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The Art of War

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For other uses, see [The Art of War \(disambiguation\)](#).

The Art of War is an ancient [Chinese military treatise](#) dating from the 5th century BC. Attributed to the ancient Chinese military strategist [Sun Tzu](#) ("Master Sun", also spelled Sunzi) the text is composed of 13 chapters, each of which is devoted to one aspect of [warfare](#). It is commonly thought of as a definitive work on [military strategy](#) and [tactics](#). It was placed at the head of China's [Seven Military Classics](#) upon the collection's creation in 1080 by [Emperor Shenzong of Song](#), and has long been the most influential strategy text in East Asia.^[1] It has had an influence on Eastern and Western military thinking, business tactics, legal strategy and beyond.

The book was first translated into French in 1772 by the [Jesuit Jean Joseph Marie Amiot](#) and a partial translation into English was attempted by British officer Everard Ferguson Calthrop in 1905. The first annotated English translation was completed and published by [Lionel Giles](#) in 1910.^[2] Leaders such as [Mao Zedong](#), General [Võ Nguyên](#)

The Art of War



Author	(trad.) Sun Tzu
Country	China
Language	Chinese language
Subject	Military strategy and tactics
Publication date	5th century BC
Text	<i>The Art of War</i> at Wikisource

The Art of War

Traditional Chinese [孫子兵法](#)

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Беларуская

Беларуская
(тарашкевіца)

Български

Boarisch

Bosanski

Brezhoneg

Буряад

Català

Čeština

Cymraeg

Giáp, General **Douglas MacArthur** and leaders of **Imperial Japan** have drawn inspiration from the work.

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History [edit]

Text and commentaries [edit]

The Art of War is traditionally attributed to a military

Simplified Chinese 孙子兵法

Literal meaning "Master Sun's Rules of Warfare"

Transcriptions

Standard Mandarin

Hanyu Pinyin Sūnzǐ bīngfǎ

Wade–Giles Sun-tzu ping-fa

IPA [swəntsɿ pínfà]

Wu

Romanization Sen-tsy pin-fah

Yue: Cantonese

Yale Romanization Syūn jí bīng faat

Jyutping Syun¹-zi² bing¹-faat³

Southern Min

Tâi-lô Sun-tzú ping-huat

Old Chinese

Baxter-Sagart *[s]ʰu[n] tsəʔ pran [p.k]ap

Chinese military texts

Seven Military Classics

The Art of War · *Wuzi* ·
The Methods of the Sima ·
Six Secret Teachings · *Wei Liaozi* ·
Three Strategies of Huang Shigong ·
Questions and Replies ·

Other texts

Sun Bin's Art of War · *Thirty-Six Stratagems* ·
Wujing Zongyao · *Huolongjing* · *Jixiao Xinshu* ·

general from the late 6th century BC known as "Master Sun" (*Sunzi* or *Sun-tzu*), though its earliest parts probably date to at least 100 years later.^[3] [Sima Qian](#)'s 1st century BC work *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji*), the first of China's [24 dynastic histories](#), records an early Chinese tradition stating that a text on military matters was written by a "Sun Wu" from the [State of Qi](#), and that this text had been read and studied by [King Helü of Wu](#) (r. 514–495 BC).^[4] This text was traditionally identified with the received *Master Sun's Art of War*. The conventional view, which is still widely held in China, was that Sun Wu was a military theorist from the end of the [Spring and Autumn period](#) (776–471 BC) who fled his home state of Qi to the southeastern [kingdom of Wu](#), where he is said to have impressed the king with his ability to train even dainty palace ladies in warfare and to have made Wu's armies powerful enough to challenge their western rivals in the [state of Chu](#).^[5]

The prominent strategist, poet, and warlord [Cao Cao](#) in the early 3rd century AD authored the earliest known commentary to the *Art of War*.^[4] Cao's preface makes clear that he edited the text and removed certain passages, but the extent of his changes were unclear historically.^[4] *The Art of War* appears throughout the bibliographical catalogs of the Chinese dynastic histories, but listings of its divisions and size varied widely.^[4] In the early 20th century, the Chinese writer and reformer [Liang Qichao](#), theorized that the text was actually written in the 4th century BC by Sunzi's purported descendant [Sun Bin](#), as a number of historical sources mention a military treatise he wrote.^[4]

