1 A Brief History of Sunzi in China

In order to understand *The Art of War* and Sunzi's modern image outside China, it is important to trace their placement within their original Chinese context, and how that construction was later intentionally crafted to promote Sunzi to the wider world. The mythical author and "his" text served a specific function in Sima Qian's 司馬遷 *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) that, given the seminal nature of *Records of the Grand Historian* in creating many of the categories and interpretations of pre-imperial and very early imperial history, has persisted until the present. This is not to say that those categories and interpretations are necessarily wrong, but rather that they were and are a particular way of seeing the past. In a manner also practiced in other cultures, the value of a text was increased by association with a heroic author or designated genius. Samuel Griffith connected Sunzi to Mao Zedong, the great Chinese military genius of the twentieth century, in order to make Sunzi relevant to Western readers. He also connected Sunzi back to ancient Chinese history to establish that, if Mao was the most recent manifestation of strategic acumen, the foundation of that thought was basic to Chinese culture. Sunzi was an ancient classic that was not only an enduring piece of strategic truth, but also a description of warfare in premodern China.

Of course, the idea that Mao was a military genius was as constructed as the category of militarists in *Records of the Grand Historian*, and the inclusion of Sunzi, Wu Qi, and Sun Bin as the exemplars of that category. Mao wrote several important essays on strategy, and the Communist government and army that he led succeeded in their struggle to take control of China. Mao's writings on strategy were therefore validated by that fundamental coin of the military realm: victory. He was an important historical figure who wrote known texts with firm dates. And while it is possible that others helped write or edit his essays on war, their content and attribution are unquestionably Mao's.

The text of Sunzi, for its part, was known well before Sima Qian composed *Records of the Grand Historian*. Master Xun 荀子 (*c*. 310–*c*. 235

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BCE), for example, argued against its precepts in his discussion of warfare,[1] and Master Hanfei 韓非子 (*c.* 280–233 BCE) said that everyone has a copy of the writings of Sun[zi] and Wu [Qi],[2] but the text attributed to Sunzi needed a biography for a Master Sun to validate the text. And since Master Xun knew about the Sunzi as the Sunzi, and Master Hanfei referred to Sun 孫 and Wu 吳, a notional Master Sun pre-dated Sima Qian's formulation. Later scholars did notice that none of the canonical histories covering the period of Sunzi's supposed life mentioned him at all, something that would have been almost impossible if such a prominent figure had been real. The existence or nonexistence of Sunzi the author or general had no bearing on the centrality of the written text the Sunzi to Chinese strategic thought. Whatever the merits of the text, or the justification of Sima Qian in including a mythical biography of Sunzi in his history, Sunzi was the fundamental and unquestioned primary work on war in China, even for those who disputed the value of studying it.

Sunzi and Mao Zedong stand at the chronological opposite ends of the history of Chinese military thought, and while it seems likely Sunzi will retain his place of importance, it is impossible to say whether Mao will matter much in the future. Mao's strategic orientation and concept of warfare was extremely influential in the early decades of Communist rule, but as the People's Liberation Army (PLA) changed from a relatively simple and low-tech army into a more modern, technical, and complex institution with a dramatically different set of tasks, Mao's precepts have become less relevant. The PLA is no longer a revolutionary organization, but rather a status quo organization one of whose primary missions is to preserve the power of the Communist Party in control of China. On the other hand, Mao's strategies for revolutionary and guerrilla warfare are widely applicable in other places, and his discussion of protracted war may well be a significant contribution to the broader field of military thought. The established militaries of existing nation-states and their systems of formal officer training may tend to downplay guerrilla warfare and strive to avoid protracted wars, but they recur nonetheless.

A less disputed connection to Sunzi than Mao is the relationship of Daoism to Sunzi. Although the explicit assertion of a connection between Daoism and military thought was fairly late, there were enough similarities of perspective and language to make it seem obvious. Less clear is what the value of connecting the two traditions is to enhancing understanding of either. If Daoism and military thought, especially Sunzi, share intellectual substance then the broadening of examples of concepts can

[1] Xunzi 荀子, Chapter 15 (Yibing 議兵).

[2] Hanfeizi 韓非子, Chapter 49 (Wuchong 五蠹).

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help to clarify the full range of possible meanings. The juxtaposition of texts can also serve to highlight a strong strain of ruthlessness in works like the *Daodejing*. Perhaps Sunzi and military works seem more mainstream by association with Daoism, or the association is an attempt to distance Sunzi from its similarly obvious connection to Ruism/Confucianism in imperial China. There was a natural interconnectedness among what Wiebke Denecke calls the "masters discourse," a term that she uses instead of the paradigm of philosophy.[3] Sunzi was part of the Warring States period masters discourse, as was Master Lao (Laozi), and Master Kong (Confucius).

Daoism retained an association with unconventionality throughout imperial Chinese history, in both the positive and the negative sense. The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (third century CE), for example, were educated men of means who rejected government service to hang around together writing poetry and literature rather than serving in a Ruist government. Much of this is legendary, and some of their interests in detachment, which was possible because of their wealth, was simply political survival. Yet they were Daoist figures because they were unconventional; they defied the accepted convention of educated men serving in government. Many subsequent Ruist officials criticized the Seven Sages for not serving in government and trying to make the world a better place. Strategy as a concept is similarly often portrayed as unconventional since it is a way to contend that involves more than a simple test of strength. The "truth" of the connection between Daoism and Sunzi cannot be resolved since it is a matter of perspective, but it must be acknowledged that it has been occasionally argued for at various times in Chinese history.

All of these issues impacted and were manipulated by Western translators of Sunzi to configure the image of the man and the text for a particular audience. Griffith chose to link Sunzi and Mao, but did not discuss Sunzi's connection to Daoism. There is no discussion in Griffith's papers of Daoism in relation to Sunzi, and it may well be that he never considered the issue. It is also the case that Griffith was trying to get Sunzi taken seriously as a strategist on par with Clausewitz and other Western strategists. He might have believed that bringing Laozi into the discussion of strategy would have tainted the seriousness of Sunzi in the eyes of military men. Griffith does mention the opposition of Ruists to Sunzi, in order to contrast the ruthless pragmatism of the strategist against the moral emphasis of the Ruists. Of course, several of the canonical

[3] Wiebke Denecke, *The Dynamics of Masters Literature: Early Chinese Thought from Confucius to Han Feizi*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.

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commentators on Sunzi were unquestionably Ruists, and the Legalists, who were diametrically opposed to much of the Ruist program, were also opposed to Sunzi and to strategists. This chapter will consider the problem of the biography or myth of Sunzi, followed by the issue of the text itself, the relationship of Daoism to Sunzi, and finally the question of Mao Zedong's connection to Sunzi.

The Biography of Sunzi

If there was a historical Master Sun other than Sun Bin, then any real information on him has been lost. The Sunzi described in Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* is a myth. An account written during the Later Han in the *Spring and Autumn Annals of Wu and Yue* simply repeats the *Records of the Grand Historian* myth, while purporting to be an earlier text.[4] The highly stylized nature of Sunzi's biography in *Records of the Grand Historian* makes it unlikely that it is a historical account of the life of Master Sun in the modern sense. As Albert Galvany has pointed out, the use of biography in *Records of the Grand Historian* was similar in function to its use in ancient Greece, where it

> was not so much concerned with listing data relative to birth, death or other memorable events as it was used to reveal the character of the individual and to present the way that individual lived . . . These biographies are not about recording all the notable events in the life of an individual. Frequently the focus is on one event alone that, because of its paradigmatic and exemplary value, is sufficient to furnish an optimal exposition of this person's moral stature.[5]

In the case of Sunzi, that event was his taking command of King Helü of Wu's (r. 514–496 BCE) palace women and training them to fight.

