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Reading "Sunzi" as a Master

In the study of Warring States sources, the treatment of "military texts" (*bing shu* 兵書) has, with some exceptions,[1] been parochial by comparison with that of other types of evidence. That is to say, where other Warring States sources are frequently juxtaposed with one another for intertextual analysis, the military texts are rarely mined for insights into the interpretation of non-military writings, or enlisted as evidence for research questions not pertaining narrowly to military affairs. The forces giving rise to this parochialism are diverse.

One contributing factor is the scholarly paradigms developed and pursued by twentieth-century scholars. The genres and themes of surviving Warring States letters drew scholars of the era toward the study of "history of philosophy" or "history of thought" for this period, a discourse that they presumed the military texts were not concerned with. Surveys of the period by Benjamin Schwartz, Angus Graham, Wing-tsit Chan, and Fung Yu-lan exemplify this pattern: none makes more than passing reference to the military texts.[2]

Such "philosophical bias" is not the sole factor impacting the treatment of military texts. Relatively recent scholarship has advocated a revision of, or departure from, the paradigm of "history of philosophy"

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[1] Robin Yates has done a great deal of work on the role of military writings in the larger political discourse of early China; e.g., idem, "Texts on the Military and Government from Yinqueshan: Introductions and Preliminary Transcriptions," in Sarah Allan 艾藍 and Xing Wen 邢文, eds., *Xinchu jianbo yanjiu* 新出簡帛研究 (Beijing: Wenwu, 2004), pp. 334–87. Robin McNeal has likewise advanced this line of inquiry; see *Conquer and Govern: Early Chinese Military Texts from the Yi Zhou shu* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 2012). Other scholars have brought military writings into the larger discussion of Chinese philosophy; e.g., Roger Ames, *Sun Tzu The Art of Warfare* (New York, Ballantine Books, 1993); and Francois Jullien, *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*, Janet Lloyd, trans. (New York: Zone Books, 1999).

[2] Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1985); Angus Graham, *Disputers of the Dao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle: Open Court, 1989); Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1963); Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy, Volume 1*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1983).

or "history of thought" in the examination of Warring States sources. Mark Edward Lewis noted that the transmitted texts of the era display much weaker conventions of "authorship" than are generally evinced by philosophical texts of the ancient Mediterranean world, having served as the foci for the construction of group identity in the formation of open-ended, multigenerational intellectual traditions of Masters and disciples, rather than dissertations on the doctrine of a discrete "thinker."[3] Wiebke Denecke took this analysis further, noting that the category of "philosopher" itself is an imposition onto the discursive universe of the Warring States, which in the form of the "Master" and attendant concepts had its own categories for the structural and thematic organization of textual production that should be respected by present-day interpreters. She thus advocates that we examine the transmitted texts of the Warring States with an eye toward reconstructing a "Masters discourse" rather than forcing the sources to fit within ahistorical "philosophical" disciplinary parameters.[4]

This move away from "history of philosophy" and toward a more open-ended "Masters discourse," however, has not yet been brought into the treatment of the military texts. Denecke did not treat any of them in her study of the "dynamic of Masters literature." Even Lewis, whose earlier scholarship devoted significant attention to military texts (as will be discussed below), did not give significant space to them in his study of *Writing and Authority in Early China*.[5]

Another factor contributing to the general exclusion of military texts from this more expansively construed field of "Masters writings" is the inertial influence of conventions that prevailed within Chinese scholarly discourse for many centuries. Imperial taxonomies of pre-Qin literature did not list the "military writings" among the *zishu* 子書 (Masters texts) that constitute the bulk of surviving Warring States literature, but classified them separately, as an autonomous category. The bibliographic treatise *Han shu yiwen zhi* 漢書藝文志 (dated to 96 AD), for example, treats *bingshu* as a distinctive generic category congruent with that of *zishu*, to the point of being divided into different "schools" such as "Military Formations 兵形" and "Yin-yang 陰陽" in the same way that the Masters texts were divided into Ru 儒, Mo 墨,

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[3] Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), pp. 53–98.

[4] Wiebke Denecke, *The Dynamics of Masters Literature: Early Chinese Thought from Confucius to Han Feizi* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 2011).

[5] This is not meant as an indictment of either Lewis's or Denecke's scholarship, given the scope and complexity of their respective investigations.

Dao 道, and other such "schools 家."[6] This circumscription of the military texts is the product of an imperial officialdom that increasingly sought to assert the supremacy of *wen* 文 over *wu* 武, the civil over the martial, and thus were motivated to deny equivalency to writings on military affairs.

Modern scholarly habits concerning the treatment of military texts are thus reinforced by longstanding conventions built into the categorical structure of the textual matrix in which present-day interpreters receive transmitted classical sources.

These habits, moreover, derive further support from the doctrinal and thematic content of much pre-Qin letters. Surviving Warring States taxonomies of the field of "Masters," such as the "Contra Twelve Masters" 非十二子 chapter of *Xunzi* and the "All Under Heaven" 天下 chapter of *Zhuangzi* likewise do not include any military figures within the scope of their accounts.[7] Like the bibliographic schemes of the imperial era, however, these late Warring States taxonomies must be viewed skeptically. *Xunzi*, for example, contains an entire chapter, "Debating the Military" 議兵,[8] that is exclusively devoted to attacking concepts and formulations found in transmitted military texts, especially *Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法 (often referred to below as *Sunzi*).

In this essay I will argue that, viewed from the perspective of the Warring States (as opposed to that of the Han, 206 BC–220 AD, or later periods), a "Masters discourse" can not be meaningfully studied without attention to the evidence afforded by sources like *Sunzi bingfa.* Through a close reading of it against the record of other pre-Qin "Masters," I will demonstrate that the writings attributed to "Master Sun" were both a product of, and contributor to, the same discourse that included the material found in the *Analects*, *Mozi*, *Dao de jing*, *Xunzi*, and all the most conventionally exemplary sources for the early Masters. The dynamics of the Masters discourse of the Warring States thus cannot be fully reconstructed without reference to the traditions concerning "Master Sun" (among others).

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[6] Ban Gu 班固, *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962) 30, pp. 1755–63; Robin D.S. Yates, "New Light on Ancient Chinese Military Texts: Notes on Their Nature and Evolution, and the Development of Military Specialization in Warring States China," *TP* 74 (1988), pp. 211–48.

[7] *Xunzi* 6/21/8–25/3; *Zhuangzi* 33/97/11–101/2. All citations of primary sources, unless otherwise noted, are to ICS concordance editions: D.C. Lau 劉殿爵 and Chen Fong Ching 陳方正, eds., *Xian Qin Liang Han guji zhuzi suoyin congkan* 先秦两漢古籍逐字索引叢刊 (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1992–2002). Citations are in the form of chapter/page/line. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

[8] *Xunzi* 15/68/1–75/2.