Authorship [[edit](#)]

Around the 12th century, some scholars began to doubt the historical existence of Sunzi, primarily on the grounds that he is not mentioned in the historical classic *The Commentary of Zuo* (*Zuo zhuan* [左傳](#)), which mentions most of the notable figures from the Spring and Autumn period.^[4] The name "Sun Wu" ([孫武](#)) does not appear in any text prior to the *Records of the Grand Historian*,^[6] and has been suspected to be a made-up descriptive cognomen meaning "the fugitive warrior": the surname "Sun" is glossed as the related term "fugitive" (*xùn* [遜](#)), while "Wu" is the ancient Chinese virtue of "martial, valiant" (*wǔ* [武](#)), which corresponds to Sunzi's role as the hero's *doppelgänger* in the story of [Wu Zixu](#).^[7]

Norsk nynorsk

Occitan

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ

پنجابی

Piemontèis

Polski

Português

Română

Русиньскый

Русский

Scots

Shqip

Simple English

Slovenčina

Slovenščina

کوردیی ناوڵندی

Српски / srpski

Srpskohrvatski /
српскохрватски

Suomi

Svenska

தமிழ்

ไทย

Türkçe

Українська

اردو

Tiếng Việt

文言

Winaray

ᨆᨔᨕᨗᨛ᨜᨟ᨿᨠᨣᨤᨥᨦᨧᨨᨩᨪᨫᨬᨭᨮᨯᨰᨱᨲᨳᨴᨵᨶᨷᨸᨹᨺᨻᨼᨽᨾᨿ

粵語

中文

Unlike Sun Wu, Sun Bin appears to have been an actual person who was a genuine authority on military matters, and may have been the inspiration for the creation of the historical figure "Sunzi" through a form of [euhemerism](#).^[7]

Yinqueshan tomb discovery [edit]

In 1972, the [Yinqueshan Han slips](#) were discovered in two [Han dynasty](#) (206 BC – AD 220) tombs near the city of [Linyi](#) in [Shandong Province](#).^[8] Among the many [bamboo slip](#) writings contained in the tombs—which were sealed around 134 and 118 BC, respectively—were two separate texts: one attributed to "Sunzi", corresponding to the received text, and another attributed to Sun Bin, which explains and expands upon the earlier *The Art of War* by Sunzi.^[9] The Sun Bin text's material overlaps with much of the "Sunzi" text, and the two may be "a single, continuously developing intellectual tradition united under the Sun name".^[10] This discovery showed that much of the historical confusion was due to the fact that there were two texts that could have been referred to as "Master Sun's Art of War", not one.^[9] The content of the earlier text is about one-third of the chapters of the modern *The Art of War*, and their text matches very closely.^[8] It is now generally accepted that the earlier *The Art of War* was completed sometime between 500 and 450 BC.^[9]

The 13 chapters [edit]

The Art of War is divided into 13 chapters (or *piān*); the collection is referred to as being one *zhuàn* ("whole" or alternatively "chronicle").

The Art of War chapter names in translations by Giles, Wing, Sawyer, and Chow-Hou

Chapter	Lionel Giles (1910)	R.L. Wing (1988)	Ralph D. Sawyer (1996)	Chow-Hou Wee (2003)
I	Laying Plans	The Calculations	Initial Estimations	Detail Assessment and Planning (Chinese: 始計, 始计)

II	Waging War	The Challenge	Waging War	Waging War (Chinese: 作戰, 作战)
III	Attack by Stratagem	The Plan of Attack	Planning Offensives	Strategic Attack (Chinese: 謀攻, 谋攻)
IV	Tactical Dispositions	Positioning	Military Disposition	Disposition of the Army (Chinese: 軍形, 军形)
V	Use of Energy	Directing	Strategic Military Power	Forces (Chinese: 兵勢, 兵势)
VI	Weak Points and Strong	Illusion and Reality	Vacuity and Substance	Weaknesses and Strengths (Chinese: 虛實, 虚实)
VII	Maneuvering an Army	Engaging The Force	Military Combat	Military Maneuvers (Chinese: 軍爭, 军争)
VIII	Variation of Tactics	The Nine Variations	Nine Changes	Variations and Adaptability (Chinese: 九變, 九变)
IX	The Army on the March	Moving The Force	Maneuvering the Army	Movement and Development of Troops (Chinese: 行軍, 行军)
X	Classification of Terrain	Situational Positioning	Configurations of Terrain	Terrain (Chinese: 地形)
XI	The Nine Situations	The Nine Situations	Nine Terrains	The Nine Battlegrounds (Chinese: 九地)
XII	Attack by Fire	The Fiery Attack	Incendiary Attacks	Attacking with Fire (Chinese: 火攻)
XIII	Use of Spies	The Use of Intelligence	Employing Spies	Intelligence and Espionage (Chinese: 用間, 用间)

