abandoned ones, and where there are

¹ This may also be rendered as 'The general of the Upper Army [as distinguished from the generals commanding the Central and Lower Armies] will be defeated' or 'will be checked'. Here the Upper Army would refer to the advance guard when the three divisions of the army marched in column. In other words, the advantages and disadvantages of forced marches must be carefully weighed, and the problem of what should be carried and what left in a secure base considered.

² The verse which follows this one repeats a previous verse and is a *non sequitur* here. It has been dropped.

³ 'Famous' because of their strategic significance.

flourishing orchards. All this must be known, as well as the way boundaries run in and out. All these facts the general must store in his mind; only then will he not lose the advantage of the ground.'

Li Ching said: '. . . We should select the bravest officers and those who are most intelligent and keen, and using local guides, secretly traverse mountain and forest noiselessly and concealing our traces. Sometimes we make artificial animals' feet to put on our feet; at others we put artificial birds on our hats and quietly conceal ourselves in luxuriant undergrowth. After this, we listen carefully for distant sounds and screw up our eyes to see clearly. We concentrate our wits so that we may snatch an opportunity. We observe the indications of the atmosphere; look for traces in the water to know if the enemy has waded a stream, and watch for movement of the trees which indicates his approach.'

Ho Yen-hsi: . . . Now, if having received instructions to launch a campaign, we hasten to unfamiliar land where cultural influence has not penetrated and communications are cut, and rush into its defiles, is it not difficult? If I go with a solitary army the enemy awaits me vigilantly. For the situations of an attacker and a defender are vastly different. How much more so when the enemy concentrates on deception and uses many misleading devices! If we have made no plans we plunge in headlong. By braving the dangers and entering perilous places we face the calamity of being trapped or inundated. Marching as if drunk, we may run into an unexpected fight. When we stop at night we are worried by false alarms; if we hasten along unprepared we fall into ambushes. This is to plunge an army of bears and tigers into the land of death. How can we cope with the rebels' fortifications, or sweep him out of his deceptive dens?

Therefore in the enemy's country, the mountains, rivers, highlands, lowlands and hills which he can defend as strategic points; the forests, reeds, rushes and luxuriant grasses in which he can conceal himself; the distances over

the roads and paths, the size of cities and towns, the extent of the villages, the fertility or barrenness of the fields, the depth of irrigation works, the amounts of stores, the size of the opposing army, the keenness of weapons—all must be fully known. Then we have the enemy in our sights and he can be easily taken.

12. Now war is based on deception. Move when it is advantageous and create changes in the situation by dispersal and concentration of forces.¹

13. When campaigning, be swift as the wind; in leisurely march, majestic as the forest; in raiding and plundering, like fire; in standing, firm as the mountains.² As unfathomable as the clouds, move like a thunderbolt.

14. When you plunder the countryside, divide your forces.³ When you conquer territory, divide the profits.⁴

15. Weigh the situation, then move.

16. He who knows the art of the direct and the indirect approach will be victorious. Such is the art of manœuvring.

17. The Book of Military Administration says: 'As the voice cannot be heard in battle, drums and bells are used. As troops cannot see each other clearly in battle, flags and banners are used.'⁵

18. Now gongs and drums, banners and flags are used to focus the attention of the troops. When the troops can be thus united, the brave cannot advance alone, nor can the cowardly withdraw. This is the art of employing a host.

Tu Mu: . . . The Military Law states: 'Those who when they

¹ Mao Tse-tung paraphrases this verse several times.

² Adopted as his slogan by the Japanese warrior Takeda Shingen.

³ Yang P'ing-an emends and reads: 'Thus wherever your banners point, the enemy is divided.' There does not seem to be any justification for this change.

⁴ Rather than 'divide the profits' Yang P'ing-an reads: 'defend it to the best advantage'. The text does not substantiate this rendering.

⁵ This verse is interesting because in it Sun Tzu names a work which antedates his own.

should advance do not do so and those who when they should retire do not do so are beheaded.'

When Wu Ch'i fought against Ch'in, there was an officer who before battle was joined was unable to control his ardour. He advanced and took a pair of heads and returned. Wu Ch'i ordered him beheaded.

The Army Commissioner admonished him, saying: 'This is a talented officer; you should not behead him.' Wu Ch'i replied: 'I am confident he is an officer of talent, but he is disobedient.'

Thereupon he beheaded him.

19. In night fighting use many torches and drums, in day fighting many banners and flags in order to influence the sight and hearing of our troops.¹

Tu Mu: . . . Just as large formations include smaller ones, so large camps include smaller ones. The army of the van, rear, right and left has each its own camp. These form a circle round the headquarters of the commander-in-chief in the centre. All the camps encompass the headquarters. The several corners are hooked together so that the camp appears like the *Pi Lei* constellation.²

The distance between camps is not greater than one hundred paces or less than fifty. The roads and paths join to enable troops to parade. The fortifications face each other so that each can assist the others with bows and crossbows.

At every crossroad a small fort is built; on top firewood is piled; inside there are concealed tunnels. One climbs up to these by ladders; sentries are stationed there. After darkness, if a sentry hears drumbeats on the four sides of the camp he sets off the beacon fire. Therefore if the enemy attacks at night he may get in at the gates, but everywhere there are small camps, each firmly defended, and to the

¹ Or 'the enemy', it is not clear which. Possibly both. *Tu Mu*'s comment is not particularly relevant to the verse but is included because it indicates a remarkably high degree of skill in the science of castramentation.

² Markal? *Pi* is Alfaratz.

east, west, north or south he does not know which to attack.

In the camp of the commander-in-chief or in the smaller camps, those who first know the enemy has come allow them all to enter; they then beat the drums and all the camps respond. At all the small forts beacon fires are lit, making it as light as day. Whereupon the officers and troops close the gates of the camps and man the fortifications and look down upon the enemy. Strong crossbows and powerful bows shoot in all directions. . . .

Our only worry is that the enemy will not attack at night, for if he does he is certain to be defeated.

20. Now an army may be robbed of its spirit and its commander deprived of his courage.¹

Ho Yen-hsi: . . . Wu Ch'i said: 'The responsibility for a martial host of a million lies in one man. He is the trigger of its spirit.'

Mei Yao-ch'en: . . . If an army has been deprived of its morale, its general will also lose his heart.

Chang Yü: Heart is that by which the general masters. Now order and confusion, bravery and cowardice, are qualities dominated by the heart. Therefore the expert at controlling his enemy frustrates him and then moves against him. He aggravates him to confuse him and harasses him to make him fearful. Thus he robs his enemy of his heart and of his ability to plan.

21. During the early morning spirits are keen, during the day they flag, and in the evening thoughts turn toward home.²

22. And therefore those skilled in war avoid the enemy when his spirit is keen and attack him when it is sluggish and his soldiers homesick. This is control of the moral factor.

23. In good order they await a disorderly enemy; in serenity, a clamorous one. This is control of the mental factor.

¹ Or 'of his wits', I am not sure which.

² Mei Yao-ch'en says that 'morning', 'day', and 'evening' represent the phases of a long campaign.

Tu Mu: In serenity and firmness they are not destroyed by events.

Ho Yen-hsi: For the lone general who with subtlety must control a host of a million against an enemy as fierce as tigers, advantages and disadvantages are intermixed. In the face of countless changes he must be wise and flexible; he must bear in mind all possibilities. Unless he is stout of heart and his judgement not confused, how would he be able to respond to circumstances without coming to his wits' end? And how settle affairs without being bewildered? When unexpectedly confronted with grave difficulties, how could he not be alarmed? How could he control the myriad matters without being confused?

24. Close to the field of battle, they await an enemy coming from afar; at rest, an exhausted enemy; with well-fed troops, hungry ones. This is control of the physical factor.

25. They do not engage an enemy advancing with well-ordered banners nor one whose formations are in impressive array. This is control of the factor of changing circumstances.¹

26. Therefore, the art of employing troops is that when the enemy occupies high ground, do not confront him; with his back resting on hills, do not oppose him.

27. When he pretends to flee, do not pursue.

28. Do not attack his *élite* troops.

29. Do not gobble proffered baits.

Mei Yao-ch'en: The fish which covets bait is caught; troops who covet bait are defeated.

Chang Yü: The 'Three Strategies' says: 'Under fragrant bait there is certain to be a hooked fish.'

30. Do not thwart an enemy returning homewards.

31. To a surrounded enemy you must leave a way of escape.

¹ Or the 'circumstantial factor'. 'They' in these verses refers to those skilled in war.

