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Sun Tzu

孫子

45 QUOTES

The Art of War (孫子兵法)

The strategist whose ideal victory is the battle you never had to fight.

MILITARY STRATEGY

孫

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Every entry below gives four things: the saying in English, the original Chinese as it stands in the text, the book or chapter it comes from, and who translated that line. Nothing here is copied from a modern edition.

- **45** sayings from The Art of War (孫子兵法).
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Sun Tzu (孫子). Thirteen short chapters, written for commanders, have outlived every army that used them. The Art of War is less about fighting than about preparation, deception, and knowing exactly when not to engage — which is why it keeps turning up in boardrooms.

01 The art of war is of vital importance to the State. It is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin. Hence it is a subject of inquiry which can on no account be neglected.

兵者，國之大事，死生之地，存亡之道，不可不察也。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 1 — "Laying Plans" 始計
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

02 The art of war, then, is governed by five constant factors, to be taken into account in one's deliberations, when seeking to determine the conditions obtaining in the field. These are: (1) The Moral Law; (2) Heaven; (3) Earth; (4) The Commander; (5) Method and discipline.

故經之以五事，校之以計，而索其情：一曰道，二曰天，三曰地，四曰將，五曰法。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 1 — "Laying Plans" 始計
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

03 The Moral Law causes the people to be in complete accord with their ruler, so that they will follow him regardless of their lives, undismayed by any danger.

道者，令民與上同意也。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 1 — "Laying Plans" 始計
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

04 All warfare is based on deception.

兵者，詭道也。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 1 — "Laying Plans" 始計
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

05 Attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected.

攻其無備，出其不意。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 1 — "Laying Plans" 始計
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

06 Thus do many calculations lead to victory, and few calculations to defeat: how much more no calculation at all!

多算勝，少算不勝，而況於無算乎！

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 1 — "Laying Plans" 始計
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

07 Though we have heard of stupid haste in war, cleverness has never been seen associated with long delays.

兵聞拙速，未睹巧之久也。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 2 — "Waging War" 作戰
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

08 There is no instance of a country having benefited from prolonged warfare.

夫兵久而國利者，未之有也。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 2 — "Waging War" 作戰
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

09 It is only one who is thoroughly acquainted with the evils of war that can thoroughly understand the profitable way of carrying it on.

不盡知用兵之害者，則不能盡知用兵之利也。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 2 — "Waging War" 作戰
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

10 Bring war material with you from home, but forage on the enemy. Thus the army will have food enough for its needs.

取用於國，因糧於敵。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 2 — "Waging War" 作戰
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

11 To fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting.

百戰百勝，非善之善者也；不戰而屈人之兵，善之善者也。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 3 — "Attack by Stratagem" 謀攻
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

12 Thus the highest form of generalship is to baulk the enemy's plans; the next best is to prevent the junction of the enemy's forces; the next in order is to attack the enemy's army in the field; and the worst policy of all is to besiege walled cities.

上兵伐謀，其次伐交，其次伐兵，其下攻城。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 3 — "Attack by Stratagem" 謀攻
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

13 The rule is, not to besiege walled cities if it can possibly be avoided.

攻城之法，為不得已。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 3 — "Attack by Stratagem" 謀攻
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

14 If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.

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。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 3 — "Attack by Stratagem" 謀攻
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

15 It is the rule in war, if our forces are ten to the enemy's one, to surround him; if five to one, to attack him; if twice as numerous, to divide our army into two. If equally matched, we can offer battle; if slightly inferior in numbers, we can avoid the enemy; if quite unequal in every way, we can flee from him.

十則圍之，五則攻之，倍則分之，敵則能戰之，少則能逃之，不若則能避之。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 3 — "Attack by Stratagem" 謀攻
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

16 The general is the bulwark of the State. If the bulwark is complete at all points, the State will be strong; if the bulwark is defective, the State will be weak.

