The Art of War was written over 2,300 years ago in what is now North China. Yet it still remains a contemporary lesson on how to attain victory without going to battle. Modern-day warriors find its ancient strategies helpful regardless of whether the conflict dwells in the boardroom or the bedroom. Despite numerous references to enemies, generals, and armies, The Art of War is about nonaggression. At its core, The Art of War offers a sophisticated lesson on taking whole, meaning staying openhearted and relaxed in order to sidestep a fight--whether you are a field commander, a CEO, or a frustrated mother putting a resistant son to bed. This particular translation comes from the Denma Translation Group, led by scholars Kidder Smith and James Gimian (publisher of Shambhala Sun magazine). Because of the texts obscure wording (even the Chinese find the original document cumbersome), the translators have inserted helpful commentary that removes some of the linguistic barriers. --Gail Hudson
Personal Review: The Art of War: The Denma Translation (Shambhala Library) by Sun Tzu

The Warring States period 475-221 BCE is a history of constant warfare, of alliances and counter-alliances, and of treaties made and broken. The nature of warfare evolved during the period. During the Warring States period, political stability was impossible to gain by adventurous military action. With the advent of swelling ranks of soldiers, protracted sieges, and an ever increasing drain on state treasuries, warfare became a serious matter for study.

Thus, the opening remark of "The Art Of War" states--without exaggeration--war had become the most serious business of the state, the key to survival or ruin. The author of this and other pithy aphorisms on how to successfully fight a war was Sun Tzu. Sun Tzu scholars place his writing "The Art of War" in the Warring States Period, based on the descriptions of warfare in the text. The book has received great exposure in the west starting in the eighteenth century after being translated by a French missionary. It has been reported that Napoleon studied the text and effectively put many of its teachings to good use. For the past 2,000 years, it has been the most important military treatise in all of Asia, even known by name with the common people. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese military figures have studied it and employed its concepts to good effect. This is especially evident in the military tactics of 20th century revolutionaries like Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh.

The book is comprised of 13 chapters. The thesis of Sun's work is one should employ an army after a thorough analysis mandated by careful planning and the formulation of an overall strategy before embarking on a campaign. Sun emphasizes rational self-control, influenced by Daoist teachings throughout the book.

Chap 1-Laying Plans
18. All warfare is based on deception. 19. Hence, when able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near.

Chap 6-Weak Points And Strong
8. Hence that general is skillful in attack whose opponent does not know what to defend; and he is skillful in defense whose opponent does not know what to attack.

The best translation is the Samuel B. Griffith edition

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