This is not to suggest that the teachings attributed to "Master Sun" and "Master Kong (Confucius)" or "Master Mo" were the product of similar or in any way equivalent groups. As I have argued elsewhere, the model that assumes the seated circle of a Master and his disciples as the social "reality" behind any and all textual production in the Warring States (so that, if we have a text eponymously titled *Guanzi*, it must have originated in the teaching of Master Guan to his disciples, and have been transmitted by similarly constituted groups as "disciples" became "Masters") is far too narrow to account for all or even most of our sources.[9] But even though our sources were obviously the product of many structurally diverse milieus, their engagement with one another over an array of shared concerns can be characterized, in large part, by a common adoption of the figure of "the Master" as an idiom of discursive interaction.

"MILITARY METHODS 兵法" AND THE RHETORIC AND LOGIC OF MASTERS DISCOURSE

In the text titled *Yu cong* IV 語叢四 by the initial editors of the Guodian manuscripts, we find this passage, which I label passage A:

> In general the way of persuasion begins with the crux. When you have found the crux of his (i.e. your opponent's) words, always have something with which to match it. Having matched and refuted [his words], always cover up and move on. Do not let him understand [the crux] of our argument]. When the opposing kingdom lacks a general, rush on like a stream.[10] 凡說之道, 急者爲首. 既得其急言, 必有及之. 及之而不可, 必文以過, 毋令知我. 彼邦亡將, 流澤而行.

This text, datable to circa 300 BC, describes a seminal realm of literati concern. Warring States sources portray "persuasion 說" as a fundamental endeavor of knights (*shi* 士) in the roles of "Masters and disciples," and it so happens that *Yu cong* IV was discovered interred along with other texts that appeal to "Masterly" authority or that engage the concerns of various early Masters.[11] Compare the above with the following passage from *Sunzi bingfa*, one of its most emblematic passages; I label it B:

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[9] Andrew Meyer, "What Made Mo Di a Master? Exploring the Construction of a Category in Warring States Sources," *TP* 101.4–5 (2015), pp. 1–27.

[10] Jingmenshi Bowuguan 荊門市博物館, *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu Press, 1998), pp. 105, 217. I have followed the transcription of the original editors in rendering the text into present-day logographs. Scott Cook orders the strips differently on the basis of rhyme. Even in his altered reconstruction, however, the resonances with the military texts are visible. See idem,, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study and Complete Translation, Volume II* (Ithaca: Cornell University East Asia Program, 2012), pp. 919–25.

[11] Only one other text among those interred, *Zi yi* 緇衣 (*Black Robes*), used the formula "The Master said 夫子曰" (Jingmenshi Bowuguan, *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*, pp. 17–20, 129–

> [On] the day that an assault is undertaken, close the passes and break the tallies, do not admit [the enemy's] envoys. Stay strictly to the upper hall of the temple in prosecuting the affair. When the enemy opens a breach, you must quickly enter it. Beat him to what he cherishes, subtly time your encounter. Make a beeline for the enemy and thus decide the battle. Thus be like a virgin girl at the outset (staying strictly indoors so as not to be seen); when the enemy opens a door, be like a darting rabbit in the end. The enemy will not be able to grasp you.[12] 是故政舉之日, 夷關折符, 無通其使, 厲于廊廟之上, 以誅其事, 敵人開闔, 必亟入之. 先其所愛, 微與之期, 踐墨隨敵, 以決戰爭. 是故始如處女, 敵人開戶, 後如脱兔, 敵不及拒.

The thematic and rhetorical echoes between passages A and B are remarkable. Both conceptualize competition in the same terms, underscoring the need to strike at the crux of the opponent's position and take swift advantage of gaps in his defenses, while at the same time affording the opponent as little knowledge of one's own plans and disposition as possible. These correspondences, taken together with the seamless ease with which A appropriates warfare as a metaphor for debate, suggest the backdrop of a common discourse. The composer of A may never have read passage B (indeed, when the former was originally composed, the latter might not yet have been written), but for him to have expected that his audience would find his terse metaphor both intelligible and rhetorically effective, he would have had to at least been aware of the ideas articulated in B as a kind of "common wisdom" concerning military affairs.

This does not suggest any particular "directionality of influence" or force us to seek the origin of one passage in the other. But it does indicate that A and B were written to overlapping audiences and were engaged in a common extended "conversation." Since passage A was speaking to the heart of the concerns of the larger world of (actual or notional) "Masters and disciples," we cannot assume that passage B was not doing so. If passage A must be situated in the early "Masters discourse," then arguably so must passage B, and by extension, the entire *Sunzi bingfa*.

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41). But the themes, concepts, textual allusions, and literary figures that pervade the Guodian texts place them squarely among the sources for the early Masters. See Scott Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study and Complete Translation, Volume I* (Ithaca: Cornell University East Asia Program, 2012), pp. 97–185.

[12] *Sunzi zhuzi suoyin* 孫子逐字索引 A11/13/5–7; in D. C. Lau and Chen Fong Ching, eds., *Bingshu sizhong* 兵書四种 (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1992; hereafter cited as *Sunzi*).

THE TEACHINGS OF "MASTER SUN"

We cannot, of course, know the precise form in which the material collected in *Sunzi bingfa* circulated during the time of the Warring States. Much recent scholarship suggests that stable texts such as *Sunzi bingfa*, in the form it has been transmitted to us today, were not in any way the norm of textual production in the classical era, and that the compositions of literati circulated in more irregular segments that could be variably recombined and restructured according to the needs and preferences of individual users and redactors.[13] We can be fairly confident, however, that the contents of the current text existed in some form by the late-fourth century BC, and that by the early to mid-third century BC it came to be associated with the figure of "Master Sun."[14] This latter figure was a personage who reportedly lived in the sixth century BC, at least a century and a half before any of the content of the transmitted *Sunzi bingfa* was composed.[15] Thus where, when, and by whom the contents of the transmitted text were first associated with its putative "author" are open questions that may never be resolved by available evidence. What is certain, however, is that the teachings of "Master Sun" were not produced for or confined within a narrowly circumscribed "technical" realm. They engaged and impacted the whole world of "Masters and disciples" that prevailed among Warring States literati.

This can be demonstrated by reference to both the text of *Sunzi bingfa* itself and the sources that respond to its content. The opening lines of our transmitted version deploy key terms from the lexicon of the early Masters: "As for the military, it is the great affair of the state, the terrain of life and death, the Way of survival and extinction. It cannot but be investigated 兵者, 國之大事, 死生之地, 存亡之道, 不可不察也."[16] Delimiting "the military" as a topic of ultimate concern was not common to other Masters teachings. However, in addressing the issues of "the state" and "the Way," the composer of this passage dons the mantle of a Master. These latter terms were two of the most exemplary and indicative of a Masters teaching: to be a Master was to claim to have the authority to speak on the state and the Way. "The Way" was so closely associated with the Masters that it was incorporated in a phrase distinguishing the Masters and their disciples from others in the Warring States who shared their social status: "knights who have a Way 有道之士."[17]

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[13] See, e.g, Eric Maeder, "Some Observations on the Composition of the 'Core Chapters' of the *Mozi*," *EC* 17 (1992), pp. 27–82; Mark Csikszentmihayli, "Confucius and the *Analects* in the Han," in Bryan W. Van Norden, ed., *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2002), pp. 134–62; William G. Boltz, "The Composite Nature of Early Chinese Texts," in Martin Kern, ed., *Text and Ritual in Early China* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2005), pp. 50–78.