夫將者，國之輔也。輔周則國必強，輔隙則國必弱。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 3 — "Attack by Stratagem" 謀攻
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

17 Thus we may know that there are five essentials for victory: (1) He will win who knows when to fight and when not to fight. (2) He will win who knows how to handle both superior and inferior forces. (3) He will win whose army is animated by the same spirit throughout all its ranks. (4) He will win who, prepared himself, waits to take the enemy unprepared. (5) He will win whose general is able and not interfered with by the sovereign.

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

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 3 — "Attack by Stratagem" 謀攻
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

18 The good fighters of old first put themselves beyond the possibility of defeat, and then waited for an opportunity of defeating the enemy.

善戰者，先為不可勝，以待敵之可勝。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 4 — "Tactical Dispositions" 軍形
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

19 To secure ourselves against defeat lies in our own hands, but the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself.

不可勝在己，可勝在敵。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 4 — "Tactical Dispositions" 軍形
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

20 Thus it is that in war the victorious strategist only seeks battle after the victory has been won, whereas he who is destined to defeat first fights and afterwards looks for victory.

勝兵先勝而後求戰，敗兵先戰而後求勝。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 4 — "Tactical Dispositions" 軍形
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

21 In all fighting, the direct method may be used for joining battle, but indirect methods will be needed in order to secure victory.

凡戰者，以正合，以奇勝。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 5 — "Forces" 兵勢
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

22 Therefore the good fighter will be terrible in his onset, and prompt in his decision. Energy may be likened to the bending of a crossbow; decision, to the releasing of the trigger.

善戰者，其勢險，其節短。勢如彍弩，節如發機。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 5 — "Forces" 兵勢
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

23 Hiding order beneath the cloak of disorder is simply a question of subdivision; concealing courage under a show of timidity presupposes a fund of latent energy; masking strength with weakness is to be effected by tactical dispositions.

治亂，數也；勇怯，勢也；強弱，形也。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 5 — "Forces" 兵勢
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

24 The clever combatant looks to the effect of combined energy, and does not require too much from individuals. Hence his ability to pick out the right men and utilise combined energy.

善戰者，求之於勢，不責於人，故能擇人而任勢。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 5 — "Forces" 兵勢
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

25 Thus the energy developed by good fighting men is as the momentum of a round stone rolled down a mountain thousands of feet in height.

故善戰人之勢，如轉圓石於千仞之山者，勢也。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 5 — "Forces" 兵勢
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

26 Therefore the clever combatant imposes his will on the enemy, but does not allow the enemy's will to be imposed on him.

善戰者，致人而不致於人。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 6 — "Weak Points and Strong" 虛實
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

27 Military tactics are like water; for water in its natural course runs away from high places and hastens downwards. So in war, the way is to avoid what is strong and to strike at what is weak.

夫兵形象水，水之形，避高而趨下；兵之形，避實而擊虛。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 6 — "Weak Points and Strong" 虛實
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

28 As water has no constant shape, so in warfare there are no constant conditions. He who can modify his tactics in relation to his opponent and thereby succeed in winning may be called a heaven-born captain.

兵無常勢，水無常形，能因敵變化而取勝者，謂之神。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 6 — "Weak Points and Strong" 虛實
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

29 By discovering the enemy's dispositions and remaining invisible ourselves, we can keep our forces concentrated, while the enemy's must be divided.

故形人而我無形，則我專而敵分。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 6 — "Weak Points and Strong" 虛實
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

30 The difficulty of tactical manœuvering consists in turning the devious into the direct, and misfortune into gain.

軍爭之難者，以迂為直，以患為利。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 7 — "Manoeuvring" 軍爭
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

31 Let your rapidity be that of the wind, your compactness that of the forest. In raiding and plundering be like fire, in immovability like a mountain. Let your plans be dark and impenetrable as night, and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt.

故其疾如風，其徐如林，侵掠如火，不動如山，難知如陰，動如雷震。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 7 — "Manoeuvring" 軍爭
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

32 A clever general, therefore, avoids an army when its spirit is keen, but attacks it when it is sluggish and inclined to return.

