

## SUN TZU'S *THE ART OF WAR*<sup>\*</sup> ITS RELEVANCE TO INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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### Introduction

Man is continually relating with his fellow men. His interaction with the latter provides an opportunity to define himself. He finds his meaning in the matrix of interpersonal relations. Thus, man is deeply rooted in such a relation. At the time of his existence, he develops an intimate relation with his parents and slowly interacts with his fellow men. As he unfolds himself, he establishes a network of interpersonal relationships which help him realize his human potentialities.

This relationship with other persons makes man truly a person. He realizes his dreams and aspirations by being with others. He pursues his goals in the context of the dynamics within the framework of his relationship with his fellow men. Therefore, to go no further just to be himself and no other would be to imprison oneself forever in one's poverty and ignorance. He is himself but open to others. The person is not wholly a person if alone. He is not being itself, but he is within being and sharing in being. It is not a dreamy feeling or a lazy repose but a vigorous commitment toward the fulfillment of himself.<sup>1</sup>

Man is not only satisfied in forming interpersonal relationships. He is so concerned also in attaining order and harmony. Man longs for harmonious interpersonal relations. He endeavors as much as possible to build interpersonal relations that would promote harmony and order in the society. However, no matter how man aspires for such dream, inevitably, there are times that such interpersonal relations will be shaken. There are occasions which would ruin. Instead of establishing smooth and harmonious interpersonal relations he is actually impairing it. His lack of knowledge perhaps would be

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<sup>1</sup> Austin Fagothey, *Right and Reason* (Saint Louis: C.V. Moslby Company, 1972), p. 165.

a factor that destroys his interpersonal relations.

The main objective of this study is to present the other perspective of understanding contemporary interpersonal relations. The study focuses on the present network of interpersonal relations. This perspective which deviates from the commonplace notion of interpersonal relations provides a distinctly different understanding of these. It attempts to explain contemporary interpersonal relations in the light of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*. It would be unthinkable to find any relation between war and interpersonal relations. As the author unfolds the study, one is able to see the close connection between the two; such that the strategies of war can be applied in the field of interpersonal relations.

Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* was written approximately in the sixth century B.C. but many of the principles proposed by Sun Tzu may be applied by analogy to interpersonal relations providing a different perspective in understanding them. His wise counsel on waging war in Ancient China throws into focus lessons on interpersonal relations. It is fascinating to see how timeless and more generally applicable much of Sun Tzu's advice is.

### Sun Tzu

Skeptics basically questioned Sun Tzu's existence because his name is never even mentioned in the *Tsu chuan*, the primary record of significant events in the Spring and Autumn period. However, the absence of his name does not necessarily justify the conclusion that he did not exist. At most it might indicate he never played a significant role. He could have been a commander or strategist and was simply eclipsed by more dramatic figures. While the *Tso chuan* may be silent, the *Shih chi*, famous throughout Asia as China's first true history and a literary masterpiece includes several biographies devoted to distinguished military strategists and generals including Sun Tzu. It contains versions of the famous training episode with king Ho-Lu as well as several other references and few additional sentences Sun Tzu may have uttered.

Sun Tzu is a person who was a native of Ch'i state during the Ch'un Ch'iu. Records seem to claim that he lived sometime in 512

<sup>2</sup> Foo Check Teck and Peter Hugh, Grinyer, op. cit., p. 10.

B.C. The author of the *Art of War*, he demonstrated his principles by imposing discipline on a mock army of concubines. This involved beheading two of the king's favorites in public. The King became convinced that Sun Tzu was a man of action and not just words, and appointed him general. He was entrusted with overall command of Wu's military forces for the purpose of affecting their reorganization and training.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Art of War*

This book has long been recognized as China's oldest and most profound military treatise, all other works being relegated to a secondary state at best. Traditionalists attribute the book to the historical Sun Tzu who is portrayed in the *Shih Chi* as active in the last years of the 6th century. In their view the book preserves his strategic and tactical concepts and principles and should therefore be dated to this period.