Chapter summary [\[edit\]](#)

1. **Detail Assessment and Planning (Chinese: 始計, 始計)** explores the five fundamental factors (the Way, seasons, terrain, leadership, and management) and seven elements that determine the outcomes of military engagements. By thinking, assessing and comparing these points, a commander can calculate his chances of victory. Habitual deviation from these calculations will ensure failure via improper action. The text stresses that war is a very grave matter for the state and must not be commenced without due consideration.
2. **Waging War (Chinese: 作戰, 作战)** explains how to understand the economy of warfare and how success requires winning decisive engagements quickly. This section advises that successful military campaigns require limiting the cost of competition and conflict.
3. **Strategic Attack (Chinese: 謀攻, 谋攻)** defines the source of strength as unity, not size, and discusses the five factors that are needed to succeed in any war. In order of importance, these critical factors are: Attack, Strategy, Alliances, Army and Cities.
4. **Disposition of the Army (Chinese: 軍形, 军形)** explains the importance of defending existing positions until a commander is capable of advancing from those positions in safety. It teaches commanders the importance of recognizing strategic opportunities, and teaches not to create opportunities for the enemy.
5. **Forces (Chinese: 兵勢, 兵势)** explains the use of creativity and timing in building an army's momentum.



The beginning of *The Art of War* in a classical [bamboo book](#) from the reign of the [Qianlong Emperor](#)

6. **Weaknesses and Strengths (Chinese: 虛實, 虚实)** explains how an army's opportunities come from the openings in the environment caused by the relative weakness of the enemy and how to respond to changes in the fluid battlefield over a given area.
7. **Military Maneuvers (Chinese: 軍爭, 军争)** explains the dangers of direct conflict and how to win those confrontations when they are forced upon the commander.
8. **Variations and Adaptability (Chinese: 九變, 九变)** focuses on the need for flexibility in an army's responses. It explains how to respond to shifting circumstances successfully.
9. **Movement and Development of Troops (Chinese: 行軍, 行军)** describes the different situations in which an army finds itself as it moves through new enemy territories, and how to respond to these situations. Much of this section focuses on evaluating the intentions of others.
10. **Terrain (Chinese: 地形)** looks at the three general areas of resistance (distance, dangers and barriers) and the six types of ground positions that arise from them. Each of these six field positions offers certain advantages and disadvantages.
11. **The Nine Battlegrounds (Chinese: 九地)** describes the nine common situations (or stages) in a campaign, from scattering to deadly, and the specific focus that a commander will need in order to successfully navigate them.
12. **Attacking with Fire (Chinese: 火攻)** explains the general use of weapons and the specific use of the environment as a weapon. This section examines the five targets for attack, the five types of environmental attack and the appropriate responses to such attacks.
13. **Intelligence and Espionage (Chinese: 用間, 用间)** focuses on the importance of developing good information sources, and specifies the five types of intelligence sources and how to best manage each of them.

Quotations [\[edit\]](#)

Chinese [\[edit\]](#)

Verses from the book occur in modern daily [Chinese idioms](#) and phrases, such as the last verse of

Chapter 3:

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

So it is said that if you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be put at risk even in a hundred battles.

If you only know yourself, but not your opponent, you may win or may lose.

If you know neither yourself nor your enemy, you will always endanger yourself.

This has been more tersely interpreted and condensed into the Chinese modern proverb:

知己知彼，百戰不殆。(Zhī jǐ zhī bǐ, bǎi zhàn bù dài.)

If you know both yourself and your enemy, you can win numerous (literally, "a hundred") battles without jeopardy.

English [\[edit\]](#)

Common examples can also be found in English use, such as verse 18 in Chapter 1:

兵者，詭道也。故能而示之不能，用而示之不用，近而示之遠，遠而示之近。

All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when we are able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must appear inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near.