Tu Mu: Show him there is a road to safety, and so create in his mind the idea that there is an alternative to death. Then strike.

Ho Yen-hsi: When Ts'ao Ts'ao surrounded Hu Kuan he issued an order: 'When the city is taken, the defenders will be buried.' For month after month it did not fall. Ts'ao Jen said: 'When a city is surrounded it is essential to show the besieged that there is a way to survival. Now, Sir, as you have told them they must fight to the death everyone will fight to save his own skin. The city is strong and has a plentiful supply of food. If we attack them many officers and men will be wounded. If we persevere in this it will take many days. To encamp under the walls of a strong city and attack rebels determined to fight to the death is not a good plan!' Ts'ao Ts'ao followed this advice, and the city submitted.

32. Do not press an enemy at bay.

Tu Yu: Prince Fu Ch'ai said: 'Wild beasts, when at bay, fight desperately. How much more is this true of men! they know there is no alternative they will fight to the death.'

During the reign of Emperor Hsüan of the Han, Chao Ch'ung-kuo was suppressing a revolt of the Ch'iang tribe. The Ch'iang tribesmen saw his large army, discarded their heavy baggage, and set out to ford the Yellow River. The road was through narrow defiles, and Ch'ung Kuo drove them along in a leisurely manner.

Someone said: 'We are in pursuit of great advantage but proceed slowly.'

Ch'ung-kuo replied: 'They are desperate. I cannot press them. If I do this easily they will go without even looking around. If I press them they will turn on us and fight to the death.'

All the generals said: 'Wonderful!'

33. 'This is the method of employing troops.

VIII

THE NINE VARIABLES

SUN TZU said:

1. In general, the system of employing troops is that the commander receives his mandate from the sovereign to mobilize the people and assemble the army.¹
2. You should not encamp in low-lying ground.
3. In communicating ground, unite with your allies.
4. You should not linger in desolate ground.
5. In enclosed ground, resourcefulness is required.
6. In death ground, fight.
7. There are some roads not to follow; some troops not to strike; some cities not to assault; and some ground which should not be contested.

Wang Hsi: In my opinion, troops put out as bait, *élite* troops, and an enemy in well-regulated and imposing formation should not be attacked.

Tu Mu: Probably this refers to an enemy in a strategic position behind lofty walls and deep moats with a plentiful store of grain and food, whose purpose is to detain my army. Should I attack the city and take it, there would be no advantage worth mentioning; if I do not take it the assault will certainly grind down the power of my army. Therefore I should not attack it.

¹ As Sun Tzu uses almost identical words to introduce chapter viii Yang P'ing-an would drop this. He would also drop v. 2-6 inclusive, as they occur later in discussion of the 'Nine Grounds', and replace them with v. 26-32 inclusive from chapter vii. Where Sun Tzu uses a negative in v. 2-6 it is not the peremptory form he used previously. Hence I do not feel justified in accepting the emendations proposed. The 'Nine Variables' are then expressed in v. 2-7 inclusive.

8. There are occasions when the commands of the sovereign need not be obeyed.¹

Ts'ao Ts'ao: When it is expedient in operations the general need not be restricted by the commands of the sovereign.

Tu Mu: The *Wei Liao Tzu* says: 'Weapons are inauspicious instruments; strife contrary to virtue; the general, the Minister of Death, who is not responsible to the heavens above, to the earth beneath, to the enemy in his front, or to the sovereign in his rear.'

Chang Yü: Now King Fu Ch'ai said: 'When you see the correct course, act; do not wait for orders.'

9. A general thoroughly versed in the advantages of the nine variable factors knows how to employ troops.

Chia Lin: The general must rely on his ability to control the situation to his advantage as opportunity dictates. He is not bound by established procedures.

10. The general who does not understand the advantages of the nine variable factors will not be able to use the ground to his advantage even though familiar with it.

Chia Lin: . . . A general prizes opportune changes in circumstances.

11. In the direction of military operations one who does not understand the tactics suitable to the nine variable situations will be unable to use his troops effectively, even if he understands the 'five advantages'.²

Chia Lin: . . . The 'five variations' are the following: A road, although it may be the shortest, is not to be followed if one knows it is dangerous and there is the contingency of ambush.

An army, although it may be attacked, is not to be attacked if it is in desperate circumstances and there is the possibility that the enemy will fight to the death.

¹ A catch-all which covers the variable circumstances previously enumerated.

² A confusing verse which baffles all the commentators. If Chia Lin is correct the 'five advantages' must be the situations named in v. 2-6 inclusive.

A city, although isolated and susceptible to attack, is not to be attacked if there is the probability that it is well stocked with provisions, defended by crack troops under command of a wise general, that its ministers are loyal and their plans unfathomable.

Ground, although it may be contested, is not to be fought for if one knows that after getting it, it will be difficult to defend, or that he gains no advantage by obtaining it, but will probably be counter-attacked and suffer casualties.

The orders of a sovereign, although they should be followed, are not to be followed if the general knows they contain the danger of harmful superintendence of affairs from the capital.

These five contingencies must be managed as they arise and as circumstances dictate at the time, for they cannot be settled beforehand.

12. And for this reason, the wise general in his deliberations must consider both favourable and unfavourable factors.¹

Ts'ao Ts'ao: He ponders the dangers inherent in the advantages, and the advantages inherent in the dangers.

13. By taking into account the favourable factors, he makes his plan feasible; by taking into account the unfavourable, he may resolve the difficulties.²

Tu Mu: . . . If I wish to take advantage of the enemy I must perceive not just the advantage in doing so but must first consider the ways he can harm me if I do.

Ho Yen-hsi: Advantage and disadvantage are mutually reproductive. The enlightened deliberate.

14. He who intimidates his neighbours does so by inflicting injury upon them.

Chia Lin: Plans and projects for harming the enemy are not confined to any one method. Sometimes entice his wise and

¹ Sun Tzu says these are 'mixed'.

² Sun Tzu says that by taking account of the favourable factors the plan is made 'trustworthy' or 'reliable'. 'Feasible' (or 'workable') is as close as I can get it.

virtuous men away so that he has no counsellors. Or send treacherous people to his country to wreck his administration. Sometimes use cunning deceptions to alienate his ministers from the sovereign. Or send skilled craftsmen to encourage his people to exhaust their wealth. Or present him with licentious musicians and dancers to change his customs. Or give him beautiful women to bewilder him.

15. He wearies them by keeping them constantly occupied, and makes them rush about by offering them ostensible advantages.

16. It is a doctrine of war not to assume the enemy will not come, but rather to rely on one's readiness to meet him; not to presume that he will not attack, but rather to make one's self invincible.

Ho Yen-hsi: . . . The 'Strategies of Wu' says: 'When the world is at peace, a gentleman keeps his sword by his side.'

17. There are five qualities which are dangerous in the character of a general.

18. If reckless, he can be killed;

Tu Mu: A general who is stupid and courageous is a calamity. Wu Ch'i said: 'When people discuss a general they always pay attention to his courage. As far as a general is concerned, courage is but one quality. Now a valiant general will be certain to enter an engagement recklessly and if he does so he will not appreciate what is advantageous.'

19. If cowardly, captured;

Ho Yen-hsi: The *Ssu-ma Fa* says: 'One who esteems life above all will be overcome with hesitancy. Hesitancy in a general is a great calamity.'

20. If quick-tempered you can make a fool of him;

Tu Yu: An impulsive man can be provoked to rage and brought to his death. One easily angered is irascible, obstinate and hasty. He does not consider difficulties.

Wang Hsi: What is essential in the temperament of a general is steadiness.

21. If he has too delicate a sense of honour you can calumniate him;

Mei Yao-ch'en: One anxious to defend his reputation pays no regard to anything else.

22. If he is of a compassionate nature you can harass him.

Tu Mu: He who is humanitarian and compassionate and fears only casualties cannot give up temporary advantage for a long-term gain and is unable to let go this in order to seize that.

23. Now these five traits of character are serious faults in a general and in military operations are calamitous.

24. The ruin of the army and the death of the general are inevitable results of these shortcomings. They must be deeply pondered.

IX MARCHES

SUN TZU said:

1. Generally when taking up a position and confronting the enemy, having crossed the mountains, stay close to valleys. Encamp on high ground facing the sunny side.¹
2. Fight downhill; do not ascend to attack.²
3. So much for taking position in mountains.
4. After crossing a river you must move some distance away from it.
5. When an advancing enemy crosses water do not meet him at the water's edge. It is advantageous to allow half his force to cross and then strike.

