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Citation

Els, P. van, & Witkam, F. (2019). Schoolyard soldiers: the art of adapting the art of war. *Journal Of Chinese Military History*, 8(2), 191-224. doi:10.1163/22127453-12341346

Version: Publisher's Version

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3199135>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Schoolyard Soldiers: The Art of Adapting the *Art of War*

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Abstract

The *Art of War* (or *Sun Tzu*) abounds with practical strategic and tactical advice which, while intended for use in warfare, can be applied to almost any professional or personal crisis or conflict. In recent decades this ancient Chinese military classic has been adapted for a variety of non-military purposes in fields as diverse as trade, law, sports, and love. Intrigued by the text's seemingly limitless applicability, this article analyzes when, where, why, and how present-day adapters applied the ancient military text to modern non-military issues. The article also reflects on the value of *Art of War* adaptations, especially vis-à-vis translations, as it highlights the diverse ways in which an age-old Chinese text is made relevant to modern readers worldwide.

Keywords

Sunzi – Sun Tzu – *Art of War* – adaptation – translation

1 Introduction

Written over two thousand years ago, the *Art of War* (or *Sun Tzu*) is the most popular military-strategic treatise of all time. The text is traditionally ascribed to the legendary military commander Sun Wu 孫武 (6th century BCE), better known as Sun Tzu or Sunzi 孫子 (Master Sun). While this ascription is

questionable, the *Art of War* has unquestionably been popular for a long time.¹ As early as twenty-one centuries ago, it was noted in the *Shiji* 史記 (*Grand Scribe's Records*) that many people in those days owned a copy of "Sunzi's thirteen chapters" (孫子十三篇).² In the centuries that followed, commentaries were written by the famous warlord Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220), the renowned poet Du Mu 杜牧 (803-852), and many others.³ As a result of its unwavering popularity, the *Art of War* also travelled to the outer edges of the Chinese cultural sphere, most notably Japan, where it arrived in the eighth century.⁴ In the following centuries, particularly during Japan's aptly named Warring States Period (1476-1603), many samurai studied the text as part of their military studies. During the Edo Period (1603-1868), Chinese annotated editions were shipped in large quantities to Japan, where scholars wrote translations and commentaries.⁵ In that same period, the *Art of War* was translated into a European language for the first time, when the Jesuit priest J. J. M. Amiot published his *Art militaire des Chinois* (1772), a collection of canonical Chinese military texts in French translation. The first English translations date from the beginning of the twentieth century, when E. F. Calthrop (1905, 1908) and Lionel Giles (1910) published their works, which were followed by a score of other English translations.⁶

Translations of the *Art of War* differ in emphasis, accuracy, and readability, but they all aspire to some degree of faithfulness to the source text. In other words, even in translation the *Art of War* is a book on waging war. There are, however, works that take a more liberal approach, as they adapt the ancient military text to modern non-military contexts. The earliest *Art of War* adaptations were published over half a century ago in the field of commerce, as

1 The ascription is questionable if only because Sun Wu's very existence is in doubt. Mair 2007, 10, argues that his name "has all the marks of being a made-up cognomen," and Galvany 2011, 631, observes that the figure of Sun Wu "is cloaked in an impenetrable aura of mystery and dubiety to the point that, even today, the historical existence of this personage is still open to debate." In this article, we occasionally refer to "Sunzi" as the progenitor of the military methods contained in the text. This is merely for stylistic reasons and should not be taken as an acknowledgment of his historical existence or his authorship of the text. For more on the textual history of the *Art of War*, see Gawlikowski and Loewe 1993.

2 *Shiji* 65.2168.

3 For an overview of the main commentators, see Giles 1910, xxxiv-xlii; Cleary 1988, 30-33; and Mair 2007, 3-5. Their comments are translated by Cleary 1988 and Minford 2002.