This has been abbreviated to its most basic form and condensed into the English modern proverb:

All warfare is based on deception.

Military and intelligence applications [\[edit\]](#)

In many [East Asian countries](#), *The Art of War* was part of the syllabus for potential candidates of military service examinations. Various translations are available.

During the [Sengoku period](#) in [Japan](#), a *daimyō* named [Takeda Shingen](#) (1521–1573) is said to have become almost invincible in all battles without relying on [guns](#), because he studied *The Art of War*.^[11]

The book even gave him the inspiration for his famous battle standard "[Fūrinkazan](#)" (Wind, Forest, Fire and Mountain), meaning fast as the wind, silent as a forest, ferocious as fire and immovable as a mountain.

The translator [Samuel B. Griffith](#) offers a chapter on "Sun Tzu and Mao Tse-Tung" where *The Art of War* is cited as influencing Mao's *On Guerrilla Warfare*, *On the Protracted War* and *Strategic Problems of China's Revolutionary War*, and includes Mao's quote: "We must not belittle the saying in the book of Sun Wu Tzu, the great military expert of ancient China, 'Know your enemy and know yourself and you can fight a thousand battles without disaster.'"^[11]

During the [Vietnam War](#), some [Vietcong](#) officers studied *The Art of War* and reportedly could recite entire passages from memory.^[citation needed]

General [Võ Nguyên Giáp](#) successfully implemented tactics described in *The Art of War* during the [Battle of Dien Bien Phu](#) ending major French involvement in Indochina and leading to the accords which partitioned Vietnam into North and South. General Võ, later the main PVA military commander in the [Vietnam War](#), was an avid student and practitioner of Sun Tzu's ideas.^[12] America's defeat there, more than any other event, brought Sun Tzu to the attention of leaders of American military theory.^{[12][13][14]}

Finnish Field Marshal [Mannerheim](#) and general [Aksel Airo](#) were avid readers of *Art of War*. They both read it in French; Airo kept the French translation of the book on his bedside table in his quarters.^[citation needed]

The Department of the Army in the United States, through its Command and General Staff College, lists *The Art of War* as one example of a book that may be kept at a military unit's library.^[15]

The Art of War is listed on the Marine Corps Professional Reading Program (formerly known as the Commandant's Reading List). It is recommended reading for all United States Military Intelligence personnel.^[16]

According to some authors, the strategy of [deception](#) from *The Art of War* was studied and widely used by the [KGB](#): "I will force the enemy to take our strength for weakness, and our weakness for strength, and thus will turn his strength into weakness".^[17] The book is widely cited by KGB officers in charge of [disinformation](#) operations in [Vladimir Volkoff](#)'s novel *Le Montage*.

Application outside the military [\[edit\]](#)

The Art of War has been applied to many fields well outside of the military. Much of the text is about how to fight wars without actually having to do battle: it gives tips on how to outsmart one's opponent so that physical battle is not necessary. As such, it has found application as a training guide for many competitive endeavors that do not involve actual combat.

Many business books have applied the lessons taken from the book to [office politics](#) and corporate strategy.^{[18][19][20]} Many [Japanese](#) companies make the book required reading for their key [executives](#).^[21] The book is also popular among Western business circles citing its utilitarian value regarding [management practices](#). Many entrepreneurs and executives have turned to it for inspiration and advice on how to succeed in competitive business situations. The book has also been applied to the field of education.^[22]

The Art of War has been the subject of legal books^[23] and legal articles on the trial process, including negotiation tactics and trial strategy.^{[24][25][26][27]}

The Art of War has also been applied in the world of sports. [NFL](#) coach [Bill Belichick](#) is known to have read the book and used its lessons to gain insights in preparing for games.^[28] [Australian cricket](#) as well as [Brazilian association football](#) coaches [Luiz Felipe Scolari](#) and [Carlos Alberto Parreira](#) are known to

have embraced the text. Scolari made the [Brazilian World Cup squad of 2002](#) study the ancient work during their successful campaign.^[29]

The Art of War is often quoted while developing tactics and/or strategy in [Electronic Sports](#). Particularly, one of the fundamental books about e-sports, "Play To Win" by MIT graduate [David Sirlin](#), is actually just an analysis about possible applications of the ideas from *The Art of War* in modern Electronic Sports.