Ho Yen-hsi: During the Spring and Autumn period the Duke of Sung came to Hung to engage the Ch'u army. The Sung army had deployed before the Ch'u troops had completed crossing the river. The Minister of War said: 'The enemy is many, we are but few. I request permission to attack before he has completed his crossing.' The Duke of Sung replied: 'You cannot.'

When the Ch'u army had completed the river crossing but had not yet drawn up its formations, the Minister again asked permission to attack and the Duke replied: 'Not yet. When they have drawn up their army we will attack.'

The Sung army was defeated, the Duke wounded in the thigh, and the officers of the Van annihilated.³

¹ Lit. 'Looking in the direction of growth, camp in a high place.' The commentators explain that *sheng* (生), 'growth', means *yang* (陽), 'sunny'—i.e. the south.

² The TT reading is adopted. Otherwise: 'In mountain warfare, do not ascend to attack.'

³ The source of Mao Tse-tung's remark: 'We are not like the Duke of Sung.'

6. If you wish to give battle, do not confront your enemy close to the water.¹ Take position on high ground facing the sunlight. Do not take position downstream.
7. This relates to taking up positions near a river.
8. Cross salt marshes speedily. Do not linger in them. If you encounter the enemy in the middle of a salt marsh you must take position close to grass and water with trees to your rear.²
9. This has to do with taking up position in salt marshes.
10. In level ground occupy a position which facilitates your action. With heights to your rear and right, the field of battle is to the front and the rear is safe.³
11. This is how to take up position in level ground.
12. Generally, these are advantageous for encamping in the four situations named.⁴ By using them the Yellow Emperor conquered four sovereigns.⁵
13. An army prefers high ground to low; esteems sunlight and dislikes shade. Thus, while nourishing its health, the army occupies a firm position. An army that does not suffer from countless diseases is said to be certain of victory.⁶
14. When near mounds, foothills, dikes or embankments, you must take position on the sunny side and rest your right and rear on them.

¹ The commentators say that the purpose of retiring from the banks or shores is to lure the enemy to attempt a crossing.

² Possibly salt flats from time to time inundated, as one sees in north and east China, rather than the salt marshes negotiable only by boat, with which we are more familiar.

³ Sun Tzu says: 'To the front, death; to the rear, life.' The right flank was the more vulnerable; shields were carried on the left arm.

⁴ That is, the methods described are to be used in encamping the army. Chang Yü takes the verses to relate to encamping but then proceeds to quote Chu-ko Liang on fighting in such places.

⁵ Supposed to have reigned 2697-2597 B.C.

⁶ Lit. 'the one hundred diseases'.

15. These methods are all advantageous for the army, and gain the help the ground affords.¹

16. Where there are precipitous torrents, 'Heavenly Wells', 'Heavenly Prisons', 'Heavenly Nets', 'Heavenly Traps', and 'Heavenly Cracks', you must march speedily away from them. Do not approach them.

Ts'ao Ts'ao: Raging waters in deep mountains are 'precipitous torrents'. A place surrounded by heights with low-lying ground in the centre is called a 'Heavenly Well'. When you pass through mountains and the terrain resembles a covered cage it is a 'Heavenly Prison'. Places where troops can be entrapped and cut off are called 'Heavenly Nets'. Where the land is sunken, it is a 'Heavenly Trap'. Where mountain gorges are narrow and where the road is sunken for several tens of feet, this is a 'Heavenly Crack'.

17. I keep a distance from these and draw the enemy toward them. I face them and cause him to put his back to them.

18. When on the flanks of the army there are dangerous defiles or ponds covered with aquatic grasses where reeds and rushes grow, or forested mountains with dense tangled undergrowth you must carefully search them out, for these are places where ambushes are laid and spies are hidden.

19. When the enemy is near by but lying low he is depending on a favourable position. When he challenges to battle from afar he wishes to lure you to advance, for when he is in easy ground he is in an advantageous position.²

20. When the trees are seen to move the enemy is advancing.

21. When many obstacles have been placed in the undergrowth, it is for the purpose of deception.

¹ The verse which immediately follows this in the text reads: 'When rain falls in the upper reaches of a river and foaming water descends those who wish to ford must wait until the waters subside.' This is obviously out of place here. I suspect it is part of the commentary which has worked its way into the text.

² Another version seems to have read: '... is offering an ostensible advantage.'

22. Birds rising in flight is a sign that the enemy is lying in ambush; when the wild animals are startled and flee he is trying to take you unaware.

23. Dust spurting upward in high straight columns indicates the approach of chariots. When it hangs low and is widespread infantry is approaching.

Tu Mu: When chariots and cavalry travel rapidly they come one after another like fish on a string and therefore the dust rises high in slender columns.

Chang Yü: . . . Now when the army marches there should be patrols out to the front to observe. If they see dust raised by the enemy, they must speedily report this to the commanding general.

24. When dust rises in scattered areas the enemy is bringing in firewood; when there are numerous small patches which seem to come and go he is encamping the army.¹

25. When the enemy's envoys speak in humble terms, but he continues his preparations, he will advance.

Chang Yü: When T'ien Tan was defending Chi Mo the Yen general Ch'i Che surrounded it. T'ien Tan personally handled the spade and shared in the labour of the troops. He sent his wives and concubines to enroll in the ranks and divided his own food to entertain his officers. He also sent women to the city walls to ask for terms of surrender. The Yen general was very pleased. T'ien Tan also collected twenty-four thousand ounces of gold, and made the rich citizens send a letter to the Yen general which said: 'The city is to be surrendered immediately. Our only wish is that you will not make our wives and concubines prisoners.' The Yen army became increasingly relaxed and negligent and T'ien Tan sallied out of the city and inflicted a crushing defeat on them.

¹ Li Ch'üan's reading, 'bringing in firewood', is adopted. They are dragging bundles of firewood. The comments that interrupt this verse are devoted to discussions of how people collect firewood!

26. When their language is deceptive but the enemy pre- tentiously advances, he will retreat.

27. When the envoys speak in apologetic terms, he wishes a respite.¹

28. When without a previous understanding the enemy asks for a truce, he is plotting.

Ch'ên Hao: . . . If without reason one begs for a truce it is assuredly because affairs in his country are in a dangerous state and he is worried and wishes to make a plan to gain a respite. Or otherwise he knows that our situation is susceptible to his plots and he wants to forestall our suspicions by asking for a truce. Then he will take advantage of our unpreparedness.

29. When light chariots first go out and take position on the flanks the enemy is forming for battle.

Chang Yü: In the 'Fish Scale Formation' chariots are in front, infantry behind them.

30. When his troops march speedily and he parades his battle chariots he is expecting to rendezvous with reinforcements.²

31. When half his force advances and half withdraws he is attempting to decoy you.

32. When his troops lean on their weapons, they are famished.

33. When drawers of water drink before carrying it to camp, his troops are suffering from thirst.

34. When the enemy sees an advantage but does not advance to seize it, he is fatigued.³

35. When birds gather above his camp sites, they are empty.

Ch'ên Hao: Sun Tzu is describing how to distinguish between the true and the false in the enemy's aspect.

¹ This verse, out of place in the text, has been moved to the present context.

² This is not exactly clear. He expects to rendezvous with reinforcing troops? Or are his dispersed detachments concentrating?

³ The fact that this series of verses is expressed in elementary terms does not restrain the commentators, who insist on explaining each one at considerable length.

36. When at night the enemy's camp is clamorous, he is fearful.¹

Tu Mu: His troops are terrified and insecure. They are boisterous to reassure themselves.

37. When his troops are disorderly, the general has no prestige.

Ch'ên Hao: When the general's orders are not strict and his deportment undignified, the officers will be disorderly.

38. When his flags and banners move about constantly he is in disarray.

Tu Mu: Duke Chuang of Lu defeated Ch'i at Ch'ang Sho. Tsao Kuei requested permission to pursue. The Duke asked him why. He replied: 'I see that the ruts of their chariots are confused and their flags and banners drooping. Therefore I wish to pursue them.'

39. If the officers are short-tempered they are exhausted.

Ch'ên Hao: When the general lays on unnecessary projects, everyone is fatigued.

Chang Yü: When administration and orders are inconsistent, the men's spirits are low, and the officers exceedingly angry.