4 Satō 1962, 231-33.

5 Kanaya 2000, 22.

6 For an assessment of English translations published until 2001, see Handel 2001, 370-72, 461-62. English translations published since that year include Mair 2007, which we use in this article because of its fine balance between accuracy, readability, and availability.

parallels can easily be drawn between the competitive arena of trade and the combative theatre of war. To this day, bookstores offer a choice of business adaptations with titles such as *The Art of War for Executives* and *Sun Tzu and the Art of Business*. In the words of Henry Kissinger, Sunzi has “achieved a second career of sorts [...], with popular editions of *The Art of War* recasting him as a modern business management guru.”⁷ Having shown its value in the world of corporate warfare, the text came to be applied “to all the complexities of modern society,” as Ralph D. Sawyer puts it, resulting in what Juliana Pilon calls a “cottage industry of how-to books inspired by *The Art of War*.”⁸ These how-to books target a variety of readers, from lawyers to writers, from healthcare providers to chess players, and from women looking for equality to men looking for a date. It is truly remarkable that a text on warfare, written in China over two thousand years ago, speaks to a diversity of readers around the world today.

While the text’s wide-ranging adaptability arguably played a major role in making it a household name, academic interest in *Art of War* adaptations is rare.⁹ The latter holds true for other types of adaptations as well. Given that adaptations are based on earlier works, they are inevitably judged in relation to those original works, and are therefore “often put down as secondary, derivative,” as Linda Hutcheon observes.¹⁰ Moreover, as adaptations freely transmute the earlier works by removing, adding, or modifying elements, they can easily be rejected as “creativity gone wild.”¹¹ The fact that these “wild” creations are mostly written by and for people outside the groves of academe may also explain why, despite their prevalence in real life, adaptations tend to be relegated to the periphery of academic studies.¹² An additional problem that pertains specifically to *Art of War* adaptations is that most authors have not mastered Classical Chinese, the language in which the text was written, and they are not always well-informed by the latest relevant scholarship, leading them to work with outdated translations of the text. Given the significant problems that may occur when people who do not know Classical Chinese work with texts written

7 Kissinger 2011, 25.

8 Sawyer 1994, 15; Pilon 2016, 71.

9 The few recent publications on this topic include: Gong 2009, who outlines business adaptations published in China over the past thirty years; Polfuß 2015, who discusses German self-help books based on ancient Chinese classics; and Shih and Hwang 2017, who examine the Western reception of the *Art of War* in the context of post-Western international relations.

10 Hutcheon 2006, 2.

11 Malmkjær 2000, 2.

12 Chan 2009, 388.

in that language, as analyzed by Paul R. Goldin in his article “Those Who Don’t Know Speak,” the lack of academic interest in *Art of War* adaptations is hardly surprising.¹³ Moreover, these works are generally published for commercial purposes, and as David Schaberg has shown in his review article with the telling title “Sell It! Sell It!,” the quality of modern renderings of ancient Chinese texts tends to lose out in such undertakings.¹⁴ Still, as an important global cultural phenomenon, *Art of War* adaptations in our view merit attention.

In this study, we define *Art of War* adaptations as self-help books that find inspiration in the ancient Chinese military text and apply it to a contemporary situation susceptible to improvement. These books typically use a variant of the original title (*Art of War*, *Sun Tzu*) as part of their own title, as in the aforementioned examples.¹⁵ While the titles of adaptations are similar, their content differs widely. Factors contributing to the diversity include the version of the source text that was used, the degree to which the modern work draws on the ancient text, and the target readership of the modern work. As a result, while one adaptation borrows nothing but the title words of the *Art of War*, another adapts the entire military text, word for word, to a non-military context, and while one adaptation is a dryish disquisition on applied strategies and tactics, another is a lively novel in which Sunzi’s wisdom is imparted by one protagonist to another.¹⁶ This substantial heterogeneity leads us to ask: Is there a shared practice in adapting the *Art of War*?

