

The Story of Sun Zi



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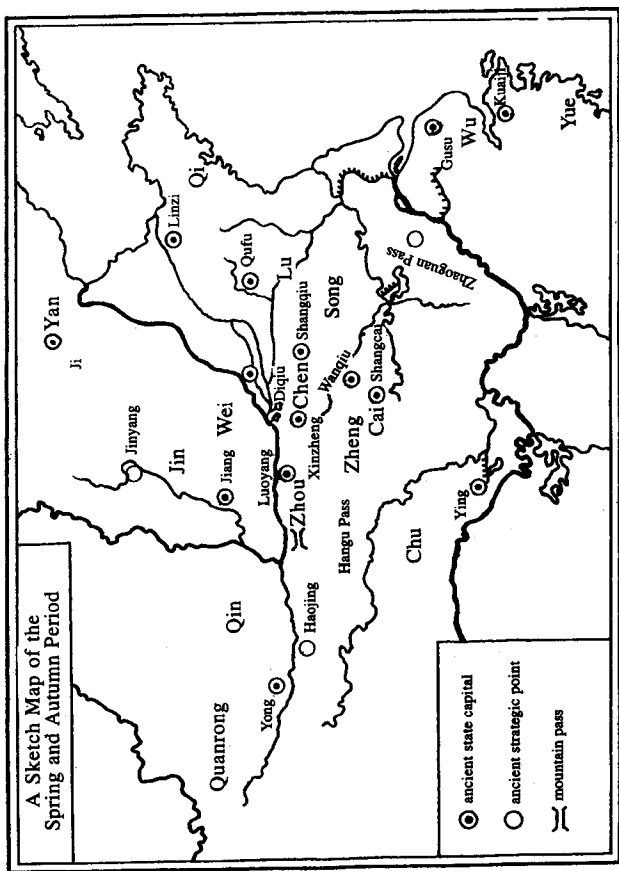
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Portrait of Sun Zi



Introduction

The Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (770-221 BC) in Chinese history were marked by great changes and social upheavals. The Zhou Dynasty that had ruled the country for over 250 years (c.11th century-256 BC) had lost its power and prosperity by this time and was grappling with difficulties on all sides to maintain its precarious existence. The decline began in the reign of the corrupt and incompetent King You, who was defeated and killed in 771 BC by the Quanrong, one of the Rong tribes in northwestern China. The dynastic capital Gaojing (southwest of present-day Xi'an, Shaanxi Province) was in ruins and the Zhou royal family had lost about half of the land and people it once governed. In 770 BC King Ping, heir to King You, was forced to move his capital out of Guanzhong (the central Shaanxi plains) to Luoyi (now Luoyang, Henan Province) in the east. Historians call the line of Zhou kings before King Ping moved east the Western Zhou Dynasty (c.11th century - 771 BC) and the line after the move, the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770-221 BC). The Eastern Zhou has been

further divided into two historical periods, called the Spring and Autumn (770-476 BC) and the Warring States (475-221 BC). The power and position of the Zhou monarch weakened further after he moved to Luoyi. He could no longer control the various feudal states, and although nominally still the ruler of the whole country had no real authority over his vassals.

Political and military struggles within and among the various feudal states were severe during the Spring and Autumn Period. Several powerful states fought to seek political and economic dominance over each other. Qi, Jin, Song, Chu, Qin, and later Wu and Yue in turn became overlords, or the heads of interstate alliances. By the time of the Warring States, seven states — Qi, Chu, Yan, Han, Zhao, Wei, Qin — were supreme, and the wars between them almost never ceased. In 256 BC Qin overthrew the Zhou Dynasty that had long existed in name only, and finally, in 221 BC, the First Emperor of Qin (Qinshihuang) conquered the other six states and unified the country.

Important changes took place in all aspects of society during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. In the political arena, the tradition of “rituals, music, and military expeditions are the rights of kings” became “rituals, music, and military expeditions are the rights of feudal lords.” This situation then changed again as large families and ministers usurped power. Subsequently, with the emergence of a scholarly class, the literati, a phenomenon appeared of *peichen* (officials serving

under feudal lords) who controlled the destiny of the country. The patriarchal clan system based on blood relations ended while superstitious notions of heaven, fate, ghosts, and gods dwindled. As productive forces in society developed, the patriarchal system based on blood relations collapsed, and the status of common people rose — the monopoly of culture and learning by the aristocracy that had existed since the Western Zhou was broken. Education was no longer only for feudal officials. Private schools and private teaching began to flourish, and it soon came into vogue for individuals to write books and set forth theories. Thus many schools of thought emerged, among which were the Confucianists, Mohists, Taoists, Legalists, Military Strategists, Logicians, Naturalists, Political Strategists, Agriculturists, and Eclectics. An unprecedented atmosphere of contending ideologies appeared.

The Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods saw the setting up of politically different feudal states, the emergence of diverse schools and theories, and the freeing of the mind from old ideas. On the academic and ideological fronts, this was one of the busiest periods in Chinese history. In the spheres of culture and ideology, the scene may be aptly described as “a hundred flowers vying for splendor and a hundred schools of thought contending.” Scholars and philosophers wrote books and put forward different views and theories not only on education and politics but on more abstract questions concerning the universe and human life.

They left behind many brilliant works and expositions that would have a far-reaching influence on the development of culture and learning in later periods. The contending of different schools had mutually beneficial effects. Their different ways of thinking influenced each other, and the logic of one school was often studied and assimilated by others. Some schools gradually began to synthesize the teachings of other schools, and moreover were able to make significant contributions in such spheres as natural science, economics, literature and art.

The Story of Sun Zi is the life story of the man who was a military theoretician and the father of military art. It introduces his thinking, theories, and outstanding contributions.

Sun Zi, whose first name was Wu and who styled himself Changqing, was a native of Qi during the late Spring and Autumn Period. The first military strategist and theoretician in China, Sun Zi has been acclaimed as the "sage of war" or "military sage." His book, *Sun Zi's Art of War*, consisting of 13 chapters with a text of more than 6,000 characters, is the earliest military treatise in the world. It has been studied by famous generals down through the ages, is highly regarded by military strategists ancient and modern, and is well known in military circles both in China and abroad. Its value and influence, however, have long exceeded the bounds of the military world; it has had profound, far-reaching effects in the spheres of politics, diplomacy, culture, and economics.

The Story of Sun Zi contains mainly accounts of the man's personal experiences, what he saw, heard, and did in a lifetime: his childhood days of hard study; his quest for knowledge in Mengshan; his travels around the country to make on-the-spot investigations; his hermitage in Qionglong, during which he also traveled and studied in order to revise *The Art of War*, and how he managed the state and the army after he left his mountain retreat. The final chapters graphically recount how Sun Zi, together with King Helu and General Wu Zixu, defeated the powerful state of Chu with the small and weak forces of Wu in nine great battles and over 20 smaller ones in which the spirit and strategies of *The Art of War* led to victory.

The book also recounts various aspects of the era in which Sun Zi lived, giving readers an overall idea of social production and social conditions in those days, the plots and intrigues of the nobility, the feudal wars of aggression and annexation, the struggles of the masses, and the living standards of different social strata. Containing vivid images and a wealth of historical knowledge, the book is a readable work of high academic value.

A special feature of the book, which is in the category of popular biography, is the narrating of history in novel form, integrating both history and literature. While the principal characters and events are real to provide an authentic and comprehensive knowledge of ancient China, the book reads like

fictional prose with its adventures, humor, and suspense. Special care has been taken in the selection of typical plots and the description of characters to hold the attention of readers, stimulate their interest, and give them food for thought.

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1. A Tiger Son Is Born into a General's Family

The great land of Qilu (a traditional term for Shandong Province) has held many attractions for people down through the ages. On this land stands Mt. Taishan, the first and foremost of the five sacred mountains of China. The Yellow River that has nourished the Chinese nation since time immemorial empties into the sea along Qilu's shores. Its fertile soil gave birth to the sage of literature, Confucius, and to the sage of war, Sun Wu.

In the early years of the Western Zhou (c.11th century — 771 BC), King Cheng of Zhou gave title to his maternal grandfather, Lu Shang (generally called Jiang Taigong), to the fiefdom of Qi. About 500 square kilometers of fertile land in an area also abundant in salt and fish, Qi extended to the Bohai Sea in the east, the Yellow River in the west, Yiling (now called Yiling Pass, east of the Yihe River) in the south, and Wudi (north of present-day Huimin County, Shandong Province) in the north. As the marquis of Qi, Lu Shang received many special privileges. As soon as he arrived at his feudal state, he embarked on

a policy of "simplifying the rituals between ruler and subject and respecting local folk customs." His policy of administering each region according to its local ways helped the state of Qi develop rapidly. By the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) Qi had annexed more than 30 other feudal states along its periphery. It reached the height of its power during the rule of Duke Huan (r.685-643 BC) who became the first overlord of the Spring and Autumn Period. Aided by Guan Zhong, an able statesman — Duke Huan governed wisely, developed and expanded his state, and "convened nine meetings of the feudal lords and brought peace and harmony to the country." By the time of Duke Jing (r.547-490 BC), more than 100 years later, Qi still remained a large state in the eastern part of the country.