[14] *Han Feizi* 49/148/25 reports that "every household keeps the writings of Sun [Wu] and Wu [Qi] 藏孫、吳之書者家有之"; and *Xunzi* 15/68/9–10 attributes to "Sun [Wu] and Wu [Qi]" the teaching that "what the military values is force and profit, what it practices is alteration and deception 兵之所貴者埶利也, 所行者變詐也." This testimony combined with parallels to *Sunzi bingfa* perceived in excavated texts such as *Cao Mie zhi zhen* 曹蔑之陣 evince the currency of the "teachings of Master Sun" in the mid- to late-Warring States. For *Cao Mie zhi zhen*, see Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, ed., *Shanghai Bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu (si)* 上海博物馆藏戰國楚竹書 (四) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004), pp. 89–156. Ernest Caldwell, on the basis of *Cao Mie zhi zhen*, makes similar points to my own about the relationship between military writings and the larger Masters discourse; Caldwell, "Promoting Action in Warring States Philosophy," *EC* 37 (2014), pp. 259–90.

[15] The anachronistic attribution of the text has been widely noted by scholars. For a survey and discussion, see Victor Mair, *The Art of War: Sunzi's Military Methods* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2007), pp. 9–42.

Another mode in which the preceding passage marks itself as the teachings of a Master is that of exegesis. It would have been recognizable to Warring States elites as a reworking of a common adage: "The great affairs of the state are sacrifice and warfare 國之大事, 在祀與戎."[18] As Mark Edward Lewis has outlined in his seminal work, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, the original saying neatly encapsulated the ethos of the Bronze Age aristocracy, whose claims to social supremacy rested on the twin foundations of martial valor and sacral duty.[19] The rephrasing of this formula strips it (and the state upon which it focuses) of all association with the aristocracy. Sacrifice, a domain exclusive to those of exalted pedigree, has been eliminated. The warrior's province of *rong* 戎, or "warfare," has been transmuted to that of *bing* 兵, the common foot-soldier (and by extension, the military that he and his fellows comprised). This kind of reworking of tradition was, like pronouncements on the "state" and the "Way," hallmarks of the presumed authority of a Master. A Master was marked by his ability to explicate the "correct" meaning of traditional cultural forms and messages for the people of his own day.[20]

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[16] *Sunzi* A1/1/3.

[17] For example: *Lüshi chunqiu* 13.5/66/24, 15.23/82/25, 16.2/91/28; *Han Feizi* 20/38/12, 34/103/6. Such a distinction was made necessary because there were so many *shi* who were not Masters or disciples, and whose activities competed with or discredited the Masters' claims to status and authority. Examples would include technical specialists like diviners or medical practitioners and "wandering bravoes 游侠."

[18] *Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B8.13.2/209/19.

[19] Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany: State U. New York P., 1990), pp. 15–52.

[20] For example, *Analects* 3.12/5/24; *Mozi* 1.7 (7)/17–27.

As Lewis demonstrated, the antipathy that its opening passage expresses towards the ethos of the aristocracy pervades the text of *Sunzi bingfa*: "The disappearance of the fighting man as an actor on the field of battle, his absorption by the commander, and his transformation into an inanimate object, an animal, a child, or a woman all implied the denial of the ideal of the heroic, individual warrior that had animated the Zhou nobility."[21] Where the "martial" realm of the Bronze Age aristocratic warrior was built upon an ideal of heroic courage, the essence of the *Sunzi*'s "military methods (兵法 *bingfa*)" is founded on the assumption that the army, in aggregate, is a mass of cowardice. Officers and men will weep upon receiving the orders to advance, they can only be counted on to display courage when they are trapped and must fight for their lives.[22] Where aristocratic combat was a genteel affair hemmed in by protocol and ceremony, the *Sunzi*'s commander is enjoined never to attack without possession of some advantage (fair or unfair), and to indiscriminately incinerate the enemy with fire whenever the need and opportunity arises.[23]

This agenda reflects the social conditions prevailing in the late Warring States. Armies had evolved from small bands of chariot-mounted aristocrats to huge masses of crossbow-armed peasant conscript infantrymen. In this new tactical climate personal valor was no longer a functional ideal. Peasant conscripts faced none of the social consequences that might deter them from displays of cowardice, and the need for units to move and shoot in unison made conspicuous acts of bravery disruptive of tactical coherence. Despite these developments, the rulers and elites of the Warring States continued to adhere to obsolete notions of aristocratic heroism. The teachings of "Master Sun" are opposed to this outmoded world view, exhorting readers to adopt a new perspective more in line with the tactical and strategic realities of the day.[24]

This kind of reformist agenda in response to changing social and political conditions is another hallmark of Masters discourse. Opposition to aristocratic mores was a unifying theme of the teachings associated with widely divergent Masters; so much so that it might be construed as a defining parameter of the role of Master itself. Figures as doctrinally opposed as Mencius and Mo Di 墨翟 are depicted (in their eponymous texts) making virtually identical attacks upon aristocratic values and prejudices.[25] Such thematic consistency was a product of the social circumstances in which the sources pertaining to the Masters were produced. The realm of "Masters and their disciples" was almost invariably that of *shi* 士, or knights – low-level aristocrats from dispossessed noble families who lacked the credentials of high birth and wealth enjoyed by the rulers of the Warring States and their close kin.[26] In those conditions, the participants in Masters discourse not only had to argue in defense of their doctrinal precepts and policy proposals, but also in defense of their legitimate authorization to speak on such matters at all. The position of "Master" itself was thus constructed in part as a remedy for this social impediment. The "Master" occupied a parallel realm of authority and prestige separate from but equivalent to that of the aristocracy. The dignity of that purchase gave the Master (and, by extension, the teachings attributed to him and any disciples who promulgated them) license to address those who, by all conventional standards, were his social "betters."[27]

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[21] Lewis*, Sanctioned Violence,* 112.

[22] *Sunzi* A11/12/1–6.

[23] *Sunzi* A6/5/1–6/14, A12/13/9–23.

[24] Andrew Meyer and Andrew Wilson, "*Sunzi bingfa* as History and Theory," in Bradford A. Lee and Karl F. Walling, eds., *Strategic Logic and Political Rationality: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 95–113.

The emergent dynamics of Masters discourse thus provided the formulators of "Master Sun" the perfect platform from which to embark upon a critique of the martial ethos of the aristocracy. Indeed, we can find striking parallels between the teachings attributed to Master Sun and arguments reportedly propounded by otherwise starkly different Masters. The cult of martial valor posed a liability for Masters and disciples because it inspired rulers to extend recognition and patronage to wandering bravoes (*youxia* 游俠) who sought fame by dueling with swords.[28] The favor shown these "knights" made the status credentials of the knights engaged in Masters discourse, who were devoted predominantly to civil pursuits, suspect. Thus arguments like those posited in "The Discourse on Swords" chapter of *Zhuangzi*, where the putative author of the text appears at the court of Wei in swordsman's garb and delivers an ironic persuasion that "cures" the ruler of his fascination for swordplay,[29] can be found throughout the sources. In fact, *Sunzi* lampoons Cao Gui 曹劌 and Zhuan Zhu 專諸, famous warriors who served as paragons for the type of swashbuckler satirized in "Discourse on Swords."[30] That two texts so ideologically out of phase as *Sunzi* and *Zhuangzi* should nonetheless align so closely in rhetoric is an indication of shared generic conventions and areas of thematic concern.