It contains "the military sayings of Sun Tzu which are terse yet elegant, simple yet profound, and eminently practical."<sup>3</sup> His purpose was to develop a systematic work on war in order to guide rulers and generals in the intelligent presentation of successful war. Viewed in another perspective, it presents a humane and intelligent method for triumph over non-negotiable conflicts. It is primarily designed for those who decide to resolve conflicts in their lives.<sup>4</sup>

*The Art of War* has many translations. It was known and studied even during the time of the Tang dynasty (618-906) and until now many translations have been published. It was introduced to the west by Fr. P. Amiot who translated it from Chinese to French. Captain E. F. Calthrop translated *The Art of War* into English from a Japanese translation in 1905. Lionel Giles translated it from Chinese to English and published it in 1910 and re-issued in a 1983 edition. This book until now has been widely translated.<sup>5</sup>

### Strategies

In this study, Sun Tzu prescribes the necessary strategies which

<sup>2</sup> Alfredo P. Co, *Philosophy of Ancient China* (Manila: UST Printing Office, 1992), p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of Strategy*, trans. R.L. Wing (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> For Greek Text and Peter Hugh Gunyer, op. cit., p. 10.

would be of help in promoting harmonious inter-personal relations. In dealing with his fellow men, Sun Tzu provides the essential techniques on how to triumph amidst the non-negotiability of conflicts. It should be noted that nowhere in the book did Sun Tzu mention the complete destruction of the other persons. What Sun Tzu envisions is to attain triumph that would lead to order and harmony in the world. Throughout the book Sun Tzu's approach is thoroughly analytical, mandating careful planning and the formulation of an overall strategy before one commences to establish a network of interpersonal relations. The focus of all grand strategy must be the development of prosperous and harmonious interpersonal relations. Thereafter, strategy can be effected which finds meaning in the constant preparation. The latter should not be neglected. The primary objective should be the enhancement of the interpersonal relations without actually engaging in actual confrontation thereby realizing the ideal of complete victory.<sup>6</sup>

Sun Tzu considers conflict as a disturbance to the order and harmony in the universe. Moreover, it must be stressed that *The Art of War* which contains the specific strategies to overcome conflicts is primarily designed to preserve the harmony of interpersonal relations. It is intended to fight off invaders, remove hostile agents and demolish anything that would jeopardize the enhancement of congruous dealing with other persons. For instance when an interpersonal conflict hampers the development of happiness, the relationship can rarely be salvaged. "These are conflicts that continue to repeat again and again because the basic interaction is unbalance. Once one has identified a deep, unresolvable interpersonal conflict, strong determination and a clear strategy are required."<sup>7</sup> Therefore, to bring back such order, a person must follow the necessary strategies.

This study enumerates the three general strategies. The first is positioning which covers the steps to be considered before engaging in actual confrontation. If the conflict cannot be anymore remedied without resorting to confrontation, one must proceed to confrontation which is the second general strategy which focuses on the steps on

<sup>6</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph D. Sawyer, p. 128.

<sup>7</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of Strategy*, trans. R.L. Wing, p. 15.

how to confront the enemies in actual controversy. The third stresses the importance of preparation in times of peace.

### Positioning

For Sun Tzu positioning is the most important strategy in restoring harmonious interpersonal relations. The achievement of triumph through tactical positioning without resorting to battle is Sun Tzu's intended objective of his book. Victory can be obtained without really engaging in actual confrontation. It does not presuppose that there must be destructive conflict before one can win. Sun Tzu does not subscribe to the idea that confrontation should happen first or one should engage actually in confrontation but as much as possible conflicts must be settled amicably without resorting to actual attack. Sun Tzu says:

"Thus, those who win one hundred triumphs in one hundred conflicts, do not have supreme skill. Those who have supreme skill, use strategy to bend others without coming to conflict."<sup>8</sup>

This demonstrates the necessity of settling conflicts before one attempts to engage in actual controversy. Therefore, positioning must be of great help in the resolution of conflict. Positioning involves many steps in the process of establishing one's position in interpersonal relations.

The first step when a person encounters an interpersonal conflict would be to analyze the conflict. One must know how to value one's ability to calculate a complete analysis of the situation which includes the strengths and weaknesses of one's position. Sun Tzu says:

"Those who triumph, compute at their headquarters a great number of factors prior to a challenge."