40. When the enemy feeds grain to the horses and his men eat and when his troops neither hang up their cooking pots nor return to their shelters, the enemy is desperate.²

Wang Hsi: The enemy feeds grain to the horses and the men eat meat in order to increase their strength and powers of endurance. If the army has no cooking pots it will not again eat. If the troops do not go back to their shelters they have no thoughts of home and intend to engage in decisive battle.

41. When the troops continually gather in small groups and

¹ See Plutarch's description in 'Alexander' of the Persian camp the night before the battle of Gaugemala.

² Chang Yü says that when an army 'burns its boats' and 'smashes its cooking pots' it is at bay and will fight to the death.

whisper together the general has lost the confidence of the army.¹

42. Too frequent rewards indicate that the general is at the end of his resources; too frequent punishments that he is in acute distress.²

43. If the officers at first treat the men violently and later are fearful of them, the limit of indiscipline has been reached.³

44. When the enemy troops are in high spirits, and, although facing you, do not join battle for a long time, nor leave, you must thoroughly investigate the situation.

45. In war, numbers alone confer no advantage. Do not advance relying on sheer military power.⁴

46. It is sufficient to estimate the enemy situation correctly and to concentrate your strength to capture him.⁵ There is no more to it than this. He who lacks foresight and underestimates his enemy will surely be captured by him.

47. If troops are punished before their loyalty is secured they will be disobedient. If not obedient, it is difficult to employ

¹ Comments under this verse are principally devoted to explaining the terms used. Most of the commentators agree that when the men gather together and carry on whispered conversations they are criticizing their officers. Mei Yao-ch'en observes that they are probably planning to desert. The verse which immediately follows is a paraphrase of this one, and is dropped.

² Ho Yen-hsi remarks that in the management of his affairs the general should seek a balance of tolerance and severity.

³ Or 'at first to bluster but later to be in fear of the enemy's host'? Ts'ao Ts'ao, Tu Mu, Wang Hsi and Chang Yü all take the *ch'i* (其) here to refer to the enemy, but this thought does not follow the preceding verse too well. Tu Yu's interpretation, which I adopt, seems better.

⁴ 'For it is not by the numbers of the combatants but by their orderly array and their bravery that prowess in war is wont to be measured.' Procopius, *History of the Wars*, p. 347.

⁵ Ts'ao Ts'ao misinterprets *tsu* (足) here in the phrase *tsu i* (足以) meaning 'it is sufficient'. His mistake obviously confused the commentators and none cared to take issue with him. Wang Hsi starts off bravely enough by saying: 'I think those who are skilled in creating changes in the situation by concentration and dispersion need only gather their forces together and take advantage of a chink in the enemy's defenses to gain the victory', but in the end allows Ts'ao Ts'ao's prestige to overcome his own better judgement.

them. If troops are loyal, but punishments are not enforced, you cannot employ them.

48. Thus, command them with civility and imbue them uniformly with martial ardour and it may be said that victory is certain.

49. If orders which are consistently effective are used in instructing the troops, they will be obedient. If orders which are not consistently effective are used in instructing them, they will be disobedient.

50. When orders are consistently trustworthy and observed, the relationship of a commander with his troops is satisfactory.

X

TERRAIN¹

SUN TZU said:

1. Ground may be classified according to its nature as accessible, entrapping, indecisive, constricted, precipitous, and distant.¹

2. Ground which both we and the enemy can traverse with equal ease is called accessible. In such ground, he who first takes high sunny positions convenient to his supply routes can fight advantageously.

3. Ground easy to get out of but difficult to return to is entrapping. The nature of this ground is such that if the enemy is unprepared and you sally out you may defeat him. If the enemy is prepared and you go out and engage, but do not win, it is difficult to return. This is unprofitable.

4. Ground equally disadvantageous for both the enemy and ourselves to enter is indecisive. The nature of this ground is such that although the enemy holds out a bait I do not go forth but entice him by marching off. When I have drawn out half his force, I can strike him advantageously.

Chang Yü: . . . Li Ching's 'Art of War' says: 'In ground which offers no advantage to either side we should lure the enemy by feigned departure, wait until half his force has come out, and make an intercepting attack.'

¹ 'Topography' or 'conformation of the ground'.

² Mei Yao-ch'en defines 'accessible' ground as that in which roads meet and cross; 'entrapping' ground as net-like; 'indecisive' ground as that in which one gets locked with the enemy; 'constricted' ground as that in which a valley runs between two mountains; 'precipitous' ground as that in which there are mountains, rivers, foothills and ridges, and 'distant' ground as level. Sun Tzu uses 'distant' to indicate that there is a considerable distance between the camps of the two armies.

5. If I first occupy constricted ground I must block the passes and await the enemy. If the enemy first occupies such ground and blocks the defiles I should not follow him; if he does not block them completely I may do so.

6. In precipitous ground I must take position on the sunny heights and await the enemy.¹ If he first occupies such ground I lure him by marching off; I do not follow him.

Chang Yü: If one should be the first to occupy a position in level ground, how much more does this apply to difficult and dangerous places!² How can such terrain be given to the enemy?

7. When at a distance from an enemy of equal strength it is difficult to provoke battle and unprofitable to engage him in his chosen position.³

8. These are the principles relating to six different types of ground. It is the highest responsibility of the general to inquire into them with the utmost care.

Mei Yao-ch'en: Now the nature of the ground is the fundamental factor in aiding the army to set up its victory.

9. Now when troops flee, are insubordinate,⁴ distressed, collapse in disorder or are routed, it is the fault of the general. None of these disasters can be attributed to natural causes.

10. Other conditions being equal, if a force attacks one ten times its size, the result is flight.

Tu Mu: When one is to be used to attack ten we should first compare the wisdom and the strategy of the opposing

¹ Generally I have translated the *Yang* of Yin-Yang as 'south' or 'sunny', and *Yin* as 'north' or 'shady'. In the context of Sun Tzu these terms have no cosmic connotations.

² *Hsien* (險) means a 'narrow pass', hence 'dangerous' and by implication 'strategic'.

³ The phrase following 'engage' is added to clarify Sun Tzu's meaning.

⁴ The character rendered 'insubordinate' is *shih* (弛), 'to unstring a bow'; hence, 'lax', 'remiss', 'loose'. The commentators make it clear that in this context the character means 'insubordinate'.

generals, the bravery and cowardice of the troops, the question of weather, of the advantages offered by the ground, whether the troops are well fed or hungry, weary or rested.

11. When troops are strong and officers weak the army is insubordinate.

Tu Mu: The verse is speaking of troops and non-commissioned officers¹ who are unruly and overbearing, and generals and commanders who are timid and weak.

In the present dynasty at the beginning of the Ch'ang Ch'ing reign period² T'ien Pu was ordered to take command in Wei for the purpose of attacking Wang T'ing-ch'ou. Pu had grown up in Wei and the people there held him in contempt, and several tens of thousands of men all rode donkeys about the camp. Pu was unable to restrain them. He remained in his position for several months and when he wished to give battle, the officers and troops dispersed and scattered in all directions. Pu cut his own throat.

12. When the officers are valiant and the troops ineffective the army is in distress.³

13. When senior officers are angry and insubordinate, and on encountering the enemy rush into battle with no understanding of the feasibility of engaging and without awaiting orders from the commander, the army is in a state of collapse.

Ts'ao Ts'ao: 'Senior officers' means subordinate generals. If . . . in a rage they attack the enemy without measuring the strength of both sides, then the army is assuredly in a state of collapse.

14. When the general is morally weak and his discipline not strict, when his instructions and guidance are not enlightened,

¹ *Wu* (伍) denotes a file of five men or the leader of such a file; a corporal; a non-commissioned officer.

² A.D. 820-5.

³ Bugged down or sinking, as in a morass. The idea is that if the troops are weak the efforts of the officers are as vain as if the troops were in a bog.

when there are no consistent rules to guide the officers and men and when the formations are slovenly the army is in disorder.¹

Chang Yü: . . . Chaos self-induced.

15. When a commander unable to estimate his enemy uses a small force to engage a large one, or weak troops to strike the strong, or when he fails to select shock troops for the van, the result is rout.

Ts'ao Ts'ao: Under these conditions he commands 'certain-to-flee' troops.