The Art of War was released in 2014 as an ebook companion alongside the Art of War DLC for [Europa Universalis IV](#), a PC strategy game by [Paradox Development Studios](#), with a forward by Thomas Johansson.

Notable translations [\[edit\]](#)

- *Sun Tzu on the Art of War*. [Lionel Giles](#), trans. London: Luzac and Company. 1910.
- *The Art of War*. [Samuel B. Griffith](#), trans. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1963. ISBN 0-19-501476-6. Part of the [UNESCO Collection of Representative Works](#).
- *Sun Tzu, The Art of War*. [Thomas Cleary](#), trans. Boston-Shaftsbury: Shambhala. 1987.
- *The Art of Warfare*. Roger Ames, trans. Random House. 1993. ISBN 0-345-36239-X.
- *The Art of War*. [John Minford](#), trans. New York: Viking. 2002. ISBN 0-670-03156-9.
- *The Art of War: Sunzi's Military Methods*. [Victor H. Mair](#), trans. New York: Columbia University Press. 2007. ISBN 978-0-231-13382-1.



Running Press miniature edition [\[edit\]](#)
of the 1994 Ralph D. Sawyer translation, printed in 2003

The book was translated into **Manchu** as □□□□□□ □□□□□ □□ □□□□□□□□□□ Wylie: Tchauhai paita be

gisurengge,^{[30][31]} **Möllendorff**: Coohai baita de gisurengge, Discourse on the art of War.^[32]

The first Manchu translations of Chinese works were the **Liu-t'ao** 六韜, **Su-shu** 素書, and **San-lueh** 三略- all Chinese military texts dedicated to the arts of war due to the Manchu interests in the topic, like Sun-Tzu's work The Art of War.^{[33][34][35]} The military related texts which were translated into Manchu from Chinese were translated by Dahai.^[36] Manchu translations of Chinese texts included the Ming penal code and military texts were performed by Dahai.^[37] These translations were requested of Dahai by Nurhaci.^[38] The military text **Wu-tzu** was translated into Manchu along with Sun-Tzu's work The Art of War.^[39] Chinese history, Chinese law, and Chinese military theory classical texts were translated into Manchu during the rule of Hong Taiji in Mukden with Manchus placing significance upon military and governance related Chinese texts.^[40] A Manchu translation was made of the military themed Chinese novel **Romance of the Three Kingdoms**.^{[41][42]} Chinese literature, military theory and legal texts were translated into Manchu by Dahai and Erdeni.^[43] The translations were ordered in 1629.^{[44][45]} The translation of the military texts San-lüeh, Su-shu, and the Ta Ming hui-tien (the Ming law) done by Dahai was ordered by Nurhaci.^[46] While it was mainly administrative and ethical guidance which made up most of San-lüeh and Su Shu, military science was indeed found in the Liu-t'ao and Chinese military manuals were eagerly translated by the Manchus and the Manchus were also attracted to the military content in **Romance of the Three Kingdoms** which is why it was translated.^[47]

Another Manchu translation was made by Aisin Gioro Qiying.^[48]

See also [\[edit\]](#)

Concepts [\[edit\]](#)

- [Philosophy of war](#)

Books [\[edit\]](#)

- *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* (Commentaries on the Gallic War) by Julius Caesar
- *The Art of War* by Niccolò Machiavelli
- *Arthashastra*
- *The Book of Five Rings* (Miyamoto Musashi)
- "Seven Military Classics"
- "Dream Pool Essays" by Shen Kuo
- "Huolongjing" by Liu Bowen
- "Hagakure" by Yamamoto Tsunetomo
- *Epitoma rei militaris* of Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus
- *Guerrilla Warfare* by Che Guevara
- *On Protracted War* by Mao Zedong
- *On War* by Carl von Clausewitz
- *Records of the Grand Historian*
- *Thirty-Six Stratagems*
- *The Utility of Force* by General Sir Rupert Smith
- *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* by T. E. Lawrence
- *Bansenshukai*
- *Infanterie Greift An* by Erwin Rommel
- "History of the Peloponnesian War" by Thucydides

Notes [\[edit\]](#)

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7. ^ [a b](#) Mair (2007), p. 10.
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