Samuel Griffith was well aware that there were serious questions regarding the existence of Sunzi. He was less concerned about whether a Master Sun who wrote the thirteen-chapter *Art of War* existed at some point than with dating the text itself. The Master Sun in *Records of the Grand Historian* lived too early for Griffith's dating of the text, so his interest in undermining the credibility of the Sima Qian biography was to separate firmly that Master Sun from the received book:

> One of the principal results of this scholarly endeavour has been to confirm, or more often to disprove, traditional claims relating to the authenticity of the works

[4] See Ralph Sawyer and Mei-chün Sawyer, *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1993, 151, for reference to the *Spring and Autumn Annals of Wu and Yue* account.

[5] Albert Galvany, "Philosophy, Biography, and Anecdote: On the Portrait of Sun Wu, " *Philosophy East and West*, October 2011, 61/4, 630.

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> in question. "The Art of War" has not escaped the careful attention of dozens of these learned analysts, who generally agree that "The Thirteen Chapters" could not have been composed about 500 B.C., as the Grand Historiographer Ssu-ma Ch'ien alleged, but belongs to a later age.[6]

Chinese scholars throughout the imperial period were frequently just as skeptical of historical anecdotes as modern scholars, and were far more deeply steeped in the early texts.

At least as early as the eleventh century, scholars noticed that Master Sun or Sun Wu was absent from any early histories of the period in which he was supposed to have lived and that the text attributed to him described a different period of warfare. Griffith cited Ye Shi's 葉適 (1150–1223) observation that since there was no mention of a great general named Sun Wu in the historical texts, he must have been made up.[7] Griffith goes on to cite Mei Yaochen's 梅堯臣 (1002–1060) position that the text of the Sunzi was from the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), rather than the Spring and Autumn period (771–481 BCE).[8] Mei was not only a renowned poet, but also one of the canonical ten or eleven commentators on Sunzi. His declaration effectively rejected Sima Qian's biography, or, at least, separated the received text from the figure portrayed. Subsequent writers in the Qing dynasty agreed with Ye Shi and Mei Yaochen's positions that the *Records of the Grand Historian* biography was not reliable and that the text was from the Warring States period. Despite a general desire simply to accept the Sunzi of *Records of the Grand Historian*, most modern scholars agree that Sima Qian's biography is unreliable or mythical.[9]

Even setting aside the question of how such a famous general could have escaped earlier historical mention, the warfare of the Sunzi was clearly not Spring and Autumn period warfare. It was only in the Warring States period that professional generals began to command large armies of trained commoner soldiers. The battles of the Spring and Autumn period were chariot fights carried out by small groups of aristocrats.[10] From a technical standpoint, a Spring and Autumn period general would not have composed the text of the Sunzi. The Warring

[6] Samuel B. Griffith (trans.), *The Art of War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963, 1.
[7] Ye Shi, *Xixue Jiyan Xumu* 習學記言序目, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1977, 46, 675–7, cited in Jens Østergård Petersen, "What's in a Name? On the Sources Concerning Sun Wu," *Asia Major*, 1992, 5/1, 8.
[8] Griffith, *The Art of War*, 1–2. Different historians give different dates for the beginning of the Warring States period, ranging from 481 to 476–5, 453, 441, or 403.
[9] Petersen, Petersen, "What's in a Name?".
[10] The classic account in English of the transition from the Spring and Autumn period to the Warring States period is Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1990.

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States feel of the text is also characteristic of its underlying ethos, that war is about *raison d'état* rather than an activity that provides the opportunity for aristocrats to prove their status by fighting in a particular manner. In that sense, the text cannot be the work of a Spring and Autumn period author.

Modern scholarship has also benefited from archaeological finds unavailable to Samuel Griffith when he was writing. The understanding of who Master Sun was, in imperial China and even well into the twentieth century, relied entirely upon a very small number of interrelated accounts of uncertain reliability. While Wu Qi was a historical figure, and likely Sun Bin as well, Master Sun's biographical details were not corroborated by any contemporaneous source. Master Sun's reputation rested on the received text of his military teachings and his persona was built on his training King Helü's palace women to act as soldiers.

In Sima Qian's biography of Sunzi, Sima relates the story of Sunzi being summoned to King Helü's palace. After telling Sunzi that he has read his "thirteen chapters" (*The Art of War*), the king asks if he can prove the effectiveness of his methods in commanding troops using palace women. Sunzi agrees to the challenge and takes charge of the 180 beautiful women, dividing them into two units, and placing one of the king's two favorites in charge of each group. He then gives them clear and simple instruction in what to do in response to each drum signal. The first time he tried to get them to respond to the drum, they laughed; he explained again, and when called upon to respond, they again laughed. Sunzi then ordered the two commanding palace ladies to be executed, rejecting the king's plea not to do so on the ground that he was now a general in the field. Not surprisingly, the women responded in good order after the executions. The king subsequently made Sunzi a general and he won important campaigns for the state of Wu.[11] It was these campaigns for which there was no mention of Sunzi that demonstrated to scholars like Ye Shi that the *Records of the Grand Historian* biography was fictitious. More recently, more information about this anecdote has emerged.

In 1972 a major archaeological find uncovered a cache of texts from two tombs, dated to 140/134 BCE and 118 BCE, at Yinqueshan. The texts were written on bamboo slips, though most of the 4,942 slips from Tomb 1, and the thirty-two slips from Tomb 2, were damaged. Thirteen fragmentary chapters from Sunzi were included in the find, as well as sixteen chapters from Sun Bin's *Art of War*. Sun Bin's *Art of War* was lost for most of imperial Chinese history. With respect to the two masters surnamed Sun, Jens Petersen points out,

[11] Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian*, "Militarists 兵家."

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> The names Sun Wu and Sun Pin do not occur in the Yin-ch'üeh-shan corpus, only the expression Sun-tzu 孫子, which is used to refer to both Sun Wu and Sun Pin. Whereas the historic referent of the expression "Master Sun says" is in doubt, the context of two of the narratives about Master Sun's exploits clearly indicates that Sun Wu is the subject, and in the other four narratives it is Sun Pin.[12]

One of the fragments of historical material among the Yinqueshan texts is a slightly different version of the story of Sunzi training King Helü's palace women. In the Yinqueshan version of the story the king goes to see Sunzi, and while interested in war, says he is not knowledgeable about it. Sunzi impresses upon him that war is a serious subject. A similar experiment with training palace women takes place, only this time Sunzi's charioteers act as the officers leading the two units. After the demonstration of his ability to form military units that will respond to commands even with palace women, Sunzi then receives an official audience with the king, who announces that "'the way has been attained' 道得矣 and calls the principles illustrated by his exercise 'the way of the general' 將之道. He concludes that in warfare there is nothing more important than the general's stern assertion of his authority over his officers and soldiers."[13] The king does not, however, appoint Sunzi to command, as in the *Records of the Grand Historian* version of the story. Rather than see this as a record of a particular event, it should be seen as an event that proves that a great general is one who carries out military regulations without respect for emotion or pleas from the ruler to be merciful.

In the *Records of the Grand Historian* version, Sunzi proves to the king not only what the correct principle is, but also that he is a general capable of carrying it out. Yet this is not the only story from that period illustrating exactly the same principle. A similar story is told about Sima Rangju 司馬穰苴 (n.d.), who became a general after a discussion of military matters with the king of Qi. In order to establish his authority over his troops, who might have scorned him because he was a relatively low-status member of the Qi royal family, he executed one of the king's favorites for arriving late. The king's messenger, pleading with him not to execute the man, arrived too late to stop it, though Sima Rangju might not have listened anyway. Although the messenger had also violated military law, he was specifically protected by his status as a royal messenger, so his aides were executed instead. Another version of this sort of story is repeated in the *Shangjunshu* and the *Hanfeizi*, where Duke Wen of Jin executes his own close follower, Tian Jie, for arriving late.[14]

[12] Petersen, "What's in a Name?", 4. [13] Petersen, "What's in a Name?", 7.
[14] Petersen, "What's in a Name?", 9–11.