Ho Yen-hsi: . . . In the Han the 'Gallants from the Three Rivers' were 'Sword Friends' of unusual talent. In Wu the shock troops were called 'Dissolvers of Difficulty'; in Ch'i 'Fate Deciders'; in the T'ang 'Leapers and Agitators'. These were various names applied to shock troops; nothing is more important in the tactics of winning battles than to employ them.²

Generally when all the troops are encamped together the general selects from every camp its high-spirited and valiant officers who are distinguished by agility and strength and whose martial accomplishments are above the ordinary. These are grouped to form a special corps. Of ten men, but one is selected; of ten thousand, one thousand.

Chang Yü: . . . Generally in battle it is essential to use *élite* troops as the vanguard sharp point. First, because this strengthens our own determination; second, because they blunt the enemy's edge.

16. When any of these six conditions prevails the army is on the road to defeat. It is the highest responsibility of the general that he examine them carefully.

17. Conformation of the ground is of the greatest assistance in

¹ The term rendered 'slovenly' is literally 'vertically and horizontally'.

² Unfortunately the functions of the 'Leapers and Agitators' are not explained. Undoubtedly one may have been to arouse the ardour of the troops by wild gyrating and acrobatic sword play for which the Chinese are justly renowned, and possibly at the same time to impress the enemy with their ferocity and skill.

battle. Therefore, to estimate the enemy situation and to calculate distances and the degree of difficulty of the terrain so as to control victory are virtues of the superior general. He who fights with full knowledge of these factors is certain to win; he who does not will surely be defeated.

18. If the situation is one of victory but the sovereign has issued orders not to engage, the general may decide to fight. If the situation is such that he cannot win, but the sovereign has issued orders to engage, he need not do so.

19. And therefore the general who in advancing does not seek personal fame, and in withdrawing is not concerned with avoiding punishment, but whose only purpose is to protect the people and promote the best interests of his sovereign, is the precious jewel of the state.

Li Ch'üan: . . . Such a general has no personal interest.

Tu Mu: . . . Few such are to be had.

20. Because such a general regards his men as infants they will march with him into the deepest valleys. He treats them as his own beloved sons and they will die with him.

Li Ch'üan: If he cherishes his men in this way he will gain their utmost strength. Thus, the Viscount of Ch'u needed but to speak a word and the soldiers felt as if clad in warm silken garments.¹

Tu Mu: During the Warring States when Wu Ch'i was a general he took the same food and wore the same clothes as the lowliest of his troops. On his bed there was no mat; on the march he did not mount his horse; he himself carried his reserve rations. He shared exhaustion and bitter toil with his troops.

Chang Yü: . . . Therefore the Military Code says: 'The general must be the first in the toils and fatigues of the army. In the heat of summer he does not spread his parasol nor in the cold of winter don thick clothing. In dangerous

¹ The Viscount commiserated with those suffering from the cold. His words were enough to comfort the men and raise their flagging spirits.

places he must dismount and walk. He waits until the army's wells have been dug and only then drinks; until the army's food is cooked before he eats; until the army's fortifications have been completed, to shelter himself.'¹

21. If a general indulges his troops but is unable to employ them; if he loves them but cannot enforce his commands; if the troops are disorderly and he is unable to control them, they may be compared to spoiled children, and are useless.

Chang Yü: . . . If one uses kindness exclusively the troops become like arrogant children and cannot be employed. This is the reason Ts'ao Ts'ao cut off his own hair and so punished himself.² . . . Good commanders are both loved and feared.

That is all there is to it.

22. If I know that my troops are capable of striking the enemy, but do not know that he is invulnerable to attack, my chance of victory is but half.

23. If I know that the enemy is vulnerable to attack, but do not know that my troops are incapable of striking him, my chance of victory is but half.

24. If I know that the enemy can be attacked and that my troops are capable of attacking him, but do not realize that because of the conformation of the ground I should not attack, my chance of victory is but half.

25. Therefore when those experienced in war move they make no mistakes; when they act, their resources are limitless.

26. And therefore I say: 'Know the enemy, know yourself; your victory will never be endangered. Know the ground, know the weather; your victory will then be total.'

¹ Military essays and codes were generally entitled *Ping Fa*. Chang Yü does not identify the one from which he quotes.

² After having issued orders that his troops were not to damage standing grain, Ts'ao Ts'ao carelessly permitted his own grazing horse to trample it. He thereupon ordered himself to be beheaded. His officers tearfully remonstrated, and Ts'ao Ts'ao then inflicted upon himself this symbolic punishment to illustrate that even a commander-in-chief is amenable to military law and discipline.

XI

THE NINE VARIETIES OF GROUND¹

SUN TZU said:

1. In respect to the employment of troops, ground may be classified as dispersive, frontier, key, communicating, focal, serious, difficult, encircled, and death.²

2. When a feudal lord fights in his own territory, he is in dispersive ground.

Ts'ao Ts'ao: Here officers and men long to return to their nearby homes.

3. When he makes but a shallow penetration into enemy territory he is in frontier ground.³

4. Ground equally advantageous for the enemy or me to occupy is key ground.⁴

5. Ground equally accessible to both the enemy and me is communicating.

Tu Mu: This is level and extensive ground in which one may come and go, sufficient in extent for battle and to erect opposing fortifications.

6. When a state is enclosed by three other states its territory is focal. He who first gets control of it will gain the support of All-under-Heaven.⁵

7. When the army has penetrated deep into hostile territory, leaving far behind many enemy cities and towns, it is in serious ground.

Ts'ao Ts'ao: This is ground difficult to return from.

8. When the army traverses mountains, forests, precipitous country, or marches through defiles, marshlands, or swamps, or any place where the going is hard, it is in difficult ground.¹

9. Ground to which access is constricted, where the way out is tortuous, and where a small enemy force can strike my larger one is called 'encircled'.²

Tu Mu: . . . Here it is easy to lay ambushes and one can be utterly defeated.

10. Ground in which the army survives only if it fights with the courage of desperation is called 'death'.

Li Ch'üan: Blocked by mountains to the front and rivers to the rear, with provisions exhausted. In this situation it is advantageous to act speedily and dangerous to procrastinate.

11. And therefore, do not fight in dispersive ground; do not stop in the frontier borderlands.

12. Do not attack an enemy who occupies key ground; in communicating ground do not allow your formations to become separated.³

13. In focal ground, ally with neighbouring states; in deep ground, plunder.⁴

14. In difficult ground, press on; in encircled ground, devise stratagems; in death ground, fight.

¹ The commentators indulge in some discussion respecting the interpretation of the character rendered 'difficult'. Several want to restrict the meaning to ground susceptible to flooding.

² The verb may be translated as 'tie down' rather than 'strike'.

³ *Ts'ao Ts'ao* says they must be 'closed up'.

⁴ *Li Ch'üan* thinks the latter half should read 'do not plunder', as the principal object when in enemy territory is to win the affection and support of the people.

¹ The original arrangement of this chapter leaves much to be desired. Many verses are not in proper context; others are repetitious and may possibly be ancient commentary which has worked its way into the text. I have transposed some verses and eliminated those which appear to be accretions.

² There is some confusion here. The 'accessible' ground of the preceding chapter is defined in the same terms as 'communicating' ground.

³ Lit. 'light' ground, possibly because it is easy to retire or because the officers and men think lightly of deserting just as the expedition is getting under way.

⁴ This is contestable ground, or, as *Tu Mu* says, 'strategically important'.

⁵ The Empire is always described as 'All-under-Heaven'.

15. In dispersive ground I would unify the determination of the army.¹

16. In frontier ground I would keep my forces closely linked.

Mei Yao-ch'en: On the march the several units are connected; at halts the camps and fortified posts are linked together.

17. In key ground I would hasten up my rear elements.

Ch'ên Hao: What the verse means is that if . . . the enemy, relying on superior numbers, comes to contest such ground, I use a large force to hasten into his rear.²

Chang Yü: . . . Someone has said that the phrase means 'to set out after the enemy and arrive before him'.³

18. In communicating ground I would pay strict attention to my defences.

19. In focal ground I would strengthen my alliances.

Chang Yü: I reward my prospective allies with valuables and silks and bind them with solemn covenants. I abide firmly by the treaties and then my allies will certainly aid me.

20. In serious ground I would ensure a continuous flow of provisions.

21. In difficult ground I would press on over the roads.

22. In encircled ground I would block the points of access and egress.

Tu Mu: It is military doctrine that an encircling force must leave a gap to show the surrounded troops there is a way out, so that they will not be determined to fight to the

¹ This and the nine verses which immediately follow have been transposed to this context. In the text they come later in the chapter.

