

Strategy Session 5: War, Strategy, and Tactics in Bronze Age China

I. Timeline

- A. <http://www.indiana.edu/~g380/Time.html>

II. Geography

- B. https://www.cdc.gov/travel-static/yellowbook/2014/map_4-10.png

III. Important Figures & Events

A. Shang (or Yin) Dynasty (c. 1600 – 1046 BC)

1. Ruled in and around the Yellow River Valley, including parts of modern-day Beijing
2. [Yin Ruins](#) are a significant part of Chinese history (archaeological evidence)
3. Bronze weapons, imported chariots, noble military, aristocratic garrisons, Shang king maintained an army of 3,000 troops and nascent bureaucracy at capital
4. Culture: Animal husbandry, agriculture, human sacrifice, shamanism, war chief/priest kings, court life tombs
5. King Wu Ding (r. 1324 – 1266 BC) – First confirmed leader and overall influential figure of Shang Dynasty (21st king), Supposed descendent of King Tang, founder of dynasty. Pacified neighbors by marrying multiple wives of neighboring tribes.
6. Wu Ding sent troops to Guifang and after three years of fighting conquered it. The Di and Qiang barbarians immediately sent envoys to Shang to negotiate. His armies went on to conquer Dapeng in the forty-third year of his reign, and Tunwei in the 50th year of his reign.

B. Western Zhou Dynasty (1046 – 771 BC)

1. King Wu of Zhou overthrows Shang Dynasty at the [Battle of Muye](#)
2. Western incursion around the Wei River valley region; a popular rebellion where hundreds of thousands of Shang troops refused to fight or defected to King Wu's side.

3. Death of King Wu precipitates a civil war between his surviving brothers; Duke of Zhou crushes rebellion, ushers in Mandate of Heaven, fiefdoms, and feudalism
4. Decentralization, feudal lords gain strength, dynasty declines, barbarian raids, capital moves east to Cheng-Zhou (down river)

C. Easter Zhou/Spring and Autumn Period (c. 771 – 506 BC)

1. “Flight of the infant king,” period marked by heavy chariot warfare
2. The period's name derives from the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, a chronicle of the state of Lu (722 – 479 BC), which tradition associates with [Confucius](#).
3. Extends into the Iron Age and early Warring States Period, which will not be discussed here.

III. [T'ai Kung's Six Secret Teachings](#) (c. 11th century BC) - a treatise on civil and military strategy traditionally attributed to Lu Shang, a top general of King Wen of Zhou, founder of the Zhou Dynasty. Historians nominally date its final composition to the Warring States period (c. 475 – 221 BC), but some scholars believe that it preserves at least vestiges of ancient [Qi](#) political and military thought. Because it is written from the perspective of a statesman attempting to overthrow the ruling Shang Dynasty, it is the only one of the Seven Military Classics explicitly written from a revolutionary perspective.¹

- A. **The Civil Strategy** - "Moral, effective government is the basis for survival and the foundation for warfare. The state must thrive economically while limiting expenditures, foster appropriate values and behavior among the populace, implement rewards and punishments, employ the worthy, and refrain from disturbing and harming the people." This strategy teaches commanders never to delight in small advantages, or that is all they will achieve. **It teaches that the greatest gains result from benevolence and helping others achieve their aspirations for a better world.**
- B. **The Military Strategy** - The Military Strategy continues the previous section's discussion of civil affairs, analyzes the current state of Zhou, and assesses the prospects of successfully overthrowing the Shang. "Attracting the disaffected weakens the enemy and strengthens the state; employing subterfuge and psychological techniques allows manipulation of the enemy and hastens its demise. The ruler must visibly cultivate his Virtue and embrace government policies that will allow the state to compete for **the minds and hearts** of the people; the state will thus gain victory without engaging in battle." **This strategy teaches commanders to achieve victory via benevolence and wit, preferably without fighting.** It teaches commanders to outwit opponents through diplomacy and manipulation.

¹ Sawyer, Ralph D. *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*. New York: Basic Books. 2007.

- C. **The Dragon Strategy** - Primarily discusses military organization, the necessary characteristics of military officers, and how to evaluate and select for these qualities. It discusses how to establish a system of rewards and punishments for establishing and maintaining a general's awesomeness and authority and the methods necessary to foster allegiance and unity in one's soldiers. Secondary topics include: military communication and the need for secrecy; basic tactical principles (emphasizing flexibility and unorthodoxy); common errors of command and how to avoid them; various cues to interpret the enemy's situation; and, a discussion of common military skills and equipment. This strategy explores the subtle and complex aspects of critical situations without losing control to advisors or becoming confused. It emphasizes that the government depends on a centralized and orderly overview which must be well informed to function effectively.
- D. **The Tiger Strategy** - Discusses military equipment, tactical principles, and essential issues of command. Most of the section provides "tactics for extricating oneself from adverse battlefield situations. The solutions generally emphasize speed, maneuverability, unified action, decisive commitment, the employment of misdirection, the establishment of ambushes, and the appropriate use of different types of forces." Asserts that a commander must guard against laxity and act in accord with ever-changing conditions. A commander must observe and utilize the effects and interactions of variables such as weather, terrain, and human psychology to achieve success.
- E. **The Leopard Strategy** – “[E]mphasizes tactical solutions for particularly difficult types of terrain, such as forests, mountains, ravines and defiles, lakes and rivers, deep valleys, and other constricted locations. It also contains discussions of methods to contain rampaging invaders, confront superior forces, deploy effectively, and act explosively." This section teaches commanders how to know their strengths, and how to direct those strengths against the weaknesses of their enemy.
- F. **The Dog Strategy** - The Dog Strategy discusses many diverse topics, miscellaneous to the other sections. The most important sections "expound on detailed principles for appropriately employing the three component forces – chariots, infantry, and cavalry – in a wide variety of concrete tactical situations," and discusses the comparative battlefield effectiveness of these three forces. It discusses a variety of "deficiencies and weaknesses in the enemy that can and should be exploited immediately with a determined attack." It discusses several other, general issues: "the identification and selection of highly motivated, physically talented individuals for elite infantry units and for the cavalry and chariots; and methods for training the soldiers." This strategy teaches never to attack an enemy when his morale is high, and to time a concentrated attack when the moment is right.