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Petersen raises strong and credible objections to the idea that the Sunzi of the anecdote acts in accord with the principles of Sunzi's *Art of War*. *The Art of War* does not advocate for motivating troops solely by the harsh administration of military law. Wu Qi was similarly careful to motivate his troops by benevolence before punishment (on one occasion, he personally sucked the pus from a common soldier's sore). Sima Qian's core biographical anecdote for Sunzi is thus inconsistent with the arguments of the text. If anything, the Sunzi who trained the palace women should be associated with the Legalists.[15] Hanfeizi, of course, was considered a Legalist, suggesting a considerable ambiguity with respect to the image of who Sunzi was supposed to be. Another story about Sun Wu in the Yinqueshan cache associates him with a basically Ruist position, positing that treating the farmers well will result in greater military power.[16]

The key point for Petersen is that the individual in anecdotes used to make certain moral points can be switched when desired without diminishing the story's impact. All that the placement of Sunzi in an account indicates is that there was a tradition of regarding Master Sun as an important enough figure that he could validate an argument by attributing it to him. This is very similar to the thousands of stories that exist outside *The Analects* in which Master Kong (Confucius) plays a role, positive or negative, to drive home an argument. The stories have literary or philosophical value, but they cannot be used as information about the life and times of an individual. And while some famous men used in these stories were historically attested, Sun Wu or Sunzi was not. To add to this literary complex, the name Sun Wu can also be read to mean "Exiled Warrior." Thus, as Petersen concludes, "The name Sun Wu is clearly an example of the literary phenomenon of personification, Sun Wu being The Exiled Warrior, and Sun Wu is thus as fictitious as his name is meaningful."[17]

The Master Sun who composed the Sunzi described in *Records of the Grand Historian* cannot have been at the court of King Helü. There is no record of a general of that name accomplishing what he is said to have done. If there was a Master Sun at King Helü's court, he could not have written the "thirteen chapters" attributed to him, since the structure of warfare was so different between the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. The story of the palace women is a literary device rather than a historical account, as are other stories regarding Sunzi or Sun Wu.

[15] Petersen, "What's in a Name?", 12. [16] Petersen, "What's in a Name?", 12–14.
[17] Petersen "What's in a Name?", 29. Petersen sees Sun Wu as a "shadow" of general Wu Zixu. Wu Yun (style name Zixu) died in 484 BCE, and served the state of Wu as a statesman and general.

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Legends grew up or were attached to the putative author of a text on war because the figure of Sunzi served to legitimize certain arguments by his presence. One of those tales, the training of the palace women, was used for Sunzi's biography in *Records of the Grand Historian* either because it had become strongly attached to him, or, more likely, because it served Sima Qian's literary purposes.

Sunzi the Text

The Sunzi as a text is mentioned, as noted above, by both Master Xun and Master Hanfei. Some version of it was well known by the third century BCE, and it seems likely that it was compiled over time beginning in the fourth century. The component parts of the received text are the work of several different authors, though I would argue that the overall arrangement of that text is coherent and orderly. Victor Mair sums up the issue of dating as follows:

> modern scholarship has demonstrated conclusively that the work evolved during the second half of the fourth century and the beginning of the third century B.C. It is clear, furthermore, that the *Sun Zi* incorporates military lore that circulated broadly during the Warring States period (475–221 B.C.) and could not possibly have been exclusively the product of a single individual.[18]

In Sima Qian's Sunzi biography, King Helü says that he has already read Sunzi's "thirteen chapters." Rather confusingly, the next time the Sunzi is mentioned in the "Bibliographic Essay" (*Yiwenzhi*) of the *Hanshu*, compiled from 58 to 76 CE,[19] the Wu Sunzi's *Art of War* is listed as having eighty-two chapters. This mention, in the "Power and Planning" subsection of the "Military Books" category, raises some problematic issues that have yet to be resolved. The entry immediately afterward is for a Qi Sunzi with eighty-nine chapters, which might refer to Master Sun Bin, who had served as a general for the state of Qi. Many theories have been advanced as to why there would be an eighty-two-chapter version of Sunzi's *Art of War*, but nothing can be concluded in the absence of new information. There were thirteen chapters for Sima Qian, and there would again be thirteen chapters for Cao Cao and afterward. In the imperial library of the Han dynasty, at least, the text of the Sunzi was organized differently, or contained a lot more associated material.

[18] Victor Mair (trans.), *The Art of War: Sun Zi's Military Method*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, li. Mair was strongly influenced by the work of Bruce Brooks on this issue.

[19] Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998, 493.

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The fluidity of texts and the vicissitudes of transmission are demonstrated by the Qi Sunzi. Even if it referred to Sun Bin's military text, it would soon be lost, never to be seen again until 1972. Yet Sun Bin was one of the great "Militarists" of *Records of the Grand Historian*. The category of military book would also change over time. Not all of what would later be chosen as the *Seven Military Classics* in the Song dynasty were listed under "Military Books" in the *Hanshu*. The *Sima Fa*, for example, is in the "Rites" chapters, *Army Rituals Sima Fa*, in 155 chapters; the *Wei Liaozi* is in the "Various" section, with twenty-nine chapters. This is not the place for an extensive dissection and analysis of this critical bibliographic issue, but it is important to be aware that the category of "military books" (*bingshu*) in the Han dynasty included a wide variety of works that would later be discarded, like works on martial arts,[20] and did not include several works on strategy or military methods (*bingfa*) that would subsequently be canonical. Moreover, since the overwhelming majority of books listed are no longer extant, there is no way to match names with contents.

A major intellectual event took place toward the end of the Han dynasty. A man by the name of Cao Cao 曹操 (*c.* 155–220 CE), born into a high-status family, and extremely well educated, wrote a commentary on the Sunzi. This is the first known commentary, which makes it an important foundation for the subsequent tradition of Sunzi commentaries. One of the reasons his commentary was preserved was that Cao Cao went on to be one of the greatest warlords in Chinese history, the retroactive founder of the Cao Wei dynasty, and future villain (in some sense) of the novelized version of Three Kingdoms history. It is important to note, however, that he wrote his commentary before he became a general.[21] At least in its conception and drafting, it was an intellectual effort to explain the Sunzi by a man without military experience. He was also said to have "edited" the text, leading to an ongoing dispute as to whether he significantly changed the received version in its thirteen chapters.

The next imperial history to contain a bibliography is the *Suishu* (completed in 636), which lists seven Sunzi *Art of War* or related works.[22] The first, Sunzi's *Art of War* in two scrolls, is noted as "composed by the Wu

[20] For an extremely tedious discussion of works on martial arts in the bibliographic section of imperial histories see Peter Lorge, "Early Chinese Works on Martial Arts," in Paul Bowman (ed.), *The Martial Arts Studies Reader*, London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018, 13–25.

[21] Rafe de Crespigny, *Imperial Warlord: A Biography of Cao Cao 155–220 AD*, Leiden: Brill, 2010, 319 and *passim*.

[22] The *Suishu* was composed in the middle of the seventh century, with the monographs and bibliography sections (added after 656) compiled by a different group than the annals and

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General Sun Wu, with commentary by Emperor Wu of the Wei dynasty [i.e. Cao Cao]. During the Liang dynasty, there were three scrolls." The second entry is for Sunzi's *Art of War* in one scroll, "collected and explained by [Emperor] Wu of Wei, and Wang Ling 王凌." Third was Sun Wu's *Military Classic* (*Bingjing* 兵經), in two scrolls, "commentary by Zhang Zishang 張子尚." Fourth is a copy of a Sunzi's *Art of War* in one scroll,

> the Wei Defender-in-Chief Jia Xu's 賈詡 copy. The Liang [dynasty] had a Sunzi's *Art of War* in two scrolls, with Master Meng's explanation and exegesis; a Sunzi's *Art of War* in two scrolls, compiled by Shen You 沈友, a private gentleman from Wu; there was also a Sunzi's *Eight Formations Diagrams* in one scroll, which was lost.