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[25] Compare, for example, the critiques of aristocratic martial valor to be found at *Mozi* 11.3 (46)/103/15–17 and *Mencius* 2.2/8/24–5.

[26] There is a large and growing literature on the importance of *shi* in the textual production of the Warring States. The early paradigm-setting study in this regard was Hsu Cho-yun 許倬雲, *Ancient China in Transition* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1965). Hsu, however, was particularly concerned with the phenomenon of social mobility in early China. Comparatively recent studies have focused more generally on the nature and role of the *shi* in politics and culture. They include Yu Yingshi 余英時, *Shi yu Zhongguo wenhua* 士與中國文化 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2000); Liu Zehua 劉則華, *Xian Qin shi ren yu shehui* 先秦士人與社會 (rev. edn., Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2004); Yan Buke 閻步克, *Shi dafu zhengzhi yansheng shigao* 士大夫政治演生史稿 (Beijing: Beijing Daxue chubanshe, 1996); Shirley Chan, *The Confucian Shi: Official Service and the Confucian Analects* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004); Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 2009).

[27] Many anecdotes could be cited as evincing this phenomenon. Two outstanding exemplars would be *Mozi* 12.1(47)/104/3–8; *Mencius* 4.2/19/10–20/12.

[28] *Han Feizi*, 49/147/21–22. For a general history of *youxia*, see James J.Y. Liu, *The Chinese Knight-Errant* (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 1967).

MASTER VS. MASTER:
POLEMICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE LARGER DISCOURSE

Finding purchase from which to critique the traditional ethos of the aristocracy is not the only motive that persuasively explains the construction of "Master Sun." It is no accident that a source like *Xunzi* would contain a chapter devoted to "debunking" the teachings of Master Sun. *Sunzi* assertions and arguments clearly challenge the basic tenets of many other Masters' putative teachings, so many that the anticipated audience of the text was arguably other literati as much as rulers and military leaders, and "Master Sun" was created as much as a platform for the critique of the teachings associated with other Masters as for attacking aristocratic values.

One indication of this agenda is the choice of Sun Wu 孫武 as a Master figure. By adopting the anachronous Sun Wu as the personification of their message, the advocates of the teachings of Master Sun deployed a technique evinced in other sources such as *Guanzi* and the *Dao de jing*. In a society that revered ancestral antiquity, teachings were perceived to enjoy greater authority with deepening age. By situating the origin of their message in the seventh and early sixth centuries BC, the promulgators of the ideas transmitted in those works and in *Sunzi bingfa* all effected an end run around Confucius, claiming greater authority than Confucius even as they subscribed to a role, that of Master, first constructed around the figure of "Master Kong."[31]

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[29] *Zhuangzi* 30/91/1–92/16.

[30] *Sunzi* A11/12/5.

[31] For the *Guanzi*, see Allyn Rickett, *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China, Volume I* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1985), pp. 14–24. For *Laozi*, see Denecke, *Dynamics of Masters Literature*, p. 208. Denecke notes that "*Laozi* is an ingenious at-

Why would the inventors of Master Sun address themselves to other literati in this fashion? A clue again can be gleaned from the opening line of the transmitted text: "The military is the great affair of the state." This assertion starkly contradicts the teachings attributed to the majority of putatively early Masters. In the *Analects,* for example, when duke Ling of Wei asks Confucius about military tactics, the Master replies, "I have heard of matters pertaining to sacrificial vessels, but I have never studied the affairs of the army on campaign 俎豆之事, 則嘗聞之矣; 軍旅之事, 未之學也."[32] Like the opening line of *Sunzi*, Confucius's reply alludes to the old adage concerning "sacrifice and warfare," but the assessment of the *Analects* reverses that of *Sunzi bingfa*: warfare is eliminated in favor of ritual. Moreover, for Confucius to declare that he has "never studied" military affairs conveys the maximum opprobrium. "Study" is the cardinal practice for the Confucius of the *Analects*; "loving study" is the only distinction that he will grant himself by way of self-praise.[33] Blithely admitting to not having studied something is an unequivocal signal that this subject matter need not and perhaps should not be studied.

The teachings of Confucius were not hegemonic in the larger Masters discourse, but as one of the first Masters given form through various writings, the figure of Confucius did wield great authority, even among literati who openly opposed the doctrines promulgated by his self-professed latter-day disciples.[34] Moreover, since martial excellence was a hallmark of the traditional aristocracy, status insecurity drove those knights engaged in Masters discourse (who pursued chiefly "civil" pursuits) to denigrate martial affairs by way of defending their own aristocratic credentials, creating a marked "anti-martial" bias. The Mo Di figure apparent in *Mozi*, for example, reportedly placed a general ban on offensive warfare,[35] and is depicted as berating a "wandering bravo" for his delusional understanding of "courage" as a virtue.[36] By the end of the fourth century BC the Masters Song Xing 宋鈃 and Yin

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tempt at chronological usurpation… to claim a place at the very beginning of Masters Literature, disinheriting the Confucians of this monopoly." She calls this rhetorical move "without peer in the Chinese tradition," but I would argue that *Guanzi* and *Sunzi* also employed this technique to similar effect.

[32] *Lun yu* 15.1/41/28–9.

[33] *Lun yu* 5.28/11/24.

[34] For an example of an ideological opponent begrudgingly admitting Confucius's salience as a model, see *Mozi* 12.2 (48)/109/15–17.

[35] *Mozi* 5.1(17)/30/14–5.3/35/28.

[36] *Mozi* 11.2 (45)/103/15–17.

Wen 尹文 reportedly preached a doctrine that called for a total ban on the military altogether.[37]

Master Sun and his putative focus on "military methods" was thus in diametrical opposition to the general orientation of the Masters at large. "X is the great affair of the state" might serve as a generic litmus test for the Masters of the Warring States, in the sense that to be a Master (as opposed to the purveyor of a more narrowly technical doctrine) was to posit some primary concept that could stand for the placeholder X. The values we might extrapolate for X would be very variable (for example, "humaneness and rightness 仁義" or "Heaven's will 天志"). Prior to the emergence of the Master Sun, however, there was general agreement as to what X was not: it was not "the military." Master Sun's declaration that the military was pivotally foundational to the state was an aggressive incursion into the discourse of the Masters, and its implications directly challenged many of their reportedly most central doctrinal formulations.