"Much computation brings triumph. Little computation brings defeat. How much more so with no computation at all."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

In interpersonal relations, the person must have a thorough knowledge of the whole situation. He must be able to calculate meaningfully the factors which would be of help to restore the harmony of such relations. One should consider all possibilities which would be of help in the resolution of the conflict. Confining oneself to limited factors not considering the whole picture or gamut of the conflict would lead only to a prolonged conflict. Consequently, if the estimates made before an actual interpersonal confrontation indicate triumph, it is because careful calculations manifest that the conditions are more favorable than those of the opponents. If it indicates defeat, it is because careful calculations show that favorable conditions for confrontation are fewer. With more careful calculations, one can win; with less, one cannot. How much less chance of victory has one who makes no calculations at all. By this means, one can foresee the outcome of this lack of calculations in the interpersonal confrontation.<sup>10</sup>

This can only be realized through secrecy in all activities; by complete self-control and strict discipline and by being unfathomable. The corollary to being unfathomable is seeking out and gaining detailed knowledge of the opponent through all available means. The unvarying rule is never to rely upon the good will of others nor upon fortuitous circumstances, but guarantee through knowledge, persistent analysis and calculation that the opponent can neither mount a surprise attack nor gain a victory through miscalculation. Sun Tzu says:

"The location we take to initiate a challenge must not be made known. When opponents do not know our location, they must prepare in many places. When opponents must prepare in many places, there will be few at the location where we initiate a challenge."<sup>11</sup>

One way of arriving at a complete calculation and analysis of the situation is the employment of tactical paradox. Tactical paradox is the ability to project to the opponent a contradictory view of one's position or plan. Sun Tzu has explained this well by

<sup>10</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. General Tao Hanz-hang, p. 102.

<sup>11</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of Strategy*, trans. R.L. Wing, p. 85.

saying:

"Thus, when able, they appear unable. When employed, they appear useless. When close, they appear distant. When distant, they appear close."

"They attack when the opponent is unprepared and appear where least expected."<sup>12</sup>

There is danger of interpreting such saying to mean that deception is part of the game. Although an insightful reading of *The Art of War* will reveal that many of its proposed measures rely on deception for their foundation and implementation, but deceit is of course not practiced as an art or end in itself, contrary to tendencies sometimes prevailing in this contemporary world. Rather, false measures and other such acts are all designed to further the single objective of deceiving the opponent so that he will be confused and forced to respond to his true identity. Strategy must be viewed as a matter of deception of constantly creating false appearance, spreading disinformation. When imaginatively created and effectively implemented, the opponent will neither know where to attack and expose himself to his own vulnerability.<sup>13</sup>

Admittedly, it can be inferred that Sun Tzu utilizes this approach to be able to have a thorough understanding of the opponent. In interpersonal relationships, sometimes one encounters problems which need to be resolved. It would be difficult to solve such conflict if a person does not have complete grasp of the situation. Perhaps the other person is not sincere and open to tell honestly of the reason which he knows of the origin of the problem. Spontaneously, he blames others for his own fault. One way of discovering the knowledge of the other is through tactical paradox by pretending to be unaware of the situation so as to be able to get the necessary information which would affect the immediate resolution of the problem.

After calculating the strengths and weaknesses of one's position, one must be ready to have a careful evaluation of the costs well in advance of confrontation. One must constantly evaluate the costs

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph D. Sawyer, p. 136.

and benefits of continuing such assessment of the situation. This would prevent escalation to occur. Being aware of the tendency to escalate can also be very helpful in anticipating how the opponent is likely to think and act. To initiate a challenge would cost much energy, time and even one's life. It would even result to the weakening of one's position. Defeat would be at the periphery if one is not able to evaluate carefully and act promptly to settle the conflict. It would even cause disintegration and the triumph becomes a nightmare if one prolongs and complicates the problem.

This emphasizes the need to act promptly in the settlement of interpersonal problems. Sometimes one has the tendency to prolong and even complicate his problems by not acting on it and leave it as it is without initiating the first move. He will let others ask forgiveness for what he has done. Pride sometimes would bring a person to defeat. This would also hinder him to evaluate carefully the strengths and weaknesses that have come from the relationship. Awareness of the cost therefore would lead to prompt action. Sun Tzu says:

"Among strategies, therefore the best triumph is a swift one."<sup>14</sup>

As much as possible a person must endeavor to resolve interpersonal conflict immediately. A speedy triumph is the main objective of interpersonal controversy. If this is long in coming, one's eagerness and morale is depressed. When one engages in protracted fight, his strength will be exhausted and his opponent will take advantage of his exhaustion and crises. In that case, no man, however wise will be able to avert the disastrous consequences that ensue.