The next work on the list is not a Sunzi, but rather a Wu Qi's *Art of War*, in one scroll, "with notes by Jia Xu." The final three Sunzi-related texts are somewhat different. There is a Sunzi of Wu's *Female and Male Eight Changes Formations Diagrams*, in two scrolls; a *Continued Sunzi's Art of War*, in two scrolls, "composed by Emperor Wu of the Wei dynasty"; and the Sunzi's *Mixed Observations on the Art of War*, in four scrolls. The Liang dynasty "had five scrolls of Zhuge Liang's *Art of War*, and also a Master Murong's *Art of War* in one scroll, which was lost."[23]

We begin to see what appears to be familiar ground with the bibliography of the *Old Tang History* (completed in 945), which lists a Sunzi's *Art of War* with thirteen scrolls, "composed by Sun Wu, commentary by Emperor Wu of the Wei dynasty," followed by two entries, "also two scrolls, explained by Master Meng," and "also two scrolls, commentary by Shen You."[24] Unfortunately, the assumption that the thirteen scrolls correspond to our expected thirteen chapters, since we often translate *juan* 卷, which means "scroll," as "chapters," is unprovable and likely a false similarity. Later bibliographies do not repeat the thirteen-scroll version of Sunzi in their lists, and it is not clear whether the recorded scrolls refer to the number of scrolls, or to divisions on a smaller number of scrolls. The *New Tang History* (completed in 1060) has a considerably better record of military books, beginning with an Emperor Wu of Wei commentary on Sunzi in three scrolls, also a *Continued Sunzi* in two scrolls, Master Meng's explanation of the Sunzi in two scrolls, Shen You's commentary on the Sunzi in two scrolls, and Sunzi of Wu's *Thirty-Two Ramparts Classic*, in one scroll. A few

biographies, which were completed in 636. My thanks to David Graff for this information.

[23] Wei Zheng 魏徵, *Suishu* 隋書, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973, 34.2736.

[24] Liu Xu 劉煦 and Zhang Zhaoyuan 張昭遠, *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975, 47.2039–41.

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nearby texts mention a Wu Zixu *Art of War* in one scroll, as well as a commentary on Wuzi by Fan Xu in one scroll, which the editors curiously felt necessary to note refers to Wu Qi. Further down in the list we encounter three commentaries on Sunzi, one by Du Mu 杜牧 in three scrolls, one by Chen Hao 陳皞, in one scroll, and one by Jia Lin 賈林 in one scroll.[25] Since the section does not list an individual Sunzi in any number of scrolls without commentary, it seems most likely that the first entry that is described as "composed by Sun Wu" but accompanied by Cao Cao's commentary was functionally the basic form of the text at that time: Sunzi with Cao Cao's commentary. The other commentaries or explanations were separate works.

The most popularly used versions of Sunzi in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are most often based on Song dynasty printed editions, or Ming dynasty recensions of Song editions. Printing became widespread during the Song, allowing a much greater circulation of texts and greater survivability. There was also an enormous flowering of military texts during the Song, most notably the *Comprehensive Essentials from the Military Classics* 武經總要, the *Seven Military Classics* 武經七書, and *Sunzi with Eleven Commentaries* 十一家註孫子. Consequently, the bibliographic section for the *Songshi* contains far more military books than previous histories do. In total, it contains 347 titles, the majority of which are no longer extant.[26]

In addition to a Sun Wu *Sunzi* in three scrolls, there was also a Sunzi collated by Zhu Fu 朱服 in three scrolls. There were also Zhu Fu's collations of four of the other of the *Seven Military Classics*: *Liu Tao* 六韜 in six scrolls, *Sima Fa* 司馬法 in three scrolls, *Wuzi* 吳子 in two scrolls, and *San lüe* 三略 in three scrolls. This is not surprising, as Zhu Fu was the chief editor for the *Seven Military Classics*, though whether the work was actually done by his assistant editor, He Qufei 何去非, cannot be determined. Curiously, the *Seven Military Classics* is not listed in the bibliography, although the *Comprehensive Essentials from the Military Classics* is. There is also an Emperor Wu of Wei commentary on the Sunzi in three scrolls; a commentary by Xiao Ji 蕭吉, "or put forth by Cao [Cao?] and Xiao," on the Sunzi in one scroll; Jia Lin's commentary on the Sunzi in one scroll; Chen Hao's commentary on the Sunzi in one scroll; and Song Qi's 宋奇 *Explaining Sunzi*, together with the *Simple Essentials from the Military Classics*, in two scrolls.[27]

[25] Song Qi 宋祁 and Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書, Zhonghua Shuju, 1975, 59.1549–52.
[26] Toqto'a 脫脫, *Songshi* 宋史, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995, 247.5288.
[27] Toqto'a, *Songshi*, 247.5277.

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Further along in the bibliography there is Li Quan's 李筌 commentary on the Sunzi in one scroll; *The Five Commentaries on the Sunzi* in three scrolls, "Emperor Wu of the Wei dynasty, Du Mu, Chen Hao, Jia Yinlin 賈隱林, and Master Meng; Du Mu's *Sunzi Commentary* in one scroll; and a Cao and Du commentary on the Sunzi in three scrolls, "Cao Cao and Du Mu."[28] None of these listings include "Art of War (兵法)" in the title in connection with Sunzi, though there are other works titled "Art of War." A number of commentators who would later be included in the ten or eleven canonical commentaries also do not show up in the imperial bibliography, such as Mei Yaochen. Any conclusions based on the bibliography can only be tentative at best, since the vicissitudes of collecting and history writing for books that are no longer extant is obviously fraught, but it might suggest that the *Seven Military Classics* was not canonical in the late thirteenth century when the *Songshi* was compiled, and the *Sunzi with Eleven Commentaries* similarly either was not canonical, or had not yet been compiled by then.

An abrupt shift is clear in the *Mingshi* (completed in 1739), the next imperial history to have a "Military Books" section. Only fifty-eight works are listed, none of which appeared in the *Songshi* list; works on martial arts are back; and only two texts that might contain the Sunzi, based on title, are listed, under the author Liu Yin 劉寅, *Direct Explanations of the Seven Books* 七書直解, in twenty-six scrolls, and *Collected Ancient Art of War* 集古兵法, in one scroll.[29] Although the imperial collection does not contain any identifiable works on Sunzi, this may have been because it was widely studied outside government auspices. Griffith claims that, during the Ming dynasty, "over fifty commentaries, interpretative studies, and critical essays were devoted to 'The Art of War'. Of these, the most popular was the work of Chao Pen-hsueh, which has been repeatedly reissued."[30] Certainly, by the Ming dynasty, the place of Sunzi in military thought and the text of the work were stable.

The understanding of the text of the Sunzi and the historical existence of Sun Wu in the eighteenth century is best exemplified by the preface to Sun Xingyan's 孫星衍 (1735–1818) edition of Sunzi. Griffith based his translation on Sun Xingyan's edition of Sunzi, which D. C. Lau criticized him for in reviewing the translation.[31] Sun Xingyan was an extremely distinguished scholar, official, and collector of books, notably republishing Song dynasty editions he had acquired. Griffith presented a much

[28] Toqto'a, *Songshi*, 247.5282. Jia Yinlin is a variant of Jia Lin.
[29] Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉, *Mingshi* 明史, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1995, 98.2436–38.
[30] Griffith, *The Art of War*, 19.
[31] D. C. Lau, "Some Notes on the 'Sun tzu' 孫子," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 1965, 28/2, 320 fn. 9.