Through an analysis of over forty *Art of War* adaptations in multiple languages, this study explores when and where the tradition of adapting the ancient military text started, why people engage in this practice, how they adapt the text, and what the value of their work is. It addresses these issues in four parts. Part 1 provides a brief history of *Art of War* adaptations, which our research traces back to 1960s Japan. Part 2 describes the process of creating the adaptations. Part 3 is a case study of one particular adaptation. Part 4 theorizes the appeal of the military text to adapters. Finally, in the Conclusion we reflect on the value of *Art of War* adaptations, particularly vis-à-vis translations. This outline shows that our article does not focus on China, the military, or history, but on what we may call an extension of Chinese military history. It takes the most influential military-strategic text created in China over two millennia

13 Goldin 2002.

14 Schaberg 2001.

15 This also means that *Art of War* adaptations without “Art of War” or “Sunzi” (or variants thereof) in their title, if they exist, are likely to have escaped our attention. However, the precise number of adaptations is not germane to our analysis, and the more than forty adaptations that we did find enable a representative analysis.

16 Michaels 2007, Ashrafian 2016, Hawkins and Rajagopal 2005, Küng 2012, respectively.

ago, and studies its continued success in today's world, outside of China's borders and beyond the military domain. In a narrow sense, the goal of our article is to provide an in-depth analysis of *Art of War* adaptations. In a broader sense, we hope to shed light on the diverse ways in which texts such as the *Art of War*, written long ago in a different language and culture, are made relevant in our world as they are applied to issues facing readers today.

2 Brief History of *Art of War* Adaptations

The earliest *Art of War* adaptations that we have been able to find date from the early 1960s in Japan.¹⁷ With titles such as *Keiei Sonshi* 経営孫子 (*Management Sunzi*) and *Bijinisuman Heihō* ビジネスマン兵法 (*The Businessman's Art of War*), they clearly targeted the trade community. This is understandable, as the military text was considered required reading in companies in Japan, where a large corporation even organized one-month courses to study Sunzi's work.¹⁸ As they render his insights into business Japanese, the adaptations display a thorough knowledge of the military treatise. For example, in his 1962 book, which also counts thirteen chapters, Andō Ryō presents numerous phrases from the *Art of War* in the original language, to which he adds literal Japanese translations, an explanation of their gist, and a discussion of their practical application in the world of trade. The works of Andō and others suggest a correlation between the creation of business adaptations and the state of the economy. These early adaptations were published in a period of economic growth. However, as the economy slowed down, so did the practice of applying the insights of Sonshi, as the military strategist is known in Japan. Accordingly, the 1970s marked a lull in Sonshi activity.

In the early 1980s, China's recently initiated Open Door policy created the need for a theoretical foundation of the new economic reality. Ironically, part of the foundation of the new China came from ancient China and by way of Japan, which by then had become the world's second largest economy. In 1982, a Japanese specialist of classical Chinese literature, Murayama Makoto 村山孚, gave a talk in China, where he explained how Japanese companies used the *Art of War* in business management.¹⁹ This kindled Chinese interest in the modern

17 Examples include Andō 1962, Yamazaki 1962, and Iida 1963.

18 Li et al. 1990, 15-16.

19 Gong 2009, 6.

utilization of the ancient text. Within two years, the first Chinese business adaptation was published.²⁰

In the late 1980s, with another economic boom in Japan, the practice of adapting the *Art of War* received new impetus, as earlier works were revised and new adaptations were created.²¹ However, the momentum of this practice was short-lived. It ended with the bursting of the Japanese economic bubble, shortly after the beginning of the 1990s, only to be reinvigorated in Japan in recent years. As Japanese Sonshi creativity dwindled, other emerging markets in Asia picked up the baton. In 1990, *Sun Wu's Art of War and the Art of Business Management* was published in Hong Kong.²² This was not a new book but an English translation of the earliest Chinese adaptation, published six years earlier. Nevertheless, it is revealing that a publisher in Hong Kong decided to publish the work in English, and the multiple editions that have been published over the years suggest a higher-than-expected interest in the English translation. In 1991, an original English adaptation was published in Singapore by the business consultant Chow-Hou Wee and colleagues.²³ A few years later, Singaporean strategy educator Check-Teck Foo co-authored *Sun Tzu on Management: The Art of War in Contemporary Business Strategy*, the first of several *Sunzi*-related publications by his hand.²⁴ Here, as in Japan, a growing economy led to a growing demand for this type of book, and with English being an official language in both Hong Kong and Singapore, this is the first time that adaptations were published in that language.