Once he has recognized the strengths and weaknesses and has evaluated the cost to act promptly, it is now time to formulate a realistic plan. Formulation of a plan therefore largely depends on his knowledge of the situation, himself and others. These are the necessary ingredients to be able to construct a sophisticated plan. In order to triumph, one must consider the knowledge and likely strategy of the other side. However, this is hard to do when his opponents know something he does not and can use the information to defeat him or put him in a situation in which defeat is a certainty.

<sup>14</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of Strategy*, trans. R.L. Wing, p. 39.



There is therefore the need to know oneself and his opponents before drawing out a strategic plan. Sun Tzu emphasizes the point by saying:

"Know the other and know yourself: one hundred challenges without danger; know not the other and yet know yourself: one triumph for one defeat; know not the other and know not yourself: every challenge is certain peril."<sup>15</sup>

The plan that is formulated would guide him on how to attain his objective. It would specify what course of action one has to make to be able to reach his desired end. His plan must be realistic. One must not confront his opponents in an area that is already fortified. Moreover, unrealistic tactical planning will throw his strategy into chaos and give the opponent the advantage.

How does one formulate his plan in such a way that it would enhance his chances of winning and establish harmonious interpersonal relations? Sun Tzu provides the answer:

"Those who are skilled in executing a strategy, bend the strategy of others without conflict; Uproot the fortifications of others without attacking; absorb the organization of others without prolonged operations."

"Thus, those who win one hundred triumphs in one hundred conflicts do not have supreme skill. Those who have supreme skill, use strategy to bend others without coming to conflict."<sup>16</sup>

In formulating a strategic plan, one must insure the avoidance of conflict as much as possible. The rationale for formulating a strategic planning system in interpersonal relations would be to increase the probability of victory by forecasting as far as possible relative strengths and weaknesses. Triumph does not depend on actual interpersonal confrontation but on how a person is able to draw a plan. It entails necessary skills and a thorough knowledge of one's interpersonal situation. A person who knows himself and his opponent's strengths and weaknesses can easily formulate a

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

plan which does not necessarily require an actual confrontation. The weaknesses of the opponent would be one's strength and one's strengths would be the weaknesses of the opponent.

Thus, a strategic plan is the main factor to achieve harmony. In his dealing with his fellow men, oftentimes one acts spontaneously and his actions are carried by his emotions. His feelings dictate the course of action that he forgets about the essential thing which is to have a plan. He immediately reacts without having a thorough investigation and planning. Instead of promoting order, there is now a widening of gap and may even result to chaos because of lack of clear understanding of the situation and the inability to formulate a plan.

When the strategic plan has already been formulated, the next thing to do is to establish a strong position. To establish a strong position implies that one must act with integrity and honesty. One's position must not be the result of one's whims and caprices but a decision that is based on a thorough understanding of oneself. Sometimes one does believe that he is correct in his position that he is unwilling to accept suggestions of others. One thinks unthinkingly that he has the monopoly of truth, and what he is holding on captures the whole situation without really ascertaining that his position is vulnerable due to the fact that it is a product of one's biases and prejudices.

Undeniably, a thorough understanding of oneself is a precondition of establishing a position. Understanding oneself means he is open to new suggestions that would enhance the promotion of harmony in interpersonal relations. To hold on to one's position which is a shadow of his biases and prejudices would only result to disorder in the interpersonal relations. Sun Tzu says:

"To secure against defeat depends on oneself: the opportunity for triumph depends on one's opponent."