² The question is, whose 'rear' is Sun Tzu talking about? Ch'ên Hao is reading something into the verse as it stands in present context.

³ The 'someone' is Mei Yao-ch'en, who takes *hou* (後) to mean 'after' in the temporal sense.

death. Then, taking advantage of this, strike. Now, if I am in encircled ground, and the enemy opens a road in order to tempt my troops to take it, I close this means of escape so that my officers and men will have a mind to fight to the death.¹

23. In death ground I could make it evident that there is no chance of survival. For it is the nature of soldiers to resist when surrounded; to fight to the death when there is no alternative, and when desperate to follow commands implicitly.

24. The tactical variations appropriate to the nine types of ground, the advantages of close or extended deployment, and the principles of human nature are matters the general must examine with the greatest care.²

25. Anciently, those described as skilled in war made it impossible for the enemy to unite his van and his rear; for his elements both large and small to mutually co-operate; for the good troops to succour the poor and for superiors and subordinates to support each other.³

26. When the enemy's forces were dispersed they prevented him from assembling them; when concentrated, they threw him into confusion.

Meng: Lay on many deceptive operations. Be seen in the west and march out of the east; lure him in the north and strike in the south. Drive him crazy and bewilder him so that he disperses his forces in confusion.

Chang Yü: Take him unaware by surprise attacks where he is unprepared. Hit him suddenly with shock troops.

¹ A long story relates that Shen Wu of the Later Wei, when in such a position, blocked the only escape road for his troops with the army's livestock. His forces then fought desperately and defeated an army of two hundred thousand.

² This verse is followed by seven short verses which again define terms previously defined in v. 2 to 10 inclusive. This appears to be commentary which has worked its way into the text.

³ The implication is that even were the enemy able to concentrate, internal dissensions provoked by the skilled general would render him ineffective.

27. They concentrated and moved when it was advantageous to do so;¹ when not advantageous, they halted.

28. Should one ask: 'How do I cope with a well-ordered enemy host about to attack me?' I reply: 'Seize something he cherishes and he will conform to your desires.'²

29. Speed is the essence of war. Take advantage of the enemy's unpreparedness; travel by unexpected routes and strike him where he has taken no precautions.

Tu Mu: This summarizes the essential nature of war . . . and the ultimate in generalship.

Chang Yü: Here Sun Tzu again explains . . . that the one thing esteemed is divine swiftness.

30. The general principles applicable to an invading force are that when you have penetrated deeply into hostile territory your army is united, and the defender cannot overcome you.

31. Plunder fertile country to supply the army with plentiful provisions.

32. Pay heed to nourishing the troops; do not unnecessarily fatigue them. Unite them in spirit; conserve their strength. Make unfathomable plans for the movements of the army.

33. Throw the troops into a position from which there is no escape and even when faced with death they will not flee. For if prepared to die, what can they not achieve? Then officers and men together put forth their utmost efforts. In a desperate situation they fear nothing; when there is no way out they stand firm. Deep in a hostile land they are bound together, and there, where there is no alternative, they will engage the enemy in hand to hand combat.³

¹ Lit. 'They concentrated where it was advantageous to do so and then acted. When it was not advantageous, they stood fast.' In another commentary Shih Tzu-mei says not to move unless there is advantage in it.

² Comments between question and answer omitted.

³ There are several characters in Chinese which basically mean 'to fight'. That used here implies 'close combat'.

34. Thus, such troops need no encouragement to be vigilant. Without extorting their support the general obtains it; without inviting their affection he gains it; without demanding their trust he wins it.¹

35. My officers have no surplus of wealth but not because they disdain worldly goods; they have no expectation of long life but not because they dislike longevity.

Wang Hsi: . . . When officers and men care only for worldly riches they will cherish life at all costs.

36. On the day the army is ordered to march the tears of those seated soak their lapels; the tears of those reclining course down their cheeks.

Tu Mu: All have made a covenant with death. Before the day of battle the order is issued: 'Today's affair depends upon this one stroke. The bodies of those who do not put their lives at stake will fertilize the fields and become carrion for the birds and beasts.'

37. But throw them into a situation where there is no escape and they will display the immortal courage of Chuan Chu and Ts'ao Kuei.²

38. Now the troops of those adept in war are used like the 'Simultaneously Responding' snake of Mount Ch'ang. When struck on the head its tail attacks; when struck on the tail, its head attacks, when struck in the centre both head and tail attack.³

39. Should one ask: 'Can troops be made capable of such instantaneous co-ordination?' I reply: 'They can.' For, although the men of Wu and Yüeh mutually hate one another,

¹ This refers to the troops of a general who nourishes them, who unites them in spirit, who husbands their strength, and who makes unfathomable plans.

² The exploits of these heroes are recounted in SC, ch. 68.

³ This mountain was anciently known as Mt. Hêng. During the reign of the Emperor Wên (Liu Hêng) of the Han (179-159 B.C.) the name was changed to 'Ch'ang' to avoid the taboo. In all existing works 'Hêng' was changed to 'Ch'ang'.

if together in a boat tossed by the wind they would co-operate as the right hand does with the left.'

40. It is thus not sufficient to place one's reliance on hobbled horses or buried chariot wheels.¹

41. To cultivate a uniform level of valour is the object of military administration.² And it is by proper use of the ground that both shock and flexible forces are used to the best advantage.³

Chang Yü: If one gains the advantage of the ground then even weak and soft troops can conquer the enemy. How much more so if they are tough and strong! That both may be used effectively is because they are disposed in accordance with the conditions of the ground.

42. It is the business of a general to be serene and inscrutable, impartial and self-controlled.⁴

Wang Hsi: If serene he is not vexed; if inscrutable, unfathomable; if upright, not improper; if self-controlled, not confused.

43. He should be capable of keeping his officers and men in ignorance of his plans.

Ts'ao Ts'ao: . . . His troops may join him in rejoicing at the accomplishment, but they cannot join him in laying the plans.

44. He prohibits superstitious practices and so rids the army

¹ Such 'Maginot Line' expedients are not in themselves sufficient to prevent defending troops from fleeing.

² Lit. 'To equalize courage [so that it is that of] one [man] is the right way of administration.'

³ Chang Yü makes it clear why terrain should be taken into account when troops are disposed. The difference in quality of troops can be balanced by careful sector assignment. Weak troops can hold strong ground, but might break if posted in a position less strong.

⁴ Giles translated: 'It is the business of a general to be quiet and thus ensure secrecy; upright and just and thus maintain order.' The commentators do not agree, but none takes it in this sense, nor does the text support this rendering. I follow *Ts'ao Ts'ao* and *Wang Hsi*.

of doubts. Then until the moment of death there can be no troubles.¹

Ts'ao Ts'ao: Prohibit talk of omens and of supernatural portents. Rid plans of doubts and uncertainties.

Chang Yü: The *Ssu-ma Fa* says: 'Exterminate superstitions.'

45. He changes his methods and alters his plans so that people have no knowledge of what he is doing.

Chang Yü: Courses of action previously followed and old plans previously executed must be altered.

46. He alters his camp-sites and marches by devious routes, and thus makes it impossible for others to anticipate his purpose.²

47. To assemble the army and throw it into a desperate position is the business of the general.

48. He leads the army deep into hostile territory and there releases the trigger.³

49. He burns his boats and smashes his cooking pots; he urges the army on as if driving a flock of sheep, now in one direction, now in another, and none knows where he is going.⁴

50. He fixes a date for rendezvous and after the troops have met, cuts off their return route just as if he were removing a ladder from beneath them.

¹ The 之 at the end of this sentence is emended to read 災, which means a natural or 'heaven sent' calamity. Part of *Ts'ao Ts'ao's* comment which is omitted indicates that various texts were circulating in his time.

² Or perhaps, 'makes it impossible for the enemy to learn his plans'. But *Mei Yao-ch'en* thinks the meaning is that the enemy will thus be rendered incapable of laying plans. *Giles* infers that the general, by altering his camps and marching by devious routes, can prevent the enemy 'from anticipating his purpose', which seems the best. The comments do not illuminate the point at issue.

³ 'Release' of a trigger, or mechanism, is the usual meaning of the expression *fa chi* (發機). The idiom has been translated: 'puts into effect his expedient plans.' *Wang Hsi* says that when the trigger is released 'there is no return' (of the arrow or bolt). Lit. this verse reads: 'He leads the army deep into the territory of the Feudal Lords and there releases the trigger' (or 'puts into effect his expedient plans'). *Giles* translates the phrase in question as 'shows his hand', i.e. takes irrevocable action.