In that same period, the practice of adapting the text took root in the United States. As a military text, the *Art of War* had been popular among corporate leaders in America for some time, a fact perhaps best epitomized by Oliver Stone's monumental movie *Wall Street* (1987) in which both leading characters quote from Sunzi's work. However, the practice of rendering the text into business American seems to date from the mid-1990s.²⁵ Since then, there has been a steady stream of publications, with some authors (such as Gary Gagliardi and Becky Sheetz-Runkle) adding multiple adaptations to their name, while others passed the craft on from father (Gerald A. Michaelson) to son (Steven W. Michaelson). With an average of at least two publications per year, the United States still reigns supreme as the undisputed market leader

20 Li et al. 1984.

21 Andō 1962 was revised in 1986; new adaptations include Kōno 1986, Ōba 1987, and Okuda 1990.

22 Li et al. 1990.

23 Wee et al. 1991.

24 Foo and Grinyer 1994.

25 Examples include Krause 1995 and McNeilly 1996.

of *Art of War* adaptations. Their initial emergence coincides with the 1990s economic boom in the United States, but perhaps more importantly, it also coincides with a growing demand for self-help books. In *Self-Help, Inc.*, Micki McGee notes that sales of self-help books in the United States nearly doubled between 1991 and 1996, a stellar growth she explains as the result of major societal changes:

With social welfare programs all but dismantled, and with lifelong marriage and lifelong professions increasingly anachronistic, [...] sculpting one's figure to remain desirable to one's spouse and perfecting one's leadership techniques to remain valued by one's company are not options but imperatives in this new economy.²⁶

Self-help books capitalize on these imperatives, and *Art of War* adaptations neatly fit into this general trend, as they are marketed as handbooks for "gaining success in all areas of competition."²⁷

Until the mid-1990s, *Art of War* adaptations remained limited to business communities in Asia and the United States. From then onwards, they grew into the global phenomenon that they are today. This is because (a) they were published in other languages and (b) they targeted new audiences.

At first, American-made adaptations were translated into other languages. For example, Donald Krause's *The Art of War for Executives* has been translated into a dozen languages including Spanish, German, and Dutch. The translations of these works familiarized other parts of the world with the practice of adapting the *Art of War*. From the mid-2000s onwards, adaptations were created directly in those other languages. One apposite example is Werner Schwanfelder's *Sun Tzu für Manager*, which was originally published in German in 2004, but has been translated into several other languages by now.²⁸

Soon after business adaptations started to appear in the United States, the text was adapted to other areas of life as well. The earliest of these works include a version aimed at martial artists by Stephen F. Kaufman, one of the "founding fathers" of American karate, and another version targeting lovers by psychologist Connell Cowan and writer Gail Parent.²⁹ Since then, numerous *Art of War* inspired how-to books target a diversity of readers, such as lawyers (*Sun Tzu's krijgskunst voor advocaten*), authors (*The Art of War for Writers*), surgeons

²⁶ McGee 2005, 11-12.

²⁷ Krause 1995, back cover of 2005 edition.

²⁸ Other non-English adaptations include Fayard 2004, Scholtens 2005, and Ballardini 2013.

²⁹ Kaufman 1996, Cowan and Parent 1998.

(*Surgical Philosophy: Concepts of Modern Surgery Paralleled to Sun Tzu's 'Art of War'*), women (*The Art of War for Women*), golfers (*Golf and the Art of War*), chess players (*Chess and the Art of War*), and poker players (*Tournament Poker and The Art of War*).³⁰ Just when it seemed that the market was saturated and that no adaptation of the military text could surprise us anymore, adapters recently managed to target new demographics, namely, babies (*The Art of War: Baby Edition*) and zombies (*The Art of War for Zombies*).³¹ Now there is an *Art of War* for everyone.

3 Adapting the *Art of War*

Is there an underlying “art” that unites the plethora of *Art of War* adaptations? The present section addresses this issue by analyzing the process of creating such works, which involves questions such as: What purpose does the adaptation serve? How does it relate to the adapted text? How does it tailor the text to readers? By focusing on the underlying process, we demonstrate that adapters implicitly or explicitly ask themselves similar questions, even if their answers yield dissimilar adaptations.