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more nuanced perspective on Sun in his dissertation, providing a complete and annotated translation of Sun Xingyan's preface to the Sunzi, but dropping it from the published book. The preface includes an extraordinary defense of the existence of Sun Wu as a historical figure, demonstrating the long-standing acceptance that this was not the case:

> Sun Tzu was a general of Wu and with thirty thousand men destroyed a Ch'u army of two hundred thousand. He took Ying and intimidated Ch'i and Chin but as he attributed these achievements to Wu Tzu-hsu the commentaries on the Spring and Autumn Annals do not record his name. It is likely that when he achieved merit he did not accept office.
>
> The Yüeh Chüeh Shu says: "The great tomb outside the Wu Men is that of Sun Wu, guest of the King of Wu. This is testimony to his existence."[32]

It was obviously important for Sun Xingyan to address the belief that Sun Wu did not exist, and to explain how it could be that he was not recorded as a general of Wu. He was forced to suggest the improbable idea that Sun Wu was not mentioned because he "attributed his achievements to Wu Tzu-hsu," unintentionally reinforcing the idea that, in fact, Sun Wu was a mythical shadow of Wu Zixu. Sun Xingyan then goes on to deal with the question why there were no listed editions of Sunzi with thirteen chapters, and why earlier bibliographies listed different numbers of chapters or scrolls. His arguments offer no better solutions for the various editions, or for proving or disproving whether Cao Cao or Du Mu changed the received Song text. The edition he offers is based upon a manuscript he believed was compiled in the Song by Ji Tianbao 吉天保 with ten commentators (though incomplete). Sun Xingyan said that he discovered this particular Sunzi manuscript in the Daoist Canon at a mountain temple in Huayin. This is, effectively, a secret Song dynasty manuscript that has allowed him to produce a more accurate version of the Sunzi with ten commentaries.

While Sun Xingyan, with the help of Wu Renji and the inclusion of scholarship by Wu Nianhu and Bi Tianxi, was qualified to edit the text of the Sunzi, his main goals appear to be asserting that Sun Wu existed, and rendering an accurate Song dynasty version of the work. In the final lines of the preface, Sun Xingyan claims that his family is actually descended from Sunzi. He then steps back to make the humble claim that he doesn't really understand all that his ancestor has written, and only made textual studies of it.[33] Clearly, he could not have descended from a mythical figure, which makes his special pleading against what was the scholarly

[32] Samuel Griffith, "Sun Tzu, First of the Military Philosophers," D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1961, 4–5.
[33] Griffith, dissertation, 6–10.

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consensus at that time more understandable, though not more credible. While he produced what Griffith describes as "the first truly critical edition of the 'Thirteen Chapters,'" in over 100,000 characters[34] – that is to say, a massive work of textual scholarship consonant with the times in which he lived and his circle of connections – neither Griffith nor many other scholars of Sunzi were convinced that Sun Wu ever existed.

This exhausting, if not exhaustive, account of the mythical Sun Wu and the very real text of the Sunzi provides the basis for considering the relationship of the Sunzi to Daoism, and the relationship of Sunzi to Mao Zedong. In both cases, the problems of intellectual framework and textual connections are apparently strong, but difficult, in fact, to establish clearly.

Sunzi and Daoism

The most basic problem of connecting Sunzi with Daoism is defining what we mean by "Daoism." There are several approaches to encompassing something that might be called "Daoism," and none of them are entirely satisfactory. The inchoate, modern Western understanding seems to reduce not only a set of texts, usually the Laozi or *Daodejing*, and the Zhuangzi, but also a long, complex, and nuanced intellectual and spiritual tradition to something like "going with the flow," "be like water," or "let nature take its course." The problem is in fitting Daoism into Western categories of practice that separate religion and philosophy. Moreover, the "Dao" or "Way" is also used as a fundamental term and concept in other traditions, like Ruism/Confucianism. It is difficult to find any intellectual or spiritual tradition, native or imported, in China that does not or has not used "Dao" in its writings. Hence, just because the Sunzi uses the word *dao* in places, and even sometimes in the same sense as does Laozi or Zhuangzi, it is not possible to assert that it came from Daoism. The uncertainty and close dating of the Sunzi, *Daodejing*, and a number of other texts similarly prevent the establishment of Daoist primacy in creating or fixing the meaning of the "Dao." In particular, for the relationship between Daoism and Sunzi, current scholarship dates the text of the *Daodejing* to a period from the late third to the early second century BCE,[35] as opposed to the earlier dating for the Sunzi text. In any case, the "Dao" belongs to many traditions, and has never been exclusive to Daoism.

[34] Griffith, dissertation, "A Note on the Translation."
[35] William G. Boltz, "Lao tzu Tao te Ching 老子道德經," in Michael Loewe (ed.), *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographic Guide*, Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China, 1993, 269–271.

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There are, nevertheless, some consistent concepts that do support a connection between Sunzi and Daoism. In addition to arguments to conform to the reality of nature, people, and circumstances, there is a strong thread of ruthless politics in the *Daodejing*. This latter aspect is frequently overlooked in popular Western concepts of Daoism. Laozi provides advice for surviving in a dangerous political environment, showing that he, like Sunzi, assumes his audience to be men of high enough standing to be navigating constant threats. Of course, where Laozi advocates withdrawal to insure survival, Sunzi is tasked with advancing military and political objectives. Laozi sees nothing to be gained by contending for power; Sunzi explains how to succeed in seeking power. Both texts recognize that the struggle for power is real, natural, and part of ordinary life. This is to say that many of their respective fundamental assumptions about the world are the same, in addition to sharing many terms and concepts.

Although some terms and concepts were common to the Sunzi and the *Daodejing*, it was not usual, initially, to associate these works together. Sunzi was clearly not associated with Daoism or with the *Daodejing* in *Records of the Grand Historian*, for example. Daoism was one of the six schools or traditions listed in *Records of the Grand Historian* (Ruism/Confucianism, Daoism, Legalism, Moism, the School of Names, and the School of Yin–Yang), whereas Sunzi, Wu Qi, and Sun Bin were in the chapter on "Militarists." As we would expect, then, Sunzi was listed in the "Military Books" section of the *Hanshu*'s bibliographic essay, and not grouped with Daoist matters. By the Tang dynasty, some people had begun to associate Daoism and the Sunzi, most obviously in the commentary of Li Quan (fl. eighth century), who directly quoted the *Daodejing* in explicating the text. That line of interpretation has continued until today. (I was told on several occasions when I began studying Sunzi in the 1980s that I should read the *Daodejing* to complement my work.) Of course, few of these connections made explicit what they meant by Daoism. The shift in perspective on Sunzi is a further reminder that Daoism was a complex and changing thing, as was the interpretation of Sunzi. Just because the connection between Daoism and Sunzi was not originally obvious, doesn't mean either that it didn't exist, or that it was wrong to assert it later.

Another important caveat on the Sunzi–Daoism connection can be seen in the commentators on Sunzi. Only Li Quan, who became one of the eleven canonical commentators, directly quoted the *Daodejing*, making the connection one of a number of possible lines of interpretation, if not necessarily a major or predominant one. Li Quan wrote two other military works, the *Taibo Yinjing* 太白陰經 and the *Huangdi Yinfu Jingshu*

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黄帝陰符經疏, in addition to his Sunzi commentary, as well as a partially extant diplomatic and military history, the *Kunwai Chunqiu* 閫外春秋, and a lost work, the *Xiangcheng Zhezhong Taizhi* 相乘著中台志. From the limited biographical information available, it appears that Li Quan was a somewhat successful official who was demoted for offending the prime minister, and then became a Daoist recluse near Mount Song.[36] Yet despite Li's clear intellectual affiliation with Daoism, his extant military works display much stronger resonance with Ruist thinking.[37] As an educated man who served in government, he would have been familiar with both Daoist and Ruist texts, and almost certainly some Buddhist works as well. Fundamentally, of course, that would simply have meant that he was a conventional member of the elite. In the eleventh century, when the *Seven Military Classics* was compiled, the Sunzi and several other military texts were seen by Ruist government officials as conventional works consistent with Ruist teaching.

