

Sun Tzu

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For the mathematician, see Sun Tzu (mathematician).

Sun Tzu



Portrait of Sun Tzu

Born: c. 544 BC
Possibly in state of Qi

Died: c. 496 BC
Possibly in state of Wu

Occupation: General

Nationality: Chinese

Subjects: Military strategy

Influenced: Robert Greene, John Boyd

Sun Tzu (Chinese: 孫子; Pinyin: *Sūn Zǐ*) ("Master Sun") is an honorific title bestowed upon **Sūn Wǔ** (孫武; c. 544 BC – 496 BC), the author of *The Art of War*, an immensely influential ancient Chinese book on military strategy. He is also one of the earliest realists in international relations theory.

In the author's name, Sūn Wǔ, the character *wu*, meaning "military", is the same as the character in *wu shu*, or martial art. Sun Wu also has a courtesy name, **Chang Qing** (長卿; Cháng Qīng).

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As a historical figure

The only surviving source on the life of Sun Tzu is the biography written in the 2nd century BC by the historian Sima Qian, who describes him as a general who lived in the state of Wu in the 6th century BC, and therefore a contemporary of one of the great Chinese thinkers of ancient times—Confucius. According to tradition, Sun Tzu was a member of the *shi*. The *shi* were landless Chinese aristocrats who were descendants of nobility who lost their dukedoms during the territorial consolidation of the Spring and Autumn Period. Unlike most *shi*, who were traveling academics, Sun Tzu worked as a mercenary (similar to a modern military consultant). According to tradition, King Helü of Wu hired Sun Tzu as a general approximately 512 BC after finishing his military famous treatise. What is now known as the *The Art of War* was entitled *Sun Tzu*; naming a work after the author was common in China prior to the Qin era. After his hiring, the kingdom of Wu which had previously been considered a semi-barbaric state, went on to become the most powerful state of the period by conquering Chu, one of the most powerful states in the Spring and Autumn Period. Sun Tzu, always wanting a peaceful and quiet life, suddenly disappeared when King Helu finally conquered Chu. As a result, his

exact date of death remains unknown.

Fame of treatise

In Chinese *Sun Tzu* (the original book title) is now commonly called *Sunzi bingfa* (also transliterated as *Sun-tzu ping fa* or *Sun-tse ping fa*). Sunzi is a modern transliteration of Sun Tzu. Bing Fa can be translated as "principal for using forces",^[1] "military methods", "army procedures", or "martial arts". Around 298 B.C., the historian Zhuang Zi, writing in the state of Zhao, recorded that Sun Tzu's theory had been incorporated into the martial arts techniques of both offense and defense and of both armed and unarmed combat. His *Bing Fa* was the philosophical basis of what we now know as the Asian martial arts. Amiot's AD 1722 translation of *Sun Tzu* into French (the first time it had been translated into a European language) entitled *Art Militaire des Chinois* is likely to have influenced translations into the English often titled *The Art of War*.

Historicity

The historicity of Sun Tzu is discussed extensively in the introduction to Lionel Giles' 1910 translation

of *The Art of War* available as a Project Gutenberg online text. In Giles' introduction to his translation, he expands on the doubt and confusion which has surrounded the historicity of Sun Tzu.

In 1972 a set of bamboo engraved texts were discovered in a grave near Linyi in Shandong.^[2] These have helped to confirm parts of the text which were already known and have also added new sections.^[3] This version has been dated to between 134 BC – 118 BC,^[4] and so rules out older theories that parts of the text had been written much later.

The Art of War has been one of the most popular combat collections in history. Ancient Chinese long viewed this book as one of the entrance test materials, and it is one of the most important collections of books in the Chinese literature. It is said that Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin both read this book while in war.

Related text

Sun Bin, also known as Sun the Mutilated, allegedly a crippled descendent of Sun Tzu, also wrote a text known as the *Art of War*. A more accurate title might be the *Art of Warfare* since this

was more directly concerned with the practical matters of warfare, rather than military strategy.^[5] At least one translator has used the title *The Lost Art of War*, referring to the long period of time during which Sun Bin's book was lost. There is, however, no commonality between the content or writing style in Sun Bin and Sun Tzu.

References

1. ^ J H Huang, *Sun Tzu The New Translation*, 1993
2. ^ membres.lycos.fr/suntsu/Sun_Tzu.htm. Retrieved on 2007-07-25.
3. ^ www.sonshi.com/ames.html. Retrieved on 2007-07-25.
4. ^ [www.fak.dk/Files/Filer/FSMO/Specialer/200304/1](http://www.fak.dk/Files/Filer/FSMO/Specialer/200304/1.pdf) (PDF). Retrieved on 2007-07-25.
5. ^ www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aurev-aug/killigrew.html. Retrieved on 2007-07-25.

See also

- Philosophy of war
- Yinqueshan Han Slips
- Famous military writers
- *Thirty-Six Strategies*, another Chinese strategy book

- Arthashastra, a treatise on statecraft, economic policy and military strategy written by Chanakya

External links

- Works by Sun Tzu at Project Gutenberg
 - *The Art of War* translated by Lionel Giles (1910), Project Gutenberg edition with considerable (but dated) text on Sun Tzu
 - *The Art of War* translated by Lionel Giles (1910), Project Gutenberg edition without the translator's annotations, and including an HTML version
 - *The Art of War*, Chinese original at Project Gutenberg
- *Sun Tzu The Art of War by Sonshi* Translation, message board, author interviews
- Sun Tzu Said English translation with cross-referenced index, reader comments, online book reader

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