"Therefore, those who are skilled in conflict can secure themselves against defeat, but it is their opponent who provides the opportunity for triumph."<sup>17</sup>

This offers him the idea that defeat does not depend on the strengths of the opponent but on how strong and established his

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

position is. Knowing himself including his strengths and weaknesses would guide and determine his position. It must be noted that in seeking a challenge, one must be certain of triumph after considering the necessary factors which would lead to it. The certainty must be of triumph and not of challenge. When one is certain only of challenge but uncertain of triumph, one is certain of defeat. Deliberate and thorough reflection is needed. Sun Tzu remarks:

"Therefore, a winning strategy is like a pound balanced against an ounce. While a losing strategy is like an ounce balanced against a pound."<sup>18</sup>

While it is true that one must establish a position that cannot be attacked, this alone would not be adequate to attain victory. It is required that one must be able to direct or position the opponent for defeat, because triumph depends on one's opponent. It is not enough that one establishes a strong position but he must also direct his opponent to such a situation which would lead to defeat. Sun Tzu believes that the ideal strategy during conflict is to move opponent here and there, until he is perfectly positioned to his own disadvantage. The need to direct one's opponent to a position which would lead to his defeat presupposes a complete understanding of the opponent's strengths and weaknesses.

In interpersonal relations, one must be able to have a glimpse of the aspect of his opponent which is vulnerable. One must be able to determine the blind spots in which the opponent can easily be defeated to restore harmonious interpersonal relations. It is not an easy task. It requires one's complete mastery of the situation. While directing can be used to carefully position, one must also be master of timing, for it is strategic timing that makes directing effective. While one leads his opponent to a position of his disadvantage or a position in which he is vulnerable and can easily be defeated, the element of timing plays an important role in attaining victory. One must be able to understand at what particular moment this person can be defeated. He who occupies the field of interpersonal conflict first and awaits his opponent is at ease, and he who comes later to the scene and rushes into the fight is weary. Those skilled in interpersonal conflict bring the opponent to the controversy and are not brought there by him. Timing therefore must be reckoned with.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

How does one attain timing in confrontation? This can be achieved by using surprise which creates the appearance of confusion, fear or vulnerability causing the opponent to perceive a false weakness. The opponent is helpless, drawn toward this illusion of advantage. Sun Tzu says:

"Through the promises of gain, an opponent is moved about while the team lies in wait."

"Hence, those who are skilled in conflict are formidable in their directing and quick in their timing."<sup>19</sup>

In his attempt to calculate his position and to direct his opponent's position, one has to employ camouflage. The idea of creating and forming illusions to obscure reality is a specific tactical maneuver designed to keep the opponent at a constant disadvantage.<sup>20</sup> By creating illusions to which the opponent must react, one can discover weaknesses, strengths, blind spots and areas of confidence. Illusions are created in order to discover the weaknesses of the opponents. Oftentimes in his dealing with other persons, no matter how one honestly calculates and endeavors to understand, still there is a great possibility of misunderstanding. The other person does not manifest himself authentically but covers or hides his true identity in a mantle of deception. His task of establishing harmony would be put in peril since he cannot act appropriately and correctly. Sometimes one tends to believe that what he says is what he is, but to his dismay is the contradictory of what he is. Precisely, a person's course of action would not be effective since he has no complete understanding of what or who he is.

To remedy such a problem, one must create illusions. Illusions are employed to discover the weaknesses, blind spots wherein one can utilize these to be able to respond effectively in his quest for deeper interpersonal relations. Only in knowing the blind spots of his opponents that one can transmit the message of harmony directly. Illusions are not used in order to manipulate other persons to gain control. They are primarily used to discover the weaknesses for a possible settlement of disputes.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

The utilization of illusion would be very effective when one takes the initiative. He must make the first move rather than letting the others take the initiative. One must first do the initial move to have a clear grasp of the situation. In the language of Sun Tzu:

"Generally, those who occupy the place of conflict early, can face their opponent in comfort. Those who occupy the place of conflict late, must hasten into conflict, troubled."