Victor Mair does point out that the Sunzi was included in the Daoist canon in two versions in the middle and late Song dynasty.[38] At least at that time, then, some Daoists identified the Sunzi as a Daoist work. The timing is interesting, however, as the Sunzi and other military texts had just been the subject of a very Ruist government project to establish a military curriculum for military exams. Mair further argues that there are consistent terms between Sunzi and Laozi, and that, conversely, the Sunzi lacks many key Ruist terms. This is true from a Daoist perspective looking for similarities, but it might also be reversed to find many inconsistencies with Laozi, and many similarities in focus with Ruist thinking. For Mair, "The chief difference between the *Dao De Jing* and the *Sun Zi* is that the former focuses on how to use a *wuwei* ('nonaction') approach to rule a state, whereas the latter concentrates on applying a similar attitude toward the prosecution of war."[39] He does temper his arguments for the Daoist connection in his footnotes, however, where he notes that *wuwei* does not actually appear in the Sunzi, and that, "In pointing out the Taoistic affinities and associations of the *Sun Zi*, I by no means wish to identify it as belonging to the Taoist school of thought per se," and he goes on to quote W. Allyn Rickett that "it is difficult to associate [it] with any particular philosophical school."[40]

The word *dao* was not the only term that spread across many intellectual traditions, and has caused some confusion in translation. A much less loaded pair of terms is *zheng* 正 and *qi* 奇. These terms are extremely

[36] Christopher Rand, "Li Ch'üan and Chinese Military Thought," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, June 1979, 39/1, 111–112.
[37] Rand, "Li Ch'üan," 118–19. [38] Mair, *The Art of War*, 47.
[39] Mair, *The Art of War*, 49. [40] Mair, *The Art of War*, 74.

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important in the Sunzi, particularly with respect to the question whether or not Sunzi argues for indirect strategy. In the Sunzi, they first appear in Chapter 5, which Griffith renders, "That the army is certain to sustain the enemy's attack without suffering defeat is due to the operations of the extraordinary and the normal forces . . . Generally, in battle, use the normal forces to engage; use the extraordinary to win."[41] One of the earliest translators, the sinologist Lionel Giles (1875–1958), renders the passage, "To ensure that your whole host may withstand the brunt of the enemy's attack and remain unshaken, use maneuvers direct and indirect. In all fighting, the direct method may be used for joining battle, but indirect methods will be needed in order to secure victory."[42] *Zheng* is translated by Griffith as normal, and *qi* as extraordinary; Giles translates them, respectively, as direct and indirect. Interestingly, this makes Griffith explicitly less close than Giles, at least in terminology, to Liddell Hart's strategy, raising the possibility that Griffith was actively avoiding both Giles's and Liddell Hart's phrasing. It also emphasizes the influence of Liddell Hart's preface on the Western interpretation of Sunzi. Benjamin Wallacker, for his part, pointed out that the terms are also used in the D*aodejing* (57): "One uses the *cheng* [*zheng*] in governing the country; one uses the *chi* [*qi*] in resorting to arms."[43]

Military methods in this Daoist sense are extraordinary or indirect, in contrast to conventional or direct governing of the state. The term to govern, *zheng* 政, is a homonym for *zheng* 正, upright, regular, or conventional. Peter Boodberg extended the homonym connection even further, by suggesting that *qi* 奇, extraordinary or indirect, became connected to cavalry *qi* 騎, through its association with cavalry as a *qi* force in concert with a *zheng* force, which was a homonym for *zheng* 征, to fix or spike in place.[44] It is very easy, and not necessarily wrong, to pull individual terms out of context and point to their similarities, but there is nothing in Sunzi that suggests the idea that war wasn't a normal, conventional activity. Indeed, a constant state of struggle or contention is a bedrock assumption in Sunzi.

Where Daoism and Sunzi conceptually coincide is in the idea of yielding, or apparently yielding, to someone else in order to attain one's goals. This is often described in female terms, relating it back to being indirect or extraordinary, in contrast to the male direct and conventional

[41] Griffith, *The Art of War*, 91.
[42] Lionel Giles, *The Art of War: Bilingual Chinese and English Text*, Burlington, VT: Tuttle, 2014., 21.
[43] Benjamin E. Wallacker, "Two Concepts in Early Chinese Military Thought," *Language*, April–June 1966, 42/2, 295.
[44] Wallacker, "Two Concepts in Early Chinese Military Thought," 298.

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approach. A woman yields or is soft to conquer a direct male force, achieving her aims in the only way she can, by deception or endurance. Women don't have the option of overcoming by force, so they deceive a stronger opponent in order to survive, and then mislead him into a disadvantageous position where he can be beaten. This is a strategy of efficiency or weakness, depending upon one's perspective, aimed for Laozi at survival and for Sunzi at gaining an advantage. Sunzi would also agree that "the weaker opponent is only a prize for the stronger";[45] in other words, fighting a stronger opponent is simply foolish and will get you killed.

Generally speaking, a Daoist perspective, however that is conceived, on Sunzi may be helpful in emphasizing some aspects of Sunzi. There is no reason, however, to see a Daoist perspective as any more or less likely than a Ruist perspective to clarify some of the Sunzi's precepts. For most of Chinese history the Sunzi was not seen as a Daoist text in any categorical or intellectual way. On the other hand, there were always some scholars who saw the Sunzi in Daoist terms, or used Daoist texts to illuminate parts of the Sunzi. The particular conditions of late imperial and modern China pushed what had hitherto been a less dominant line of interpretation that posited a fundamental relationship between Daoism and Sunzi to the forefront. Those conditions were based upon a Chinese sense of weakness with respect to their Manchu rulers during the Qing dynasty, upon Chinese weakness with respect to Japan and the West, and, in the West, upon the desire, in the absence of any knowledge of China's military history, to believe that China's culture was fundamentally antiwar in contradistinction to the West. If Chinese culture was antiwar, then its most important work on war had also to be antiwar. In China, this narrative explained Chinese military weakness at the end of imperial history. In the West, Daoism's perceived unassertiveness seemed to explain a strategy of weakness in the Sunzi. The Sunzi became nonbelligerent because it was Daoist.

China began the twentieth century in a militarily weak position. The Qing dynasty had suffered several disastrous defeats before collapsing in 1912, and Republican China fared poorly against Japanese incursions and invasion. Ultimately, the Chinese Communists under Mao Zedong would defeat the Nationalist government under Chiang Kai-shek in 1949. The Communists' success made their strategy, and the relationship of that strategy to earlier Chinese culture, an important question. What was the relationship between Maoist strategy and Sunzi, and why was the issue even raised?

[45] Sunzi, Chapter 3.

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Sunzi and Mao Zedong

One of the most important ways in which Samuel Griffith connected Sunzi with twentieth-century historical events was by asserting a direct connection between Sunzi's *Art of War* and Mao Zedong's military thought. This added immediate relevance to reading Sunzi since the Communists had taken control of China in 1949 and fought the United States and the United Nations forces to a standstill in Korea, and many revolutionaries around the world followed, or claimed to follow, Mao's precepts. Unlike Marx, Engels, Lenin, or Stalin, Mao wrote out his revolutionary military strategy.[46] There were sound intellectual reasons for making the connection between Sunzi and Mao, but, in addition to highlighting areas of similarity, Griffith supported his argument by explaining Chinese Communist strategy and tactics from the 1930s through the Korean War. The connection between Sunzi and Mao was therefore not only implied through a seeming similarity in phrasing within the translation of Sunzi; it was also explicitly laid out by Griffith in a chapter inserted before the translation. The many similarities between some passages of Sunzi and of Mao leave little doubt for many Chinese scholars of Sunzi's influence on Mao, nor was Griffith the only foreigner to make the connection.[47] Griffith had also already translated some of Mao's military writings, and was in the process of preparing a republication of those translations while he was preparing his Sunzi manuscript for publication.