⁴ Neither his own troops nor the enemy can fathom his ultimate design.

51. One ignorant of the plans of neighbouring states cannot prepare alliances in good time; if ignorant of the conditions of mountains, forests, dangerous defiles, swamps and marshes he cannot conduct the march of an army; if he fails to make use of native guides he cannot gain the advantages of the ground. A general ignorant of even one of these three matters is unfit to command the armies of a Hegemonic King.¹

Ts'ao Ts'ao: These three matters have previously been elaborated. The reason Sun Tzu returns to the subject is that he strongly disapproved of those unable to employ troops properly.

52. Now when a Hegemonic King attacks a powerful state he makes it impossible for the enemy to concentrate. He overawes the enemy and prevents his allies from joining him.²

Mei Yao-ch'en: In attacking a great state, if you can divide your enemy's forces your strength will be more than sufficient.

53. It follows that he does not contend against powerful combinations nor does he foster the power of other states. He relies for the attainment of his aims on his ability to overawe his opponents. And so he can take the enemy's cities and overthrow the enemy's state.³

Ts'ao Ts'ao: By 'Hegemonic King' is meant one who does not ally with the feudal lords. He breaks up the alliances of

¹ Emending 四五者—[these] four or five [matters]—to read 此三者—[these three [matters]]

² This verse and the next present problems. Chang Yü thinks the verse means that if the troops of a Hegemonic King (or a ruler who aspires to such status) attack hastily (or recklessly, or without forethought) his allies will not come to his aid. The other commentators interpret the verse as I have.

³ The commentators differ in their interpretations of this verse. Giles translates: 'Hence he does not strive to ally himself with all and sundry nor does he foster the power of other states. He carries out his own secret designs, keeping his antagonists in awe. Thus he is able to capture their cities and overthrow their kingdoms.' But I feel that Sun Tzu meant that the 'Hegemonic King' need not contend against 'powerful combinations' because he isolates his enemies. He does not permit them to form 'powerful combinations'.

All-under-Heaven and snatches the position of authority. He uses prestige and virtue to attain his ends.¹

Tu Mu: The verse says if one neither covenants for the help of neighbours nor develops plans based on expediency but in furtherance of his personal aims relies only on his own military strength to overawe the enemy country then his own cities can be captured and his own state overthrown.²

54. Bestow rewards without respect to customary practice; publish orders without respect to precedent.³ Thus you may employ the entire army as you would one man.

Chang Yü: . . . If the code respecting rewards and punishments is clear and speedily applied then you may use the many as you do the few.

55. Set the troops to their tasks without imparting your designs; use them to gain advantage without revealing the dangers involved. Throw them into a perilous situation and they survive; put them in death ground and they will live. For when the army is placed in such a situation it can snatch victory from defeat.

56. Now the crux of military operations lies in the pretence of accommodating one's self to the designs of the enemy.⁴

57. Concentrate your forces against the enemy and from a distance of a thousand *li* you can kill his general.⁵ This is described as the ability to attain one's aim in an artful and ingenious manner.

58. On the day the policy to attack is put into effect, close the

¹ Possibly Giles derived his interpretation from this comment.

² Also a justifiable interpretation, which illustrates how radically the commentators frequently differ.

³ This verse, obviously out of place, emphasizes that the general in the field need not follow prescribed procedures in recognition of meritorious service but should bestow timely rewards. The general need not follow customary law in respect to administration of his army.

⁴ Possibly too free a translation, but the commentators agree that this is the idea Sun Tzu tries to convey. I follow Tu Mu.

⁵ I follow Ts'ao Ts'ao here. A strategist worthy of the name defeats his enemy from a distance of one thousand *li* by anticipating his enemy's plans.

passes, rescind the passports,¹ have no further intercourse with the enemy's envoys and exhort the temple council to execute the plans.²

59. When the enemy presents an opportunity, speedily take advantage of it.³ Anticipate him in seizing something he values and move in accordance with a date secretly fixed.

60. The doctrine of war is to follow the enemy situation in order to decide on battle.⁴

61. Therefore at first be shy as a maiden. When the enemy gives you an opening be swift as a hare and he will be unable to withstand you.

¹ Lit. 'break the tallies'. These were carried by travellers and were examined by the Wardens of the Passes. Without a proper tally no one could legally enter or leave a country.

² The text is confusing. It seems literally to read: 'From [the rostrum of] the temple, exhort [the army?] [the people?] to execute the plans.' The commentators are no help.

³ Another difficult verse. Some commentators think it should read: 'When the enemy sends spies, immediately let them enter.' The difficulty is in the idiom *k'ai ho* (開闢), literally, 'to open the leaf of a door', thus, 'to present an opportunity [to enter]'. Ts'ao Ts'ao says the idiom means 'a cleavage', 'a gap', or 'a space'. Then, he goes on, 'you must speedily enter'. Other commentators say the idiom means 'spies' or 'secret agents'. I follow Ts'ao Ts'ao.

⁴ The commentators again disagree: v. 58-61 are susceptible to varying translations or interpretations.

XII

ATTACK BY FIRE

SUN TZU said:

1. There are five methods of attacking with fire. The first is to burn personnel; the second, to burn stores; the third, to burn equipment; the fourth, to burn arsenals; and the fifth, to use incendiary missiles.¹

2. To use fire, some medium must be relied upon.

Ts'ao Ts'ao: Rely upon traitors among the enemy.²

Chang Yü: All fire attacks depend on weather conditions.

3. Equipment for setting fires must always be at hand.

Chang Yü: Implements and combustible materials should be prepared beforehand.

4. There are suitable times and appropriate days on which to raise fires.

5. 'Times' means when the weather is scorching hot; 'days' means when the moon is in Sagittarius, Alpharatz, *I*, or *Chen* constellations, for these are days of rising winds.³

6. Now in fire attacks one must respond to the changing situation.

7. When fire breaks out in the enemy's camp immediately co-ordinate your action from without. But if his troops remain calm bide your time and do not attack.

¹ There is a mistake in the text here. Tu Yu emends and explains that flame-tipped arrows are fired into the enemy's barracks or camp by strong crossbowmen. Other commentators vary in their interpretations, but Tu Yu's emendation is logical.

² 'among the enemy' added. Ch'ên Hao remarks that one does not only rely on traitors.

³ Sun Hsing-yen has emended the original text in accordance with the TT and YL, but the original seems better and I follow it. I cannot place the *I* and *Chen* constellations.

8. When the fire reaches its height, follow up if you can. If you cannot do so, wait.

9. If you can raise fires outside the enemy camp, it is not necessary to wait until they are started inside. Set fires at suitable times.¹

10. When fires are raised up-wind do not attack from down-wind.

11. When the wind blows during the day it will die down at night.²

12. Now the army must know the five different fire-attack situations and be constantly vigilant.³

13. Those who use fire to assist their attacks are intelligent; those who use inundations are powerful.

14. Water can isolate an enemy but cannot destroy his supplies or equipment.⁴

15. Now to win battles and take your objectives, but to fail to exploit these achievements is ominous and may be described as 'wasteful delay'.⁵

16. And therefore it is said that enlightened rulers deliberate upon the plans, and good generals execute them.

17. If not in the interests of the state, do not act. If you cannot succeed, do not use troops. If you are not in danger, do not fight.⁶

18. A sovereign cannot raise an army because he is enraged, nor can a general fight because he is resentful. For while an

¹ A warning not to be cooked in your own fire is to be inferred from the last sentence.

² Following Chang Yü.

³ Following Tu Mu.

⁴ Following Ts'ao Ts'ao.

⁵ Mei Yao-ch'en is the only commentator who caught Sun Tzu's meaning: situations must be exploited.

⁶ The commentators make it clear that war is to be used only as a last resort.

angered man may again be happy, and a resentful man again be pleased, a state that has perished cannot be restored, nor can the dead be brought back to life.

19. Therefore, the enlightened ruler is prudent and the good general is warned against rash action.¹ Thus the state is kept secure and the army preserved.

¹ Last three words added. Rage and resentment lead to rash action.

XIII

EMPLOYMENT OF SECRET AGENTS¹

SUN TZU said:

1. Now when an army of one hundred thousand is raised and dispatched on a distant campaign the expenses borne by the people together with the disbursements of the treasury will amount to a thousand pieces of gold daily. There will be continuous commotion both at home and abroad, people will be exhausted by the requirements of transport, and the affairs of seven hundred thousand households will be disrupted.²

Ts'ao Ts'ao: Anciently, eight families comprised a community. When one family sent a man to the army, the remaining seven contributed to its support. Thus, when an army of one hundred thousand was raised those unable to attend fully to their own ploughing and sowing amounted to seven hundred thousand households.

