

Sun tzu the game of go and strategy



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How did Sun Tzu use the game of Go in his application of strategy? The answer takes us back 500 years B. C., when Sun Tzu - the warrior, philosopher and the creator of The Art of War - used his strategic thought and successfully led the state of Wu's numerically inferior army to defeat the ten times larger and powerful army of the Kingdom of Chu to the West.

[2]Like a master player of the Go, he turned the odds in his favour and ultimately King Helu of Wu controlled the vast expanse of fertile territory in eastern China. The only thing that separates present day's world from his legacy is a gap of two millenniums; otherwise his strategic thought transcends time and appears to be more applicable today. The strategists, generals, sportsmen and businessmen apply Sun Tzu's strategic thought, either wittingly or unwittingly, to gain victory in their respective fields.[3]It isn't clear if Sun Tzu drew inspiration from the game of Go in writing The Art of War; but the black and white stones of the Go cannot teach strategy the way Master Sun did. He was the master player and the ' practical manifestation of the Go'.

This short essay attempts to show how Sun Tzu used the game of Go in application of strategy with relevant examples from his life and its practice throughout history.

The Chinese invented the Go[4]some 2, 500 years ago and it became very popular in Asia by 3 B. C. In its present form, the game is now played on a 19 x 19 grid board between two players who use black and white pieces - stones are commonly used - to surround and capture the opponent. Unlike chess, the game of Go starts with an empty board, the players use as few pieces as possible to acquire maximum territory, and in this manner it is a

resource efficient strategy. The stones remain on the board unless completely surrounded by the opponent's pieces. The object of the game is not the destruction of the enemy rather the goal is to control a larger portion of the board than the opponent while using minimum stones. It is a complex game that requires more skill and strategy than chess or any other board game does. In the 8 x8 squares' chessboard, each piece has its own rank and can only make fixed moves; and level of strategic thinking required are far inferior to the Go and the object of the game is merely attrition of the opponent until the King is killed. The Go is superior in the sense that it seeks to subdue the opponent without attrition-one of the basic principles of strategy evolved and practiced by Sun Tzu.[5]

Sun Tzu formulated the general strategic principles - whether applied to war, [board] games such as the Go, or politics - to render immediate practical advice.[6]Sun Tzu applied his strategy to successfully fight a larger opponent and defeat it. He was very focused on how to achieve his goal with the minimum amount of resources and with minimum amount of destruction. His immediate practical advice to the King of Wu and his exercise of art of warfare have endured tests of times and are applied in facets of social life other than war too.

An understanding of Sun Tzu's Art of War helps in understanding of military history. In successful execution of indirect strategy[7]he foretold the outcome of America's greatest battles; he prophesied Nazis' ultimate doom; predicted how the North would win the American Civil War; and foresaw why America would be defeated in Vietnam. Mark McNeilly, the author of Sun Tzu and The Art of Modern Warfare,[8]warns that if you understand the principles <https://assignbuster.com/sun-tzu-the-game-of-go-and-strategy/>

of the art of war you will prevail; ignore them and [you fight in darkness] at your own peril because you will definitely lose.[9]

To Sun Tzu the war was a matter of life and death[10]and this is the key principle of his teachings; once understood everyone from the leader down to the individual soldier can be motivated to win. According to Professor Andrew R. Wilson of US Naval War College, the King of Wu understood that if he wanted to defeat the superior forces of Chu, his army had to be disciplined and practice war according to Sun Tzu's dictates.[11]Had the generals and statesmen of later generations taken Sun Tzu's heed they wouldn't have fought the bloody wars of attrition and led their nations to disaster the way they did.

Inside the thirteen chapters of The Art of War lie the secrets of success. If one understands the principles, as given in the book, one can predict how wars and battles will turn out.[12]There are three key principles that unify Sun Tzu's philosophy: 1) know your enemy and know yourself and in 100 battles you will never be in peril.[13]In the art of war understanding of the enemy is crucial; 2) to win 100 battles is not the height of skill, to subdue the enemy without fighting is.[14]Fighting costs life and money and Sun Tzu prized the general who could out win instead of out fight his opponent; 3) and he cautioned the statesmen and the generals to avoid what is strong and professed attacking what is weak.[15]Throughout history armies have fought head to head on the battlefield to show their strength and courage but Sun Tzu didn't care about glory, he only wanted to win. "[Sun Tzu's three basic] principles are like chords in a stronger rope; individually these may be strong but if combined they are unbreakable," posits Mark McNeilly.[16]

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The most pertinent example of Sun Tzu's employment of the strategy, as used in the game of Go, appears during the breakout of war between the Wu and Chu.[17] Sun Tzu always chose where and when he had to fight. He avoided the strongest part of Chu army and attacked it at its weakest point. Chu's 300, 000-strong army was poised to attack Sun Tzu's paltry 33, 000 men. Any conventional commander would have prepared defences but Sun Tzu did the unexpected; he invaded the Chu army. He did not attack head on, as seeking a decisive engagement early in the war would be fatal. Instead, using guerrilla tactics he attacked soft targets like their outposts and border crossings with speed and efficiency. The Chu army immediately launched counter offensives but the Sun Tzu's army use to vanish before encounter, thus frustrating the invaders by constantly shifting forces. Instead of direct attack he used manoeuvre, surprise and deception; and in that he displayed that intellect is of higher value than brute force.

Sun Tzu's strategy of fighting the war like a game of Go resonated in Vietnam War in mid-1960s.[18] The Americans fought against the North Vietnamese communists as if playing the attrition based game of chess. Comparatively, the Vietnamese employed guerrilla tactics against a superior enemy, like Sun Tzu they did not take on American forces frontally and rather attacked them at points of weakness. Like the game of Go they controlled a large territory with lesser forces. This short essay on Sun Tzu's use of the game of Go in his application of strategy hopefully illustrates that the successful statesmen and generals avoid wars of attrition in pursuit of their goals.