Griffith came directly to the point in Chapter 6, "Sun Tzu and Mao Tse-Tung":

Mao Tse-Tung has been strongly influenced by Sun Tzu's thought. This is apparent in his works which deal with military strategy and tactics and is particularly evident in *On Guerrilla Warfare*, *On the Protracted War*, and *Strategic Problems of China's Revolutionary War*; it may also be traced in other essays less familiar to Western readers. Some years before Chairman Mao took his writing-brush in hand in Yan'an, Red commanders had applied Sun Tzu's precepts to their

[46] For a discussion of Marx and Engels's views on war, and pragmatic preparations for war, see Sigmund Neumann and Mark von Hagen, "Engels and Marx on Revolution, War, and the Army in Society," in Paret, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 262–280. John Shy and Thomas W. Collier discuss Mao's military writings in the same edition of *Makers of Modern Strategy*.

[47] In a 1968 letter to Griffith and his wife, Robert Asprey pointed out that Robert Payne's biography of Mao referred to Sunzi, and traced Mao's slogans to Sun Wu. "Do you know anything about Payne? He is an old hand, knew or knows Mao and seems to have a splendid background in Chinese. I wonder why he didn't use your work with your researches, impressive enough, on dating Sun Tzu; also your translations which are much better and more supple than the ones he offers." Robert Asprey to Belle and Sam Griffith, May 19, 1968, BU archive.

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operations in Kiangsi and Fukien, where between 1930 and 1934 they inflicted repeated defeats on Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists whose object was to exterminate the Communists.[48]

Mao, as Griffith goes on to point out, was, in fact, much more interested in the two great classical novels of war and rebellion, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and *Outlaws of the Marsh*, than in classical works of strategy. Several of the heroes of those novels were closely associated with strategy and with Sunzi, most obviously Cao Cao and Zhuge Liang (諸葛亮) (181–234 CE).[49] Mao was also interested in the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864).

Some of Griffith's connections between Mao's reading, Sunzi, and Mao's political and military activities seem tenuous, at best. Oddly for Griffith, who was usually systematic in his citations, he does not provide direct support for most of his assertions. His explanation for the formation of Mao's military thought seems to reflect US Marine Corps General Evans Carlson's (1896–1947) view of the Communists, and why they were militarily successful:

Both Mao and Chu Teh (who took command of the army at this time) realized the need for a literate and well-indoctrinated force. This concern with morale, traceable in part at least to Sun Tzu's teachings, was to pay handsome dividends, for it was the major factor which preserved the Red Army after the disastrous reverses suffered in Hunan in August and early September 1930.[50]

Zhu De 朱德 (1886–1976), who was an experienced and educated military man, had partnered with Mao in Jinggangshan in 1928. He likely provided most of the actual military training and doctrine for his and Mao's few thousand men. An immensely humble man, he was a convert to Communism after receiving a formal military education, become a warlord, and even traveled abroad.[51] At a minimum, Mao could draw upon Zhu De's knowledge of Western strategists.

Griffith dates the "birth" of Maoist strategy and tactics to September 13, 1930, when Mao and Zhu broke with the urban-focused strategy of the Communist Party's Central Committee under Li Lisan

[48] Griffith, *The Art of War*, 45.
[49] Mao told Edgar Snow that he had read *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Outlaws of the Marsh* when he was young and tried to model the various characters' heroic behavior. He would have picked up the general ideas of strategy and connection to Sunzi contained in those novels. Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1937, 129–130.
[50] Griffith, *The Art of War*, 47.
[51] Zhu engaged a private tutor on Western military subjects when he was attending Göttingen University in 1923 studying political science. He felt that "he had learned little that he did not already know." Agnes Smedley, *The Great Road*, New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1972, 155.

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(1899–1967). This break was caused by the total defeat of Communist forces making futile attacks on Changsha (by Peng Dehuai 彭德怀), and Nanchang (by Mao and Zhu). Mao learned in a very direct way that it was self-destructive to attack fixed positions held by superior forces. Peng Dehuai had at least captured Changsha and held it for several days before being forced to withdraw; Mao and Zhu's forces hadn't even gotten into Nanchang. Chiang Kai-shek began what would become the first of his campaigns to destroy the Communists later in 1930. Those efforts finally succeeded in driving the Communists out of Jiangxi in 1934, leading to their famous Long March to Yan'an. In 1937, Mao reflected on the lessons he had learned by writing *On Guerrilla Warfare* and, the following year, *On Protracted War*.

Griffith suggests that Mao may have had the unpleasant experience of the defeat of the Red Army in 1934 in mind when he subsequently wrote, "We must not belittle the saying in the book of Sun Wu Tzu, the great military expert of ancient China, 'Know your enemy and know yourself and you can fight a hundred battles without disaster'."[52] Griffith attributes Mao's subsequent analysis of the failures of the Red Army to "disarming honesty" rather than to the critical political struggle that Mao was waging for control over the party and the army. The Red Army's defeat in Chiang's Fifth Annihilation Campaign was due as much to better strategy and co-ordination on the part of the Nationalists as it was to failures by the Communists. Mao wanted to develop not only an effective strategy for preserving and advancing the interests of the Communist Party, but also one that would place him in charge (Mao was not the paramount leader in the Jiangxi Soviet in 1934, so he could attack those responsible for the military failures, Bo Gu 博古, Zhou Enlai 周恩來, and Otto Braun, and promote himself).

The parallels with Sunzi, Griffith goes on to point out, are clear, even if Mao did not directly cite Sunzi. Mao, like Sunzi, realized that a war could only be won by avoiding a "static attitude." While this appears to be consistent with Sunzi's thinking, there is no direct statement to that effect. Mao argued directly against "all passive and inflexible methods."[53] Griffith also goes on note the similarities between Mao's sixteen-character "jingle" formulated at Jinggangshan, and some of Sunzi's sayings: "When the enemy advances, we retreat! When the enemy halts, we harass! When the enemy seeks to avoid battle, we attack! When the enemy retreats, we pursue!" Mao's jingle was important in

[52] Griffith, *The Art of War*, 50, quoting Mao Zedong, *Selected Works*, Volume 1, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965, 187.

[53] Griffith, *The Art of War*, 51, quoting Mao, ii, 96.

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distilling strategy and tactics down to something easy to memorize by ordinary soldiers with limited literacy. A number of other passages also elaborate on concepts from Sunzi, particularly the emphasis on deception, intelligence, and mobility. The similarities of Mao's writings to Sunzi seemed obvious to Griffith, and he was therefore comfortable in asserting, "Throughout the Civil War the Communists continually threw Sun Tzu's book of war at the Generalissimo's dispirited commanders." He continued this connection into the Korean War, attributing the People's Liberation Army's initial successes against the United Nations forces to deception, intelligence, and mobility.[54]

Mao had read Sunzi, though as Xiong Huayuan 熊華源 pointed out, Mao said on three occasions that he had only done so after the Zunyi conference, which took place in 1935.[55] Yet no one has addressed the issue of why Mao did not extensively quote Sunzi's maxims, many of which would have been generally known throughout China. There is a clear split in composition between Mao's tactical "jingles" created for Red Army soldiers, and his longer essays on broader strategic, operational, and tactical issues. His longer essays were aimed at a more educated audience, many of whom would have known that Mao was rephrasing Sunzi. "Ingenious devices such as making a noise in the east while attacking in the west, appearing now in the south and now in the north, hit-and-run and night action should be constantly employed to mislead, entice and confuse the enemy," is an obvious reference to a section of Chapter 6, for example:

> For if he prepares to the front his rear will be weak, and if to the rear, his front will be fragile. If he prepares to the left, his right will be vulnerable and if to the right, there will be few on his left. And when he prepares everywhere he will be weak everywhere.