This was true in part because the teachings of Master Sun (as they can be reconstructed from his eponymous text) drew heavily upon the conceptual arsenal of earlier Masters. Master Sun's radical new perspective on military affairs would arguably not have been possible if it had not utilized a preexisting body of theory. For example, in chapter 2 of *Sunzi*, we read:

> In the standards of employing the military, with 1,000 fast chariots, 1,000 armored chariots, 100,000 mailed infantry, carrying food for 1,000 *li*, then the internal and external cash outlays, necessities for guest-clients, supplies of glue and lacquer, provisions for chariots and infantry, will require a daily expenditure of 1,000 gold. Only then can an army of 100,000 be mobilized. [Even] if it is used in battle and victorious, if [the campaign] is protracted then weapons will be blunted and morale diminished, if a walled city is assaulted then strength will be depleted. If the army is long engaged it will become impossible to meet the expenses of the state....Thus one who makes protracted use of the military and profits the state has never been seen. If one does not completely understand the harm of using the military, one cannot completely understand the profit of using the military.[38] 凡用兵之法, 馳車千駟, 革車千乘, 帶甲十萬; 千里饋糧, 則內外之費賓客之用, 膠漆之材, 車甲之奉, 日費千金, 然後十萬之師舉矣. 其用戰也勝, 久則鈍兵挫銳, 攻城則力

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[37] *Zhuangzi* 33/99/2.

[38] *Sunzi* A2/1/25–29.

> 屈, 久暴師則國用不足… . 夫兵久而國利者, 未之有也. 故不盡知用兵之害者, 則不能盡知用兵之利也.

This passage articulates what at the time of its composition was a radical redefinition of military affairs. In the ethos of the Bronze Age aristocracy, warfare was a transcendental good the value of which could not be assessed in material terms. From that earlier perspective even a campaign that ended in defeat could, on some level, be viewed positively, as it displayed the courage of the combatants and shed blood that was pleasing to the spirits.[39] *Sunzi* insists that henceforth military affairs must be gauged strictly in terms of material “profit (*li* 利).” In this new mode of assessment even a victorious campaign must be deemed a failure if it brought less profit to the state than the cost of deployment:

> One who is victorious in battle and successful in assault but sees no increase thereof is ill-augured, this is called wasted expense. Thus I say, “The enlightened ruler reflects upon it, the good commander studies it.” If there is no profit, do not move, if there is no gain, do not employ [forces], if there is no danger, do not do battle. A ruler cannot mobilize the army from anger, a commander cannot join battle out of frustration. They move only in accord with profit, and stop if no profit is to be had.[40] 夫戰勝攻取, 而不修其攻者凶, 命曰費留. 故曰: 明主慮之, 良將修之, 非利不動, 非得不用, 非危不戰. 主不可以怒而興師, 將不可以慍而致戰; 合于利而動, 不合于利而止.

This reinvention of military affairs on a material basis owes itself to the prior theoretical work of the Mohists. The teachings of Master Mo reportedly redefined the basic values at the foundation of political and social power in material terms, arguing, for example, that a concept like “rightness (*yi* 義)” could not be understood except in terms of profit.[41] The moral excellence of a state could not be measured in the elegance of its ceremonials and music or in the austere dignity of its ruling house, but only in the sheer volume of food, clothing, and shelter it produced for its people. Analogously, Master Sun was made to assert that military excellence can not be measured in intangibles such as honor, but must be assessed in starkly quantifiable material terms. Both “Masters” warned that the failure to adopt this material gauge of value will result in the destruction of the state.

We can see that the situation of “Sun Wu” within the discourse of the Masters is not a rhetorical posture, but an organic logical agenda.

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[39] For an expression of this earlier world view, see *Chu ci* 2.10/7/7–13 (“Guo shang” 國殤).

[40] *Sunzi* A12/13/19–22.

[41] *Mozi* 7.2 (28)/46/7–15.

Though Master Sun was putatively a general and military theorist, the perspective on military affairs attributed to him entailed reconceptualizing both the military and the state. Its central argument is that these two realms of concern must be understood in terms of one another if they are to be at all functional. The military will not be at all efficacious unless its utility for the state is accepted as the first principle for its operation. Conversely, the state will not survive unless its leaders embrace the military as the basic framework upon which the state is structured.

This latter perspective entailed an array of logical conflicts between Master Sun and the other Masters for whom we possess sources. For example, though Master Sun and Master Mo putatively agreed that "profit" is of cardinal importance, they diverged in assessing its doctrinal implications. As noted above, *Mozi* insists that there must be a ban on offensive warfare, asserting that this is clearly the only way to bring the most profit and the least harm to the world. *Sunzi*, by contrast, refuses to constrain the operation of the military so categorically. Though *Sunzi* markedly prefers the defensive use of the military as entailing less risk and less expense, nowhere is Master Sun made to exclude the possibility that taking the offensive *might* yield more profit than not. This is exemplified in chapter 3 of the transmitted *Sunzi bingfa*, the title of which, "Planning the Offensive" 謀攻,[42] is a neat inversion of the corresponding "core chapter" of *Mozi* ("Against Offense" 非攻). Such chapter titles were likely appended by Han-era redactors, but the *Sunzi* text itself makes the point that while assaulting a walled city is the least preferable option for the commander, it remains at his disposal. "Seizing another's city 拔人之城" and "destroying another's state 毀人之國" are presented as fundamental missions of the military for Master Sun,[43] a complete repudiation of the moral doctrine of Master Mo.

In the final analysis, it is not "profit" that controls the logical agenda of either Master Mo or Master Sun. *Sunzi* finds profit a very versatile tool with which to conceptualize military outcomes, but it is the strategic and tactical imperatives of military force that overdetermine the teachings of Master Sun, not an abstract concern for profit per se.[44] Though reimagining the military as a mechanism for bringing profit to the state entails a shift away from the reductionist view of it as a mere combat force, constraints upon the combat faculties of the military distort its potential to profit the state. For example, it is better to win resources and territory through threats and intimidation than through costly invasion, but at the same time threats and intimidation will not work unless invasion is a plausible possibility.

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[42] *Sunzi* A3/2/16.

[43] *Sunzi* A3/2/24–25.

[44] This is analogous to the *Mozi*'s application of profit as a logical category, which is overdetermined by the moral imperatives of rightness and Heaven's Will in parallel fashion.

The inherent logic of "military methods," from the perspective of Master Sun, makes the world view of the Master Mo unrealistic and unworkable, as demonstrated by the penultimate chapter of the transmitted *Sunzi bingfa*, "The Attack by Fire" 火攻. Though *Sunzi* urges, on the calculation of profit, that the ruler be circumspect before mobilizing the military, it acknowledges that once the commitment to deployment is made, the tactical dynamic of the campaign compels the commander to choose the most efficient destruction of the enemy at the least risk to his own forces.[45] Thus, Master Sun is made to posit in a phrase calculated to maximally offend the adherents of Mo Di and other Masters, "One who assists the attack with fire is enlightened 以火佐攻者明."[46]

When the military was used chiefly in pursuit of honor or divine favor, there was little distinction to be made between a "*bing fa*" and the set of standards and conventions that structured the nonmilitary dimensions of aristocratic life. As the above comparison between the teachings attributed to Master Mo and Master Sun suggests, however, the shift to profit as the basic gauge of military effectiveness induced a rupture between what *Sunzi* terms "military methods" and the norms prevailing in other social domains. This is exemplified by the famous assertion that when the commander is on campaign, "there are commands from the ruler that he will not accept 君命有所不受."[47] All decisions influencing campaign outcomes must be made by the individual who has the closest firsthand knowledge of material conditions and the specialized knowledge required to yield the highest gain. By this principle the commander, a subject while in court, becomes a sovereign authority while on campaign, disturbing the universally coherent and consistent scope of royal authority reportedly advocated by figures such as Confucius and Mo Di.