"Thus, those who are skilled in conflict, take the initiative over others, so that others do not take the initiative."<sup>21</sup>

The ultimate strategy is to be without an apparent position. Without position even the deepest intelligence is unable to spy, and those who are clever are unable to plan. The ultimate position is to conceal it without ascertainable indicator. Then the most penetrating opponent cannot pry nor can the latter lay plans against him. It is according to the situations that plans are laid for triumph, but the opponent does not comprehend this. Although the opponent can see the outward aspect but he does not understand how the victory is achieved. Therefore, when a triumph is won, one's tactics are not repeated. One should always respond to circumstances in an infinite variety of ways. Sun Tzu says:

"Thus, once a challenge is won, the system should not be repeated. Positioning should be a reaction to infinite variations."<sup>22</sup>

This implies that while one creates illusions to discover the weaknesses and blind spots of the opponents, he must also appear to have no position. The appearance of having no position would make it difficult for the opponents to calculate his strengths and weaknesses. The inability to comprehend his position in the seemingly no position situation would render the opponent helpless and miscalculate his strengths. It would give them the assurance that he is not what he is and thus believing that they possess superior strengths compared to what he has. Besides, once interpersonal challenge has begun, one

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

must keep one's opponent unsure and in constant readjustment. Most importantly, one must continually obscure one's plan and attitudes. In this way, one protects oneself from attack while the confusion one creates depletes the opponent's resources. An opponent who is not certain of the position cannot attack, and instead must prepare defenses in every area. Thus appearing to have no position would not only bring difficulty of ascertaining one's strengths and weaknesses but also depletes the opponent's resources. Sun Tzu further says:

"The strategy of Positioning is the image of water. Moving water evades heights and hastens through the lowlands; a strategy of Positioning evades reality and confronts through illusion. Water follows the territory and systematically flows; the strategy follows the opponent and systematically triumphs."

"Just as water has no absolute position, the strategy has no absolute direction. Those who can follow their opponent's transformations to take triumph, may be called genius."<sup>23</sup>

Thus, in interpersonal relations, the position may be likened to water, for just as flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands, so his position should avoid strength and strike weakness. And as a water shapes its flow in accordance with the ground, so his strategic position manages its victory in accordance with the situation of his worthy opponent. And as water has no constant form, there are in interpersonal relations no constant conditions. Therefore, one is able to win the victory by modifying his tactics in accordance with the opponent's situation. This may be said to be the ultimate way to victory.

### **Confrontation**

In the preceding discussion, the strategies to be considered before the actual confrontation may happen are considered. In establishing interpersonal relations, one should have complete understanding of the situation. Calculation of one's strengths and weaknesses is the initial stage in achieving triumph. Estimating the cost whether it is

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

emotional, physical, or mental must be reckoned with. The idea is to engage swiftly or immediately and not to engage in a protracted confrontation. There is also a need of developing an error-free strategy. Once one has recognized a conflict and analyzed the cost in confronting it, it is time to formulate a realistic plan. One must also emphasize the importance of positioning himself for triumph. The need to direct and position one's opponent for the defeat and the significance of creating illusions to discover weaknesses and strengths, blind spots of the opponents and build areas of confidence must also be considered.

Whenever possible, victory should be achieved through positioning and planning, thwarting the opponent's plans and frustrating his strategy. Only if an opponent threatens with actual confrontation or refuses to acquiesce without being forced into submission should one resort to actual confrontation. Even when exercising this option, one should focus on achieving maximum results with minimum risk and exposure, limiting as far as possible the destruction to be inflicted and suffered and it should be remembered that such actual confrontation is motivated with the aim of preservation.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, no matter how he equips himself with the above-mentioned strategies, still confrontation is inevitable. One will always experience actual confrontation. Consequently, there is a need to absorb some steps to be able to attain triumph and establish harmonious interpersonal relations.

The first move would be how to maneuver oneself for advantage. In actual interpersonal confrontation, sometimes because of intense feeling of hatred, one wants to fight without considering the importance on how to maneuver which would lead to his disadvantage or loss. He will not be able to achieve his objective. He will be caught unaware that he is actually bringing defeat in confrontation. One must strive hard to maintain his sanity and not to be overwhelmed by his intense emotion. One should bear in mind that in engaging an actual confrontation, it should be designed to capture the advantage during a challenge.

