

A warrior's mind games

Sun Tzu (544 - 496BCE) was a military general, strategist and philosopher. He wrote *The Art of War*, which is popular even today, writes **Sarah Brennan**



Do you want to ace your next game of chess or tennis? Then you need *The Art of War*, the first and the greatest of all books written about warfare. And believe it or not, it was written more than 2,000 years ago, in China.

Sun Tzu, or Sunzi, was born in China in 544BCE and first worked as a mercenary, or soldier for hire, quickly achieving a reputation as a great leader. At the time, China was being torn apart by civil wars. In particular, King Helu of Wu was constantly fighting the rival kingdom of Yue. Legend has it that around 512BCE, he summoned Sun Tzu and ordered him to train 180 of his concubines as soldiers.

Sun Tzu divided them into two groups and appointed the king's two favourites as leaders. He gave them a command and the concubines just giggled. Sun Tzu explained that if orders are not clear, then the general is at fault. He repeated the command, slowly and clearly. The concubines giggled again. He then explained that when orders are clear but are not followed, the officers are at fault, and ordered the execution of the two favourites.

When the king protested, Sun Tzu

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explained that once a general is leading his troops, he should reject interference by his king. The favourites were beheaded, and not unsurprisingly, the next time Sun Tzu gave the command, the concubines obeyed perfectly. The King was very upset, but nonetheless appointed Sun Tzu as commander of his army.

Sun Tzu scored many victories, and finally published his theories of military strategy in a book called *The Art of War*. It had 13 chapters, dealing with everything from preparation and plan of attack to terrain and the use of spies. He actually did not recommend going into battle, believing instead that it was better to dominate by causing fear in the enemy's mind, splitting their alliances and using spies to find out their weak points. Then if you had to go into battle, it was best to do so by surprise.



Some famous quotes from *The Art of War*:

- "Know the enemy and know yourself, and you can fight a hundred battles with no danger of defeat."
- "Fight going down hill, not climbing up."
- "The five virtues of a general are wisdom, sincerity, benevolence, strictness and courage."

Illustration: Celine Choo

Sun Tzu died in 496BCE, at the age of 48. But *The Art of War* soon became the basis of military strategy in China.

Qin Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of a united China, used it to conquer the Warring States in 221BCE. Nine hundred years later, it had a critical influence on Samurai warfare in Japan. It was used by Napoleon, by the Unionists in the American Civil War, by Mao Zedong (毛澤東) during the Communist Revolution in China, and by Ho Chi Minh during the Vietnam War. It was even used by the US army in the Gulf War in the 1990s, and to this day, US army officer cadets are required to study it closely.

It has also been applied in politics, business

management, public administration, martial arts and even sport. And best of all, it's short, it can be downloaded off the internet - and it's absolutely fascinating!

Sarah Brennan is the author of the best-selling *Chinese Calendar Tales* and *Dirty Story* series. Check out www.sarah-brennan.com

say it

mercenary (n) 僱傭兵	reputation (n) 名聲	civil wars (n) 內戰
rival (n) 對頭的	general (n) 將軍	conquer (v) 征服