In Le'an County (now Huimin County), a part of the state of Qi, was a village of some 200 households called Tianban (Tian Group). In this village lived a prestigious aristocratic family whose master was Tian Shu, who styled himself Zizhan, a hereditary high official of Qi. Together with the heads of four other families, with the surnames Luan, Bao, Guo, and Gao, he held the political power of Qi and controlled its destiny. Tian Shu's son Tian Ping, also called Qizong, was a high official in the Qi court. Capable, resourceful and eloquent, he was held in high favor by the reigning Duke Jing, who thought highly of his talents.

On the 29th day of the eighth lunar month in the year 545 BC Tian Ping's wife Fan Yulan gave birth to

a baby boy. From the moment of his birth, the baby would not open his eyes or suck his mother's breast. He cried and howled for all his worth and, clenching his tiny fists, swung his arms and kicked with both feet.

While Fan Yulan was in the throes of childbirth, Duke Ping of Jin (a feudal state occupying parts of present-day Shanxi and Hebei provinces) was in his Jinyang Palace examining the tributes paid by the rulers of Qi (齊), Chen, Cai, Northern Yan, Qi (杞), Hu, Shen, and Baidi. The rulers had arrived to pay homage and greetings.

Why did the rulers of those eight states come to Jin to pay homage? After 770 BC, when King Ping of Zhou moved his capital to Luoyi (now Luoyang, Henan Province) in the east, the power of the Zhou royal court diminished. The court's orders could not be carried out, and the country was in disorder. Jin was the most powerful of the feudal states at the time, and if any small state provoked it, it would not hesitate to make war on that state, destroy its temples, dig up its ancestral graves, and massacre its people. So to curry the favor of Jin, the rulers of the eight states came to the Jin court together, bringing with them their most valuable treasures as tributes to the ruler of Jin. Qi was the strongest of the eight, but Duke Ping did not find any tributes from Qi. He was extremely annoyed, his face darkened and his facial muscles twitching. He was so angry he could not speak for some time. Then suddenly he exploded: "Qi is a large

state with a thousand chariots. It has broad and fertile lands, bountiful products and countless treasures. Why have you brought no tribute?"

Duke Ping's angry eyes, like two sharp daggers, were fixed on Duke Jing of Qi, whose small stature appeared smaller than ever in the gloomy silence. Trembling all over, Duke Jing turned to the left and right as if looking for something, begging for something....

At this moment someone stepped forward from behind him, a giant 12 spans in height with a head as large as a bucket, broad shoulders, round hips, a back like a tiger's, and a torso like a bear's. Clad in armor from head to foot, he stood there with his chin up and chest out. Duke Ping shrank away. "Who ... who are you?" he stammered.

The awesome giant answered calmly, "General Tian Ping, the duke of Qi's bodyguard, here to present our tribute to the great lord."

"Where is the tribute? Bring it up, quick!" Duke Ping spoke like a beggar who had just seen some crumbs.

Tian Ping cupped his hands in salute and said with a smile, "There is a common saying that in a theatrical program the best comes last. The great lord has just said that Qi is a large state in the east, with a strong army, fertile lands stretching 500 kilometers, and bountiful products. To the south it is buttressed by Mt. Taishan; to the north are the perils of the Bohai Sea; and to the west are the barriers of the Yellow River. Is

it not within reason that Qi should be the last to offer up its tribute?"

"You're right," answered Duke Ping, who was now all smiles. "But what is Qi's tribute?"

Tian Ping spoke in a calm, steady voice:

"Lao Dan, the founder of Taoism, once said that the gift of a nobleman is money and valuables and the gift of a benevolent person is words. While the ruler and people of Qi can not claim to be benevolent and upright, one of our earlier rulers, Duke Huan, was: He was able, without using force, to summon nine meetings of the feudal lords. In this way he brought peace and harmony to the country and became the first overlord of China. So I venture to say that in world affairs a just cause gains much support while an unjust one gains little, and he who indulges in unjust acts merely digs his own grave. If you take these words as your motto, you will find them more valuable than any treasure on earth!"

Like a deflated balloon, Duke Ping sat there paralyzed, unable to laugh or cry. He could find no fault with what General Tian Ping had just said. Every sentence had an overtone, apparently not of advice but of threat and warning.

Pressing his advantage, Tian Ping spoke on: "There are both clear and cloudy skies. Day alternates with night. The moon waxes and wanes. The four seasons continually replace each other. Everything under the sun that lives must die. The tiger may be fierce and strong, but when it is old and loses its teeth, a single