3.1 Purpose

What purpose does the adaptation serve? At the core of each *Art of War* adaptation lies the awareness of a problem experienced by a certain demographic that forms the prospective readers. These readers include managers who strive to make their companies competitive, attorneys who seek ways for improving their competence, women who find themselves on the underside of the gender gap, writers who fail to get published, and men who fail to get a date. They also include the average person, struggling with the challenges of daily life, for whom Sun Tzu: *L'arte della guerra nella vita quotidiana* was created.³² The problem-solving focus of these books is often made explicit. For example, *The Art of War for Zombies* starts as follows:

30 Scholtens 2005, Bell 2009, Ashrafian 2016, Chu 2010, Wade 2006, Lawrence and Moradiabadi 2016, Apostolico 2005, respectively.

31 Tamborino 2017, Smith et al. 2011, respectively.

32 Ballardini 2013.

They walk among us: The Living. And they have for centuries. They are the Human Race—our nemesis. They seek to vanquish us. But we bite back. Still, every Zombie needs support. Hence this book.³³

The core focus on a problem distinguishes *Art of War* adaptations from both translations and other types of adaptations. While translations endeavor to convey the source text's meaning, style, and tone from one language into another, and adaptations in general transmute a novel, movie, poem, and so on, into a new artistic form, *Art of War* adaptations fundamentally seek to help readers with the problem that they face.

3.2 *Edition and Selection*

Having settled on the *Art of War* as a remedy for the prospective reader's problem, adapters face practical questions: What version of the source text should they use? How much of it should they incorporate into their adaptation? What aspects of the *Art of War* should they focus on?

Some *Art of War* adapters master the language in which the text was written and base their adaptation directly on the Classical Chinese text. This applies mainly to adapters in Asia, and occasionally to adapters elsewhere.³⁴ Most adapters rely on translations, and with only a few exceptions, the vast majority use Giles' work.³⁵ It is telling that adapters rarely explain their choice of translation. The popularity of Giles' work appears to be motivated by practical considerations, rather than appreciation of the translation, as his book was first published over a century ago and is now available in the public domain.³⁶ The fact that Giles was a famous sinologist and prodigious translator means that his version is apparently good enough for most adapters, although newer and more accurate translations are readily available.³⁷ Karen McCreadie ex-

33 Smith et al. 2011, Introduction.

34 Examples include Li et al. 1984, Saitō 2016, and Chu 2010.

35 Exceptions include McNeilly 1996, who uses Griffith's translation; Watson 2007, who uses a mixture of Cleary, Griffith, and Sawyer; Krause 1995, who uses a translation by Chang Miao, principal of the West Suburban Chinese Language School in Villa Park, Illinois; and Michaelson 1998, who uses a translation by Pan Jiabin and Liu Ruixian that he secured while speaking on Sunzi in China.

36 Morris-Cotterill 2012, 14, explains the complicated copyright position in relation to Giles' work: "Under US copyright law, the work is out of copyright. Under EU/UK law, it remains in copyright until at least 2028, i.e. 70 years after Giles' death." Needless to say, Morris-Cotterill's *Art of War* adaptation, which uses Giles' translation, is published in the United States.

37 Morris-Cotterill 2012, 14, for example, praises Giles' long and highly regarded career, and suggests that his *Art of War* translation is the most authoritative.

presses this most straightforwardly: "There are many [*Art of War*] translations but this one has stood the test of time and while the phrasing may vary from version to version the essence of what is being expressed is the same."³⁸ This suggests that accuracy of translation is not a major concern for most adapters. As Catherine Huang and A. D. Rosenberg note after modifying Giles' translation for their *Women and the Art of War*: "Our intent is not to create a more literal translation but, rather, one that may be more accessible to our western audience."³⁹

Having settled on an edition or translation of the source text, the adapters need to decide how much of the *Art of War* to incorporate into their adaptations.