避其銳氣，擊其惰歸。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 7 — "Manoeuvring" 軍爭
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

33 When you surround an army, leave an outlet free. Do not press a desperate foe too hard.

圍師必闕，窮寇勿迫。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 7 — "Manoeuvring" 軍爭
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

34 The art of war teaches us to rely not on the likelihood of the enemy's not coming, but on our own readiness to receive him; not on the chance of his not attacking, but rather on the fact that we have made our position unassailable.

用兵之法，無恃其不來，恃吾有以待之；無恃其不攻，恃吾有所不可攻也。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 8 — "Variation in Tactics" 九變
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

35 There are five dangerous faults which may affect a general: recklessness, which leads to destruction; cowardice, which leads to capture; a hasty temper, which can be provoked by insults; a delicacy of honour which is sensitive to shame; and over-solicitude for his men, which exposes him to worry and trouble.

將有五危：必死，可殺也；必生，可虜也；忿速，可侮也；廉潔，可辱也；愛民，可煩也。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 8 — "Variation in Tactics" 九變
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

36 Regard your soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys; look upon them as your own beloved sons, and they will stand by you even unto death.

視卒如嬰兒，故可與之赴深谿；視卒如愛子，故可與之俱死。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 10 — "Terrain" 地形
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

37 If, however, you are indulgent, but unable to make your authority felt; kind-hearted, but unable to enforce your commands; and incapable, moreover, of quelling disorder: then your soldiers must be likened to spoilt children; they are useless for any practical purpose.

厚而不能使，愛而不能令，亂而不能治，譬若驕子，不可用也。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 10 — "Terrain" 地形
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

38 If you know the enemy and know yourself, your victory will not stand in doubt; if you know Heaven and know Earth, you may make your victory complete.

知彼知己，勝乃不殆；知天知地，勝乃可全。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 10 — "Terrain" 地形
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

39 Place your army in deadly peril, and it will survive; plunge it into desperate straits, and it will come out safe.

投之亡地然後存，陷之死地然後生。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 11 — "The Nine Situations" 九地
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

40 No ruler should put troops into the field merely to gratify his own spleen; no general should fight a battle simply out of pique.

主不可以怒而興師，將不可以慍而致戰。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 12 — "The Attack by Fire" 火攻
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

41 Anger may in time change to gladness; vexation may be succeeded by content. But a kingdom that has once been destroyed can never come again into being; nor can the dead ever be brought back to life.

怒可以復喜，慍可以復悅；亡國不可以復存，死者不可以復生。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 12 — "The Attack by Fire" 火攻
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

42 Move not unless you see an advantage; use not your troops unless there is something to be gained; fight not unless the position is critical.

非利不動，非得不用，非危不戰。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 12 — "The Attack by Fire" 火攻
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

43 What enables the wise sovereign and the good general to strike and conquer, and achieve things beyond the reach of ordinary men, is foreknowledge.

故明君賢將，所以動而勝人，成功出於眾者，先知也。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 13 — "The Use of Spies" 用間
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

44 This foreknowledge cannot be elicited from spirits; it cannot be obtained inductively from experience, nor by any deductive calculation. Knowledge of the enemy's dispositions can only be obtained from other men.

先知者，不可取於鬼神，不可象於事，不可驗於度，必取於人，知敵之情者也。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 13 — "The Use of Spies" 用間
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

45 Hence it is that with none in the whole army are more intimate relations to be maintained than with spies. None should be more liberally rewarded. In no other business should greater secrecy be preserved.

三軍之事，莫親於間，賞莫厚於間，事莫密於間。

The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 13 — "The Use of Spies" 用間
Trans. Lionel Giles, 1910

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ONE TO KEEP

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.

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。

— The Art of War (孫子兵法), Chapter 3 — "Attack by Stratagem" 謀攻

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