

Krigskunsten (The Art of War). Danish translation by Jens Østergaard Petersen. With an Introduction by Michael Clemmesen and a Postscript by Jens Østergaard Petersen. Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1989. 251 pp.

A French translation of the Master Sun's treatise on the art of war (*Sun Zi bingfa*) was published as early as 1772. Since then a number of translations have appeared, into English, Russian, German, and Czech and other languages. In the 1960s the *Sun Zi bingfa* began to attract attention outside the circle of classical sinologists. At the time of the United States' military engagement in Vietnam, this text seemed to offer people in the West some insight into the basis of East Asian military thought.

The work here under review contains an annotated annotation of

the Chinese text and a postscript by the Danish sinologist Jens Østergaard Petersen, with an introduction by the military historian Michael H. Clemmesen.

The Danish translation of the *Sun Zi bingfa* by Jens Østergaard Petersen is based on the *Shiyi jia zhu Sun Zi* (Eleven commentators on Sun Zi) edition from the Song dynasty, which the translator has checked against variants in ancient Chinese encyclopedias as well as against the text on bamboo slips found in 1972 in the Western Han dynasty tomb at Yinqueshan in Shandong province. The translator is to be congratulated on a translation that reads well and is still close to the original.

In his introduction Michael Clemmesen compares the ideas of the *Sun Zi bingfa* with the ideas on warfare of Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), Antoine Henri Jomini (1779-1869), Basil Liddell Hart (1895-1970), and Mao Zedong (1893-1976). Clemmesen argues that the West European thinkers focus rather narrowly on the use of military means and thus see war as a task mainly for professionals. As a result they tend to divorce warfare from the totality of which it is a part. Sun Zi and his East Asian followers, on the other hand, have a more holistic view of war and do not regard it as primarily a task for professionals. In their view there are good rational reasons for avoiding war, but when war is inevitable, all means must be put to use to win it.

Jens Østergaard Petersen's postscript is a veritable dissertation comprising 148 pages. In the first part the author seeks to place the *Sun Zi bingfa* in a historical context by discussing such questions as: Was it written by philosophers or generals? When did the notions expressed in it arise and when and where was the text written? In particular, the author is interested in one of the central notions of the text, i.e. the notion of winning a certain and complete victory without engaging in war. The author argues that this notion is completely absent from the teachings of Confucius and also from the cluster of ideas around the notion of the Mandate of Heaven. However, he finds sprouts of it in what he calls the philosophy of "forms and names". What this term denotes is not entirely clear to this reviewer, but a text found at Yinqueshan on conventional and unconventional forms of struggle is taken as "one of the very few texts that systematically explains the philosophy of "forms and

names"" (p. 158). In the *Mencius* the author finds an amalgamation of the Confucian idea that "the good man has no match under heaven" (*Mencius* 7B:3) and the military idea of "certain victory". Still, he is of the opinion that the *Xun Zi* is the first text that clearly reflects influence from the *Sun Zi bingfa* in terms of the notion of a certain and complete victory. The fact that Xun Zi lived during the first half of the third century B.C. the author takes as circumstantial evidence that the *Sun Zi bingfa*, too, dates back to this time. On the basis of other circumstantial evidence the author concludes that the text originates from the eastern state of Qi, which was a centre of philosophical speculation during the Warring States period.

In the second part of the postscript the author argues that the *Sun Zi bingfa* is a kind of "scrap-book", a compilation of excerpts from other texts. Thus, he considers the traditional notion of Sun Wu as the author of the work as mistaken. On the basis of a careful examination of classical references to Sun Wu, the author concludes that these references are good stories rather than good history and are therefore of little use in determining the historical existence of Sun Wu.

In *Shiji* (The Records of the Grand Historian), Sima Qian (45-86 B.C.) had declared that the *Sun Zi bingfa* was written by Sun Wu in the 6th century B.C. This view seems to have been undisputed until the Song dynasty, when Ye Shi (1150-1223) argued that the *Sun Zi bingfa* was a product of the early Warring States period and even expressed doubts as to whether Sun Wu had ever existed. Since then the dating and the authorship of the *Sun Zi bingfa* have remained controversial. Jens Østergaard Petersen has made a significant contribution to this discussion that should be brought to the attention of scholars in Asia and the West who do not read Danish. But there is no reason to assume that the last word has yet been said. The discussion will continue.

Torbjörn Lodén
Stockholm University