As was true for the authority of the ruler, the military methods reportedly taught by Master Sun undermined the formulation of an ultimately coherent and consistent Way. Since the pursuit of profit transformed command into a process of collecting and interpreting information, effective military leadership precluded honesty or transparency: "The military is the Way of deception 兵者, 詭道也."[48] Where the Confucius of the *Analects* declares that the salvation of society resides in the "rectification of names"[49] and the Mo Di of *Mozi* asserts that all questions may be resolved by the adherence to "three standards,"[50] Master Sun enjoins leaders to conceal or distort the truth about all things at every opportunity. Though Confucius and Mo Di were vehemently opposed figures within the larger Masters discourse, they were said to have concurred with one another in the search for universally shareable values. The world view attributed to Master Sun is incommensurate with such a goal.

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[45] *Sunzi* A12/13/9–23.

[46] *Sunzi* A12/13/19.

[47] *Sunzi* A8/7/29.

This conflict might not be so profound if, in the formulations found in *Sunzi*, the realm of the "military" were delimited and containable. This is not the case, however. The teachings of Master Sun put the state at the heart of the social world and the military at the heart of the state. This is made clear in *Sunzi bingfa*'s final chapter, "Using Spies" 用間, which declares that the successful use of the military relies upon advance knowledge that can only be obtained by espionage. Comprehensive intelligence is developed through the integration of five types of spies into a "spirit-like skein 神紀" serving as an information conduit from the enemy court to the commander. The first link in this network is formed by the acquisition of a "turned spy," that is, an officer or official of the commander's own kingdom who has been enlisted by the enemy.[51] In this respect, the domain of military affairs does not stop within the precincts of the army and is not restricted to times of war, but extends to all officials in all parts of government at all times. Military leadership thus does not merely require that one deceive the enemy, but that one deceive everyone and anyone, always. "The Way of Deception" is thus the prevailing reality for all of humankind.

In promulgating these ideas, Master Sun is made to employ language that broadcasts a deliberate engagement with and subversive opposition to the existing perspective of revered Masters. "Using Spies," for example, states that "one who is not humane and righteous is not able to employ spies 非仁義不能使間,"[52] neatly inverting what would be the conventional normative assessment of both Mo Di and Confucius. Master Sun, moreover, is made to declare that the rise of both the Shang

[48] *Sunzi* A1/1/16.

[49] *Lun yu* 13.3/33/27–34/3.

[50] *Mozi* 9.3(35)/58/19–22

[51] *Sunzi* A13/14/9–12, 21–24.

[52] *Sunzi* A13/14/14–15.

and Zhou dynasties resulted from their employment of spies,[53] insinuating his world view into the seminal moments putatively revered as normative models by other Masters.

To say that an "anti-military" posture was generally conventional in the personae of authoritative Masters is not to suggest that the Masters discourse was biased in favor of pacifism. The Confucius of the *Analects* openly advocates offensive warfare against those that have radically breached the ritual order of the Zhou kings.[54] While the Mo Di of *Mozi* bans offensive warfare, he freely advocates the use of any and all tactical measures to defend against assault, extending even to the use of spies (euphemistically labeled "scouts 候").[55] But the use of force in the putative teachings of these Masters is overdetermined by the moral tenets of their doctrines. Confucius castigates two disciples for failing to restrain their lord from attacking a neighbor in possession of strategically important terrain. At first glance Mo Di would seem to be more practical in his approach to force. *Mozi*, for example, advises that their families be detained as hostages to the good conduct of any spies sent out to scout the enemy.[56] But even this seemingly "pragmatic" agenda presumes a tactical universe that is morally circumscribed in ways that the teachings of Master Sun would not allow. Holding spies' families hostage is not an effective technique in the system found in *Sunzi bingfa*, since the entire espionage network is dependent upon recruiting spies among the enemy through bribery and coercion, a maneuver that would be proscribed by the *Mozi* as "offensive warfare." While both Confucius and Mo Di were made to teach that a moral world is only achievable through placing military force under discrete doctrinal constraints, Master Sun was constructed as an advocate for the position that moral outcomes, to the extent that they exist, can only be realized through an understanding and confrontation of the brutal dynamics of wholly unconstrained military force.

ON THE DEFENSIVE: THE RESPONSE TO *SUNZI BINGFA*

That the challenges the teachings of Master Sun posed were robust is evinced by the responses they evoked. The *Xunzi* chapter "Debating the Military" is an outstanding case in point. There we read:

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[53] *Sunzi* A13/14/26–27.

[54] *Lun yu* 14.21/39/6–11.

[55] *Mozi* 15.3(70)/139/15.

[56] *Mozi* 15.3(70)/139/15–19.

> The Lord of Linwu said: "…That which the military values is force and profit, what it practices is alteration and deception. One skilled at using the military sows confusion and moves in darkness, none knows where he will emerge. Sun [Wu] and Wu [Qi] used [this Way] and had no match in the world, why would they need to await the allegiance of the people?" 臨武君曰: … 兵之所貴者埶利也, 所行者變詐也. 善用兵者, 感忽悠闇, 莫知其所從出. 孫吳用之無敵於天下, 豈必待附民哉!
>
> Master Sun Qing (Xunzi) said: "Not so. What I take as the Way is the military of a humane person, the will of a King. What you value is expediency, scheming, force and profit, what you practice is attack, harassment, alteration and deception. This is the affair of the Lords of the Land. The military of a humane person can not be deceived. Those that can be deceived are the negligent and the idle, the weakened, those for whom there has been a disunion of moral potencies between ruler and minister, superior and inferior. Thus when a Jie (the tyrant whose wicked reign brought the Xia dynasty down) deceives a Jie, then there can still be the good fortune of the skillful over the clumsy. [But] when a Jie deceives a Yao (the virtuous sage-king of high antiquity), it is like throwing an egg at a stone, or stirring boiling water with one's finger, or using feathers to put out a fire–on entering one burns or drowns, that is all. Thus for the humane person, superior, inferior and the hundred commanders are all of one mind; the three armies unite their efforts. Minister towards the ruler and subordinates toward superiors are like sons serving their fathers, younger brothers serving older brothers, the hands and arms protecting the eyes, head, and torso. Deceiving and launching a surprise attack against [the humane person] is the same as warning him in advance and then attacking him. Moreover, when a humane person has the use of a state of ten hamlets, his commander has the intelligence from one-hundred hamlets. When he has the use of a state of one-hundred hamlets, his commander has the intelligence of one-thousand hamlets. When he has the use of a state of one-thousand hamlets, his commander has the intelligence from all within the four seas. He will certainly be clearly informed, forewarned, harmonious and united."[57]
>
> 孫卿子曰: 不然. 臣之所道, 仁者之兵, 王者之志也. 君之所貴, 權謀埶利也; 所行, 攻奪變詐也; 諸侯之事也. 仁人之兵, 不可詐也; 彼可詐者, 怠慢者也,

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[57] *Xunzi* 15/68/9–69/2.

