

BOOK REVIEW

Sun Tzu's Art of War

Edited by Khoo Kheng – Hor

Translated by Hwang Chung – Mei

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Sun Tzu's Art of War is believed to be the oldest and most popular guide on military treatise of all time. Many world leaders, business magnates, and administrators have studied and incorporated the wisdom found in this book in their practice.

As an avid learner and a young teacher in the practice of orthopaedics, I find this book to be an interesting and informative read.

The book in my keeping is the 8th printed version, 2019 edition. It would be injustice if I offer a glimpse of what this book offers, keeping the fact that this timid-looking 54-page book, is at its longest a weekend's read. This is another way of me saying, rather than summarizing the book to entice readers, its best if one can explore the book at one's own leisure, as it is a surprisingly small book albeit packed with a world of wisdom.

Allow me to elaborate the wisdom bit of the book:

Sun Tzu's Art of War is reputed to be the oldest military treatise among the Chinese classic works. The obsession of this book among world leaders, not only to those with military interests at heart, is due to the fact that the principles shared by the Art of War can be applied to a limitless facet of one's life, provided one is creative or innovative enough.

The Art of War is a book which lays down the basic principles of warfare and gives military leaders advice on when and how to fight. It remains relevant even today to a wide spectrum of readers of varying background, as the book highlights strategy and tactics, rather than specific warfare technology.

The Sun Tzu's Art of War is a book with 13 chapters in total, with a preface by Khoo Kheng-Hor, the editor of the Malaysian version of the book. This is followed by a short and intriguing introduction before readers are brought into Chapters 1 till Chapters 13 of the book. My favourite part is the introduction portion of the book, which speaks about how General Sun Tzu, a native Chinese general of the Qi state in ancient China, creates such an impression on Wu state Prince, He Lu, so much so that the prince appoints Sun Tzu to lead his Wu armies, well into the many victorious years to come.

Following chapters reveal strategies and philosophies that Sun Tzu ascribes in order to attain his many victories; pointers that even we today, can apply in our modern daily lives. In Chapter 1 on planning, Sun Tzu quotes "More planning shall give greater possibility of victory while less planning, lesser victory. So how about those without planning?" Applying this philosophy as surgeons going to theatre to perform a difficult surgery, one should have a plan of approaching the surgery, preparing all necessary instruments and required expertise and assistance, whilst keeping a contingency plan if the intended surgery does not go as planned, or if complication arises intra-operatively.

I highly recommend this gem of a book as a motivational, informative yet concise book that we, orthopaedic surgeons, will truly find useful in our daily practice – be it clinical or administrative.

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