2. One who confronts his enemy for many years in order to struggle for victory in a decisive battle yet who, because he begrudges rank, honours and a few hundred pieces of gold, remains ignorant of his enemy's situation, is completely devoid of humanity. Such a man is no general; no support to his sovereign; no master of victory.

3. Now the reason the enlightened prince and the wise general conquer the enemy whenever they move and their achievements surpass those of ordinary men is foreknowledge.

Ho Yen-hsi: The section in the Rites of Chou entitled 'Military Officers' names 'The Director of National

¹ The character used in the title means 'the space between' two objects (such as a crack between two doors) and thus 'cleavage', 'division', or 'to divide'. It also means 'spies', 'spying', or 'espionage'.

² I have translated 'to a distance of one thousand *li*' as 'on a distant campaign'. The figure need not be taken as specific.

Espionage'. This officer probably directed secret operations in other countries.¹

4. What is called 'foreknowledge' cannot be elicited from spirits, nor from gods, nor by analogy with past events, nor from calculations. It must be obtained from men who know the enemy situation.

5. Now there are five sorts of secret agents to be employed. These are native, inside, doubled, expendable, and living.²

6. When these five types of agents are all working simultaneously and none knows their method of operation, they are called 'The Divine Skein' and are the treasure of a sovereign.³

7. Native agents are those of the enemy's country people whom we employ.

8. Inside agents are enemy officials whom we employ.

Tu Mu: Among the official class there are worthy men who have been deprived of office; others who have committed errors and have been punished. There are sycophants and minions who are covetous of wealth. There are those who wrongly remain long in lowly office; those who have not obtained responsible positions, and those whose sole desire is to take advantage of times of trouble to extend the scope of their own abilities. There are those who are two-faced, changeable, and deceitful, and who are always sitting on the fence. As far as all such are concerned you can secretly inquire after their welfare, reward them liberally with gold and silk, and so tie them to you. Then you may rely on them to seek out the real facts of the situation in their country, and to ascertain its plans directed against you. They can as well create cleavages between the sovereign and his ministers so that these are not in harmonious accord.

¹ Probably an appeal to the authority of tradition to support the legitimacy of espionage and subversion which are contrary to the spirit of Confucian teaching.

² I use 'expendable' in lieu of 'death'.

³ The idea is that information may be gathered in as fish are by pulling on a single cord and so drawing together the various threads of a net.

9. Doubled agents are enemy spies whom we employ.

Li Ch'üan: When the enemy sends spies to pry into my accomplishments or lack of them, I bribe them lavishly, turn them around, and make them my agents.

10. Expendable agents are those of our own spies who are deliberately given fabricated information.

Tu Yu: We leak information which is actually false and allow our own agents to learn it. When these agents operating in enemy territory are taken by him they are certain to report this false information. The enemy will believe it and make preparations accordingly. But our actions will of course not accord with this, and the enemy will put the spies to death.

Chang Yü: . . . In our dynasty Chief of Staff Ts'ao once pardoned a condemned man whom he then disguised as a monk, and caused to swallow a ball of wax and enter Tangut. When the false monk arrived he was imprisoned. The monk told his captors about the ball of wax and soon discharged it in a stool. When the ball was opened, the Tanguts read a letter transmitted by Chief of Staff Ts'ao to their Director of Strategic Planning. The chieftain of the barbarians was enraged, put his minister to death, and executed the spy monk. This is the idea. But expendable agents are not confined to only one use. Sometimes I send agents to the enemy to make a covenant of peace and then I attack.

11. Living agents are those who return with information.

Tu Yu: We select men who are clever, talented, wise, and able to gain access to those of the enemy who are intimate with the sovereign and members of the nobility. Thus they are able to observe the enemy's movements and to learn of his doings and his plans. Having learned the true state of affairs they return and tell us. Therefore they are called 'living' agents.

Tu Mu: These are people who can come and go and

communicate reports. As living spies we must recruit men who are intelligent but appear to be stupid; who seem to be dull but are strong in heart; men who are agile, vigorous, hardy, and brave; well-versed in lowly matters and able to endure hunger, cold, filth, and humiliation.

12. Of all those in the army close to the commander none is more intimate than the secret agent; of all rewards none more liberal than those given to secret agents; of all matters none is more confidential than those relating to secret operations.

Mei Yao-ch'en: Secret agents receive their instructions within the tent of the general, and are intimate and close to him.

Tu Mu: These are 'mouth to ear' matters.

13. He who is not sage and wise, humane and just, cannot use secret agents. And he who is not delicate and subtle cannot get the truth out of them.

Tu Mu: The first essential is to estimate the character of the spy to determine if he is sincere, truthful, and really intelligent. Afterwards, he can be employed. . . . Among agents there are some whose only interest is in acquiring wealth without obtaining the true situation of the enemy, and only meet my requirements with empty words.¹ In such a case I must be deep and subtle. Then I can assess the truth or falsity of the spy's statements and discriminate between what is substantial and what is not.

Mei Yao-ch'en: Take precautions against the spy having been turned around.

14. Delicate indeed! Truly delicate! There is no place where espionage is not used.

15. If plans relating to secret operations are prematurely divulged the agent and all those to whom he spoke of them shall be put to death.²

¹ Such agents are now aptly described as 'paper mills'.

² Giles translated: 'If a secret piece of news is divulged by a spy before the time is ripe. . . .' Sun Tzu is not talking about 'news' here but about espionage affairs, or matters or plans relating to espionage.

Ch'en Hao: . . . They may be killed in order to stop their mouths and prevent the enemy hearing.

16. Generally in the case of armies you wish to strike, cities you wish to attack, and people you wish to assassinate, you must know the names of the garrison commander, the staff officers, the ushers, gate keepers, and the bodyguards. You must instruct your agents to inquire into these matters in minute detail.

Tu Mu: If you wish to conduct offensive war you must know the men employed by the enemy. Are they wise or stupid, clever or clumsy? Having assessed their qualities, you prepare appropriate measures. When the King of Han sent Han Hsin, Ts'ao Ts'an, and Kuan Ying to attack Wei Pao he asked: 'Who is the commander-in-chief of Wei?' The reply was: 'Po Chih.' The King said: 'His mouth still smells of his mother's milk. He cannot equal Han Hsin. Who is the cavalry commander?' The reply was: 'Feng Ching.' The King said: 'He is the son of General Feng Wu-che of Ch'in. Although worthy, he is not the equal of Kuan Ying. And who is the infantry commander?' The reply was: 'Hsiang T'o.' The King said: 'He is no match for Ts'ao Ts'an. I have nothing to worry about.'

17. It is essential to seek out enemy agents who have come to conduct espionage against you and to bribe them to serve you. Give them instructions and care for them.¹ Thus doubled agents are recruited and used.

18. It is by means of the doubled agent that native and inside agents can be recruited and employed.

Chang Yü: This is because the doubled agent knows those of his own countrymen who are covetous as well as those officials who have been remiss in office. These we can tempt into our service.

¹ These agents, according to Giles' translation, are to be 'tempted with bribes, led away and comfortably housed'.

19. And it is by this means that the expendable agent, armed with false information, can be sent to convey it to the enemy.

Chang Yü: It is because doubled agents know in what respects the enemy can be deceived that expendable agents may be sent to convey false information.

20. It is by this means also that living agents can be used at appropriate times.

21. The sovereign must have full knowledge of the activities of the five sorts of agents. This knowledge must come from the doubled agents, and therefore it is mandatory that they be treated with the utmost liberality.

22. Of old, the rise of Yin was due to I Chih, who formerly served the Hsia; the Chou came to power through Lu Yu, a servant of the Yin.¹

Chang Yü: I Chih was a minister of Hsia who went over to the Yin. Lu Wang was a minister of Yin who went over to the Chou.

23. And therefore only the enlightened sovereign and the worthy general who are able to use the most intelligent people as agents are certain to achieve great things. Secret operations are essential in war; upon them the army relies to make its every move.

Chia Lin: An army without secret agents is exactly like a man without eyes or ears.

¹ Several of the commentators are outraged that these worthies are described by Sun Tzu as 'spies' or 'agents', but of course they were.