> 路亶[58] 者也,君臣上下之間,渙然有離德者也. 故以桀詐桀,猶巧拙有幸焉. 以桀詐 堯,譬之: 若以卵投石,以指撓沸; 若赴水火,[59] 入焉焦沒耳. 故仁人上下, 百將一心, 三軍同力; 臣之於君也, 下之於上也, 若子之事父, 弟之事兄, 若手臂之扞頭 目而覆胸腹也, 詐而襲之, 與先驚而後擊之, 一也. 且仁人之用十里之國, 則將有百里之聽; 用百里之國, 則將有千里之聽; 用千里之國, 則將有四海之聽, 必將聰 明警戒和摶而一.

The degree to which the teachings of Master Sun (and other military "Masters") have shifted the terms of the discourse is on display in this passage. The narrative setting is starkly different than the scene depicted in *Analects* 15.1. However hostile Master Xun may be to the perspective of his opponent, he engages the Lord of Linwu fully and directly rather than turning away in disgust at the very suggestion of discussing military affairs. Here *Xunzi* responds directly to the threat posed by "Master Sun" to the world view of Confucius's self-professed disciples. If "force (*shi* 勢, the basic gauge of combat power that *Sunzi* posits as determinative of battlefield outcomes)"[60] and deception can serve the integrative function reportedly described by Master Sun, the moral order for which Master Xun is said to have argued is neither logical nor practical.

Moreover, rather than simply declare Master Sun's ideas illegitimate or immoral, here Master Xun "proves" that humaneness can nullify the effects of force and deception in the terms of Master Sun himself. In admitting that a "Jie [may] deceive a Jie," *Xunzi* 15 implicitly grants that there is much empirical evidence for the efficacy of force and deception when opponents are equally morally deficient. Beyond this, the passage describes the strategic asymmetry that occurs when a Jie faces a Yao in metaphors that would be just as at home in *Sunzi*. Indeed, the first in the chain, "like throwing an egg against a stone," appears in *Sunzi* itself, where its inverse is used to describe the successful utilization of "force."[61] The necessary conditions Master Xun lays down for military success might be different than those of Master Sun, but the material circumstances of that success are the same. Even the mechanisms of victory are common between the two figures: like the skillful commander attributively idealized by Master Sun, the humane person of *Xunzi* 15 stands triumphant because his moral excellence gives him access to the broadest field of intelligence.

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[58] My translation follows Wang Niansun's recommended emendation (*Xunzi zhuzi suoyin* p. 68, n. 16).

[59] My translation follows the emendation based on parallel text in *Xin xu* and *Hanshi waizhuan* (*Xunzi zhuzi suoyin* p. 68, n. 19).

[60] *Sunzi* A5/4/8–29.

[61] *Sunzi* A5/4/11.

Another text which evinces a profound discursive engagement with the teachings of Master Sun is the *Dao de jing* 道德經. Establishing the relative date of the relevant sources is difficult, thus it is not possible to establish a clear chronological "dialogue." Such an exercise is not necessary, however. As was the case when comparing passages from *Yu cong* IV and *Sunzi bingfa*, the sources clearly show that the *Dao de jing* and the teachings of Master Sun were addressed to common questions and overlapping areas of concern:

> Those who use the military have a saying: "I do not dare to be host yet play the guest, I do not dare to advance an inch yet retreat a foot." This is called "moving without moving," "rolling up one's sleeve without an arm," "opposing without an enemy," "arming without a weapon." There is no calamity greater than underestimating the enemy. Underestimating the enemy is near to losing my treasure.[62] 用兵有言: "吾不敢爲主而爲客, 不敢進寸而退尺." 是謂行無行, 攘無臂, 扔無敵, 執无兵. 禍莫大於輕敵, 輕敵幾喪吾寶.

This passage accords with the general preference for defensive over offensive warfare expressed in *Sunzi bingfa*. It also echoes Master Sun's famous advice to "know the enemy, know yourself 知彼知己."[63]

Elsewhere in the *Dao de jing* terms are used in a technical sense that mirrors their deployment in the text of *Sunzi*: "One rules the state with regularity, one uses the military with the unorthodox, and one grasps the world by being without affairs 以正治國, 以奇用兵, 以無事取天下."[64] The deployment of the terms "regular 正" and "unorthodox 奇" here mirrors their use in *Sunzi*, where they denote the opposed tactical options available to a commander during an encounter with the enemy. The "regular" represents the standard formation or maneuver that is conventionally employed given certain circumstances. The "unorthodox" represents some unpredictable and unprecedented move upon the part of a commander employed to confuse the enemy and seize the tactical advantage.[65] *Sunzi* declares that victory depends upon employment of the "unorthodox," thus the *Dao de jing*'s observation that "one uses the military with the unorthodox" echoes the tactical doctrine reported in *Sunzi bingfa*.

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[62] *Laozi* 69/24/3–5.

[63] *Sunzi* A3/3/1.

[64] *Laozi* 57/19/16. This phrase appears in the Guodian *Laozi* parallels: Jingmenshi Bowuguan, *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*, pp. 5, 113.

[65] *Sunzi* A5/4/13–16.

As much as the *Dao de jing* uses terms and addresses themes shared in common with the teachings of Master Sun, it diverges from this latter perspective at significant points. For example, in *Dao de jing* 31 we read:

> A skilled military is an ill-augured implement. Some things are hateful, thus one possessed of the Way will not abide them. The gentleman reveres the left, those who use the military revere the right. The military is an ill-augured implement. It is not the implement of the gentleman. He uses it only when he must.[66] 夫佳兵者, 不祥之器. 物或惡之, 故有道不處. 君子居則貴左, 用兵則貴右. 兵者, 不祥之器, 非君子之器. 不得已而用之.

Both the *Dao de jing* and *Sunzi bingfa* agree that the ruler should deploy for combat "only when he must." But the former's overall normative assessment of the military and its role in the state overturns that attributed to Master Sun. *Sunzi bingfa* denies, for example, that war is the only or even the most frequent "use" of the military,[67] or that the military is an implement hateful to "those who possess the Way." The passage quoted above and other passages in the *Dao de jing* are not reconcilable with *Sunzi*'s basic assertion that "the military is the great affair of the state."

What is at issue? *Dao de jing* 80 speaks to a question that was of urgent political significance during the Warring States period:

> Keep the state small with few people. Make it so that they have weapons for squads and companies but do not use them. Make the people respect death and refrain from travelling far. Though they have boats and carts, no one boards them, though they have armor and weapons, no one deploys them. Make people revert to the use of the knotted rope. Let them savor their food, appreciate their clothes, rest secure in their lodgings, enjoy their customs. Though neighboring states see one another and can hear the sound of one another's chickens and dogs, let the people grow old and die without ever travelling back and forth.[68] 小國寡民, 使有什伯之器而不用, 使民重死而不遠徙. 雖有舟轝, 無所乘之; 雖有甲兵, 無所陳之. 使人復結繩而用之. 甘其食, 美其服, 安其居, 樂其俗, 鄰國相望, 雞犬之聲相聞, 民至老死, 不相往來.