Once a challenge has been executed, one must vary his tactics. In interpersonal confrontation, it is not adequate to maneuver and

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<sup>24</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph D. Sawyer, p. 129.

to find a position for advantage, but one must also consider the possibility of spontaneity. The latter implies that one must be flexible amidst the ever growing confrontation. One must be able to create new dimensions and tactics while the confrontation is existing. Varying one's position is a key factor to achieve triumph. To get hold of one position albeit advantageous and remain on such position would mean vulnerability and can easily be discovered. No matter how strong such a position, the opponent will be able to study and discover the weaknesses and can respond effectively to outmaneuver the position. To avoid such catastrophe, one must keep on changing directions so that the opponent would find difficulty in ascertaining the blind spots. One must use the changing circumstances of his interaction to trigger the tactical spontaneity. Use one's advantages— clarity, sense of destination and motivation to rush the opponent's responses. Highlight the opponent's disadvantages to shake his composure.

It implies a clear understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses before one can proceed with ease in creating changes in position. Varying one's tactics and being spontaneous would require knowing also the opponent's blind spots and weaknesses to be able to lead the opponent to his disadvantage. Spontaneity can be effective if the person has a prior knowledge not only of the situation but also of one's strengths and weaknesses. Sun Tzu says:

"Rather than presuming they will not come, we lie in wait for their appearance."

"Rather than presuming they will not attack, we appear in a place they cannot attack."<sup>25</sup>

During times of interpersonal conflict, one must execute his strategy in a timely manner and not be disturbed by intense emotion in order to keep the opponent in motion. Timeliness is an ingredient to achieve victory. Varying one's position not in timely manner would only weaken one's position. The primary reason is because one's opponent has already obtained a clear comprehension of his movement. Be able therefore to act spontaneously in a manner which the opponent is caught unaware of in such situation. Each maneuver that one initiates will certainly bring danger to the opponent. Interpersonal conflicts are the most likely to undermine self-control, and when that happens, it will make dangerous mistakes. One must

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<sup>25</sup> Sun Tzu. *The Art of Strategy*, trans. R.L. Wing, p. 109.



not be fearful, boastful, angry, or vengeful. Direct indifference toward the opponent and focus on the objectives and strategy as the ways to achieve them.<sup>26</sup> The need to have control of the emotion is a paramount consideration to be able to attain victory. If one's attention is disturbed by intense emotion that interferes in his concentration and focus, inevitably it will only result in defeat. Take control of the emotion. Do not act recklessly and do not be shaken. Have the mastery of the situation. One must be in control of any eventualities it may lead to. Sun Tzu asserts:

"Leaders may have five weaknesses: The overly reckless can be destroyed, the overly cautious can be captured. The quickly angered can be ridiculed, the very fastidious can be humiliated, the deeply attached can be harassed."<sup>27</sup>

These five traits of character are serious faults of one who establishes a network of interpersonal relations and the strategy resulting from such weaknesses would mean calamitous. The ruin or imbalance of such relation is inevitable result of these shortcomings. These must be deeply pondered.

Even during interpersonal confrontation, one must utilize the ability to calculate the factors necessary to win the conflict. There must be constant calculation of the strengths and weaknesses of both sides. It is not enough that one must confine his calculation during positioning and then cease to evaluate. This is dangerous because in the process of having interpersonal confrontation, one may develop and improve one's weaknesses to the detriment of the other. It is not impossible along the way that the opponent has improved his position that adversely affects one's position. One must include in his deliberations both favorable and unfavorable factors. By taking into account favorable factors, he makes the plan feasible and effective. By taking into account the unfavorable, he may avoid possible disasters and even to the extent of defeat. The need to evaluate constantly should be emphasized. Sun Tzu remarks:

"In an intense Strategy, where one may face the other for a long time without engaging and without retreating, careful observations are essential."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

One must try to determine the opponent's strengths, fears, and plan of attack. One must be concerned with optimizing and protecting his own and have the ability to move and position himself in any situation while maximizing both the security and field of opportunity.

To distance oneself amidst the interpersonal confrontation is necessary to be able to assess one's strengths and weaknesses and evaluate the opponent's blind spots. To make a distance gives one a complete view of the situation and can effectively respond to it. He has to make sure that even in such situation he is able to move himself by ascertaining both sides regarding their strengths and weaknesses to be able to judge correctly and initiate a plan that would truly respond to such situation. Sun Tzu declares:

"Those who think that their opponents are easy without making careful calculations, are certain to be captured by them."<sup>29</sup>

While one is preoccupied in assessing and evaluating both strengths and weaknesses, one must be able to position himself during confrontation. This is called situational positioning which is the most formidable strategic maneuver. It must be noted however that to establish situational positioning, one must have a deeper understanding of the strengths and weaknesses.