It is also a direct quote from *The Thirty-Six Stratagems*, a work of uncertain date and authorship.

Most, if not all, of the educated members of the Communist leadership would have been familiar with Sunzi, and it would have been surprising if at least some of the Communist generals did not know Sunzi. Quoting Sunzi might have seemed both condescending and pretentious in a scholarly, old-fashioned way, or even backward and feudal to the Communists. Paraphrasing Sunzi, on the other hand, allowed Mao to signal that he was educated and that he expected that his audience was as well. It was then their responsibility to know the classical reference. Mao's

[54] Griffith, 55.
[55] Xiong Huayuan 熊華源, "Mao Zedong Jiujing Heshi Dude *Sunzi Bingfa* 毛澤東究竟何時讀的《孫子兵法》," *Dangde Wenxian* 黨的文獻, 2006/3.

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classical education was patchy, as was, at least in his early days, his knowledge of Marxism. He had better-educated secretaries to make up for his lacunae after he had gotten to the top of the Communist power structure. Much as Mao and the Chinese Communist leadership frequently criticized traditional Chinese education, they were also often anxious to demonstrate their knowledge of it.

Liddell Hart's role, through Griffith's Sunzi translation, in connecting Sunzi and Mao was also important to Li Ling李零, the greatest living authority on Sunzi. Indeed, Professor Li thought that Liddell Hart's foreword advocating a return to Sunzi was so important that he translated it into Chinese in 1992.[56] From Professor Li's perspective, the value of drawing the connection between Sunzi and Mao was exactly the same as for Liddell Hart and Griffith: to convince people that Sunzi was relevant and valuable. He is, however, somewhat more nuanced in his dating of Mao reading Sunzi than is Xiong Huayuan. Mao was not considered a serious thinker by the Moscow-educated Communists when he and Zhu De were at Jinggangshan, regarding him as a country yokel. Mao was influenced by the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and, as a man from Hunan, people like Zeng Guofan (1811–1872) and Hu Linyi (1812–1861), two military commanders of the late Qing dynasty who took part in suppressing the Taiping Rebellion.

Mao had read Zheng Guanying's (1842–1922/1923) *Shengshi Weiyan* (Words of Warning to a Prosperous Age), published in 1893, which contained the quote, "Sunzi said: 'Know the enemy and know yourself, and in a hundred battles you will have a hundred victories.'[57] Although these words are small their effect is great." Mao had also listened to Yuan Zhongqian's 袁仲謙 (1868–1932) lectures on Wei Yuan's 魏源 (1794–1856) *Sunzi Jizhu* while in Hunan, and noted down that "Master Sun Wu believed that soldiers were used when there was no alternative 孫武子以兵為不得已."[58] But it was not until Mao reached Yan'an that he had the opportunity to actually read Sunzi. Although he mentioned Sunzi on

[56] Li Ling, "Lideer Hete, 'Huidao Sunzi'," *Sunzi Xuekan*, 1992/4, 12–13.

[57] Zheng Guanying distorted Sunzi's meaning by combining two different passages with very different meanings. In Sunzi Chapter 3, it says, "Know the enemy and know yourself and in a hundred battles you will not be in danger." Earlier in Chapter 3, it says that "winning a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not the acme of skill." Zheng was a late Qing dynasty reformer, who wanted to fight Western dominance of China through economic nationalism.

[58] Li Ling, *Bing yi zhali: Wo du Sunzi* 兵以诈立 : 我读孙子, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2006, 49–50. Wei Yuan was a Qing dynasty magistrate known for his *Huangchao Jingshi Wenbian* 皇朝經世文編 (Collected Writings on Statecraft of the Reigning Dynasty). Wei's collected works, the *Guwei Tang Ji* 古微堂集, contained an essay, *Sunzi jizhu xu* 孫子集註序 (Preface to Collected Annotations on Sunzi), which appears to be what Mao's teacher Zhongqian based his lectures on. Yuan Jiliu, whose courtesy name was

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several occasions, it does not appear, or at least he did not emphasize the idea, that Sunzi strongly influenced him. Professor Li concludes that Mao did not particularly venerate Sunzi, even though he allowed Sunzi to be promoted by his (Mao's) reputation.[59]

Ultimately, it is fair to say that Mao had been at least somewhat influenced by Sunzi, even if this influence was indirect. Mao later acknowledged that he had actually read Sunzi for the first time at some point after 1935, likely in 1936, but even for a modern Chinese scholar the value of associating Mao and Sunzi was to promote Sunzi in the modern day. David Graff has pointed out that Sunzi did not include, and indeed argued against, protracted war, which was a critical concept for Mao.[60] One of the most basic strategic components of guerrilla warfare is protracted war. Sunzi, by contrast, always stressed rapid warfare. From a battlefield perspective – that is, a situation in which one raises an army to fight – lengthy campaigning is always a costly problem.

It is telling that Li Ling finds the same value in attaching Sunzi to Mao that Griffith and Liddell Hart did. The Sunzi is valued by those who study it academically, but it is also popularly known. It is impossible to determine how widely Sunzi is read inside or outside the Chinese military, let alone how seriously it is studied, or how influential it is. It is likely more widely read, in modern translation, than Clausewitz, translated from the German, is in the American military (though Clausewitz, in some form, is usually required for officers of the middle and upper ranks). Sunzi has the great advantage of being extremely short, and its more obtuse sections can easily be ignored by Westerners as weird ancient Chinese mysticism. Clausewitz is long, dense, philosophical, and, as a Western work, close enough culturally that it seems it should be understandable to Westerners. But it is a rare officer in any military who has thought through Clausewitz seriously; outside the military Clausewitz is only read by a very small group of academics and enthusiasts. Sunzi, at least, has a nonmilitary and nonacademic audience. Of course, the extent of familiarity with Sunzi is impossible accurately to measure in either the various militaries or populations of the world.

The use of Mao and Mao's importance for modern Chinese history directly contributed to the profile of Sunzi in the twentieth century. This

Zhongqian, also known as "Yuan the Big Beard," was one of Mao's teachers at the Fourth Normal School in Changsha, from 1913 to 1918. Yuan taught classical Chinese literature. Mao would later write a tomb inscription for him. See Stuart Schram (ed.), *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912–49*, Volume 1, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, 30 fn. 104 (for Wei Yuan), 9 fn. 1 (for Yuan Jiliu).

[59] Li Ling, *Bing yi zhali*, 50.

[60] David Graff, "Sun Tzu," in Daniel Coetzee and Lee W. Eysturlid (eds.), *Philosophers of War*, Volume 1, Santa Barbara, Denver, and Oxford: Praeger, 2013, 175.

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was not an accident; it was a conscious decision by Samuel Griffith, strongly supported by Liddell Hart, to push Sunzi into the consciousness of people in the West. Both Griffith and Liddell Hart appear to have believed in the fundamental value of *The Art of War* as a strategic work, and felt that strategists in the West would benefit from reading it. Both men also understood that Griffith's translation of *The Art of War* would sell many more copies if a more general audience were interested in the book. From a basic marketing perspective, Griffith had every reason to tie it to Mao Zedong, the military and political genius who had led the Chinese Communists to victory in 1949, and fought the UN forces in Korea to a standstill in the Korean War. Whether fully justified or not, the connection of Mao and Sunzi vaulted *The Art of War* into a permanent place in the popular imagination in the West.

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