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[66] *Laozi* 31/31/5–7. Part of this passage appears in the Guodian *Laozi* parallels: Jingmenshi Bowuguan, *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*, pp. 9, 121.

[67] See, e.g., *Sunzi* A3/2/22, which asserts that the supreme soldier attacks the enemy's plans 謀, the next best attacks the enemy's alliances 交, and only the tertiary soldier actually attacks the enemy's military. The former two instances are "uses" of the military that might not (depending upon the circumstances) require the soldiers to leave their barracks.

[68] *Laozi* 80/27/8–11.

Though this passage evokes an air of “primitivism,” it registers a prosaic point about the politics of the Warring States. The issue of whether “small states” might coexist underscores the larger centralizing trend of the period: states such as Qin, Qi, and Chu grew larger and larger through the destruction of small aristocratic courts and the conversion of their territory to “prefectures and districts.” This progressive consolidation of territorial power structures was the crucial function of the new military that is the focus of the teachings of Master Sun.

“ORDERING THE MANY”: *SUNZI BINGFA*’S DISTINCTIVE POSITION IN POLITICAL DEBATE

According to *Sunzi bingfa*, not only was the military the material implement by which political centralization was achieved, but it provided the conceptual template according to which the political realm might be reorganized: “Generally, ordering the many is like ordering the few; it resides in divisions and counting. Leading a large force in combat is like leading a small force; it resides in ‘forms and names’ 凡治眾如治寡, 分數是也. 鬥眾如鬥寡, 形名是也.”[69] The new military about which Master Sun putatively theorized, unlike the charismatic and kinship-centered world of the hereditary aristocracy, was organized along routine principles. A clear division of labor was enforced, allowing for a regular and consistent chain of command. This formulation also appears in the surviving fragments of early writings like those putatively authored by Shen Buhai 申不害 (ca. 400–ca. 337 BC), in which they are applied to the organization of the civil organs of state.[70] It is an open question whether these concepts originated in the military writings and migrated into political theory, or vice-versa. Whatever the case, these new forms of organization stood in contrast to the norms of aristocratic society, in which intricately variable and intertwining ties of status and kinship obligation made strictly regular discipline and coordination impossible.

The organizational principles embodied in this new military structure were progressively applied beyond the ambit of the army and the central court. By destroying customary cult centers and replacing them with regular administrative districts, the prevailing governments of the Warring States period were in effect imposing the template embodied in the new military organization upon the workings of local government, thus "militarizing" the political structure of local society. An acknowledgment of this centralizing process can be read in the *Sunzi* text itself:

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[69] *Sunzi* A5/4/10–11.

[70] See Herlee Creel, *Shen Pu-hai: A Chinese Political Philosopher of the Fourth Century B.C.* (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 1974).

> When the armies of a hegemon or king attack a large state its masses cannot unite. When his might is applied to the enemy, [the enemy's] alliances will not hold together. Thus he does not compete for the alliances of the world, he does not cultivate the authority of the world, he relies on his own personal [authority], applying his might to the enemy. Thus [the enemy's] cities can be taken, his state can be destroyed.[71] 夫霸王之兵, 伐大國則其眾不得聚, 威加于敵, 則其交不得合. 是故不爭天下之交, 不養天下之權, 信己之私, 威加于敵, 故其城可拔, 其國可墮.

This is the negative image of the political vision described in *Dao de jing* 80. In effect, the divergence in perspectives between these two sources is geopolitical in nature. The *Dao de jing* pictures a world settling into a multipolar homeostasis in which the military becomes inactive, while *Sunzi bingfa* envisions a future in which the military remains active until it is no longer needed. Put into other words, where Master Sun is made to envision (even advocate) a military solution for the larger strategic crisis of the Warring States, the *Dao de jing* urges a political solution. In this position the *Dao de jing* was not alone; other early Masters likewise putatively advocated the acceptance of a multipolar world as the foundation upon which a new normative political order could be built, one that resisted the total "militarization" of the united realm.[72] The teachings of Master Sun cast this position as idealistic and impractical. Though *Sunzi* was not alone in this stance (texts such as *Han Feizi* and *Shangjun shu* likewise contain arguments in favor of centralization and general routinization), the full parameters of this debate can only be clearly seen if one includes the teachings of Master Sun in one's analysis of the larger discourse of the Masters texts.

Though I have focused particularly on *Sunzi bingfa* in this essay, it must be stressed that the other military texts likewise should be integrated into the larger exploration of the Warring States "Masters discourse." The opening lines of the transmitted *Wuzi* 吳子, for example, have the eponymous protagonist appear in audience before marquis Wen of Wei 魏文侯 (r. 445–396 BC) in "Confucian 儒 dress," only to be told that the marquis "is not fond of the affairs of the army 不好軍旅之事."[73] The rhetorical framework of this scene (the implicit incongruity of "Master Wu's" attire and his theme) clearly broadcasts a claim to engage a larger Masters discourse, and an acknowledgment of the tensions such an engagement entails. Not only the larger *Wuzi* text, but other sources such as *Liu tao* 六韜, *Sima fa* 司馬法, and *Weiliaozi* 尉繚子, belong integrally within this field of analysis.

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[71] *Sunzi* A11/12/25–27.

[72] *Lüshi chunqiu* 吕氏春秋 7.5/36/19–37/16; *Huainanzi* 淮南子 15/142/21.

[73] *Wuzi zhuzi suoyin* 吳子逐字索引 C1/36/3 7, in Lau and Chen, eds., *Bingshu sizhong*.

In conclusion, we must broaden the scope of investigation if we are to comprehensively plumb the terrain of early Masters discourse. Firstly, to reconstruct the logical and rhetorical engagements that drove the production of our sources, we must focus not only on the reported exchanges between various "Masters", but also account for the social and political institutions and power structures with which the producers of early texts had to contend. "Master" was a novel source of authority being invented by our sources in order to carve out political space and claim social capital in a world dominated by an emerging fiscal-military state,[74] as well as by an entrenched hereditary aristocracy. Without some attempt to analyze how those contexts impacted their production, we will never be able to understand the semantic and thematic commonalities that occur across sources as seemingly disparate as, for example, *Sunzi bingfa*, *Mencius*, and *Zhuangzi.* Secondly, we cannot allow our conception of the field of investigation to be narrowed, either by the biases of our own intellectual culture (a hesitation to "mix" works of philosophy and military strategy) or the partisan agendas of former eras (the circumscription of a genre of *bing shu* distinct from *zi shu*). If we are truly to explore the Masters discourse as it emerged during the Warring States, we must include all of the sources that bear witness to the assertions and activities of its participants.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Sunzi	D. C. Lau and Chen Fong Ching, eds., *Sunzi zhuzi suoyin* 孫子逐字索引

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[74] John Brewer developed the concept of the "fiscal-military state" in examining early modern Britain. It is a state that has developed sophisticated mechanisms of revenue extraction and finance, along with specialized administrative personnel employed to put these assets at the disposal of the military, enabling the state to leverage its economic power to military ends. See John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (New York: Knopf, 1989).