Sometimes in his eagerness to defeat his opponent immediately, one is tempted to embrace a situation which may not be advantageous. One seems to believe that triumph is attainable without considering other important factors. Overconfidence will lead to nowhere. One who tries to understand the opponents' thinking is less likely to feel overconfident in their judgment or to escalate demands needlessly. One who is aware of the tendency to be overconfident in his judgment is more likely to consider what opponents are thinking and to reframe his perceptions in positive terms. Instead of analyzing and ascertaining facts, one acts hastily thinking that he can defeat his opponent. Disorder is the greatest danger to strategy.

It must be stressed that interpersonal confrontation implies that one who engages must be motivated by the virtue of discipline. The latter requires an understanding of the value of his opponent. A

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

disciplined person is one who initiates plans for others to be corrected and not to engage in personal controversy. A Disciplined person is one who acts according to his conviction, not according to his whims and caprices.

In engaging in interpersonal confrontation, one must be aware of his objectives or goals. If his objectives are fundamentally wrong, then defeat is certain to happen. This objective must be inspired by Tao and should be directed toward the establishment of harmonious relationships. It should not be for selfish interest. Sometimes, one engages in interpersonal confrontation because he does not want that others would correct his wrongdoings. One may immediately react if somebody tells him that his behavior is not in consonance with fair dealing.

The *Art of War* is designed to promote harmony in the universe. Applying to interpersonal relations, it is to promote order and harmony. To have a goal contrary to such would mean disorder to the universe and in interpersonal relations. Sun Tzu says:

"Disorder means: the leader is weak and undisciplined, the philosophy is not enlightened by the tao. The officers and team have no principles, the strategy is deployed indulgently and illogically."

"Desertion means: the leader is unable to evaluate the opponent, so the few engage the numerous and the weak confront the strong; the strategy is flat and unfocused."<sup>30</sup>

To gain advantage in interpersonal confrontation, it is important that one must have a thorough knowledge on how to move with discernment. It is not enough to calculate both sides regarding the strengths and weaknesses but most significantly to locate beforehand the opponent's deepest vulnerability. When this vulnerability is successfully threatened, the opponent will be forced to yield. It should be one's concern in engaging in interpersonal confrontation to be able to ascertain and determine the opponent's blind spots which sometimes is his emotional disposition. Having discovered the blind spots or weaknesses, he must utilize and capitalize it up to the point where the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

opponent will surrender. If one is able to detect his opponent's weaknesses, he can easily threaten and intimidate his opponent. He has now the control of the situation.

The discovery must be done with quickness. One must not give ample time for the opponent to be informed of what he has discovered. swiftness is the name of the game. Dilatory tactics would only weaken one's position. Speed presides over the conditions of strategy. One must seize opportunities so that others do not gain. Take paths that are unexpected and attack locations that are unprotected. While time is essential, one must also employ means to hide his own plans. While it is his concern to discover the weaknesses of his opponent to be able to intimidate and have control over his opponent, he should not also give the opportunity to his opponent to discover his own weaknesses. When the opponent presents an opportunity, speedily take advantage of it. Seize the blind spots which the opponent values without making an appointment for battle with him. In executing the plan, one should change according to the opponent's situation in order to triumph. Sun Tzu says:

"When opponents open a doorway, swiftly penetrate it. Locate beforehand their deepest attachments, then inspire subtle expectations. Follow the rules and accommodate the opponent, all the while working toward the decisive challenge."

"Hence, appear at first as an innocent until the opponent opens the door. Then, act in a flash so the opponent is unable to resist."<sup>31</sup>

Finally, it should be emphasized that the strategy one is employing is not a means to proceed to confrontation. Open confrontation is inevitably destructive and must be viewed only as a tactic of last resort. The strategic plan that one has in interpersonal relations is not meant to promote conflict but only to neutralize and bring back the order and harmony in interpersonal relations. The plan is designed to restore harmony which has been threatened by some disturbances. It is not meant to create havoc or chaos or conflict. In cases where confrontation is inevitable, as much as possible, one must avoid prolonging the agony but it must be settled with dispatch. The need to resolve

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 147.