Some adaptations barely refer to the military text at all. For example, Spencer Michaels' *The Art of War for Dating* teaches romantically challenged readers "how to meet and attract any woman, anywhere, at any time" by adopting an "almost war-like mindset."⁴⁰ Apart from the title and some military-inspired terminology (such as "conquering" women), this book provides no more than a nodding acquaintance with Sunzi's military classic. Another adaptation, *The Art of War for Writers* by suspense author and writing coach James Scott Bell, follows Sunzi's example of presenting ideas in compact chapters of just a few pages each.⁴¹ His book also contains a handful of Sunzi quotes, but it also quotes Isaac Asimov, Napoleon Bonaparte, Truman Capote, Abraham Lincoln, a famous Chicago Cubs second baseman, a legendary UCLA basketball coach, and numerous others. The ironic result is that the writings ascribed to Sunzi are of little account in Bell's book on writing. It appears that for adaptations such as these, the military classic merely informed the overall tone or idea of the book, provided a few apposite quotations, and supplied the title words "Art of War." These words may attract readers and boost sales, which speaks to the popularity of the *Art of War*, but they do not reflect the content of the modern books, which could have just as easily been published under different titles.

Other adaptations render the ancient military text in its entirety to modern non-military domains. This normally means that they take an existing translation, usually Giles, and change the wording as they deem appropriate. For example, in his *Surgical Philosophy: Concepts of Modern Surgery Paralleled to Sun Tzu's 'Art of War'*, Hutan Ashrafian, clinical lecturer in surgery at London's Imperial College, changes Sunzi's pronouncement "These five heads should be

38 McCreadie 2008, 2.

39 Huang and Rosenberg 2011, 12.

40 Michaels 2007, 3.

41 Bell 2009, 3.

familiar to every general: he who knows them will be victorious; he who knows them not will fail.” into “These five factors should be familiar to every surgeon: he or she who knows them will succeed in treating his or her patients; he or she who knows them not will fail.”⁴² With modifications such as these, Ashrafian transposes the text from the ancient battle front, mostly populated by men, to the modern emergency room, a workplace for women as well. In a similar vein, *The Art of War for Lawyers* by Troy J. Doucet, Esq., a Columbus, Ohio-based litigation lawyer, renders Sunzi’s “The Commander stands for the virtues of wisdom, sincerity, benevolence, courage and strictness” as “The Attorney in charge means whether the leader of the legal team is wise, sincere, benevolent, tenacious, courageous, and disciplined.”⁴³ As these and other adapters have chosen to adapt the entire *Art of War*, they must deal with contentious topics such as incendiary attacks. The proposed correspondences may feel forced at times. For example, Ashrafian’s adaptation for surgeons likens attacking with fire to stopping a flow of blood, as Sunzi’s claim that “There are five ways of attacking with fire” becomes “There are five ways of achieving haemostasis of bleeding vasculature.”⁴⁴ In *The Art of War for Lovers*, Cowan and Parent link the same Sunzi claim to coitus instead: “There are five kinds of heat in a relationship: thinking someone is hot, warming up to him, getting fired up, having sex, and getting burned.”⁴⁵ In contemporary adaptations such as these, the text on warfare appears to serve as a mold into which the rewording in the other domain—whether surgery, love, law, or something else—is made to fit like a Procrustean bed.

Most adaptations fall somewhere in between these two extremes. On the basis of select *Art of War* passages that the adapters consider most relevant for their purposes, these books engage thoroughly with the military text, while at the same time avoiding the straitjacketing that potentially occurs when mirroring the *Art of War* in its entirety. When selecting relevant passages, the adapters naturally include those that reflect quintessential *Art of War* ideas, such as the noble goal of winning without fighting. However, they differ when it comes to contentious topics, such as incendiary attacks. Some opt to include these topics. For example, in *Sun Tzu and the Project Battleground*, the adapters David Hawkins and Shan Rajagopal, whose background is in project management, draw a parallel between fire and finance: “While fire can create heat and energy, it also has a great destructive capability. Similarly in the life of a project,

42 Ashrafian 2016, 9.

43 Doucet 2014, 10–13.

44 Ashrafian 2016, 107.

45 Cowan and Parent 1998, 263.

the financial aspects of the business can be destructive if not taken on carefully and managed correctly.”⁴⁶ Jesse Tamburino, who works as an IT manager, has a version for babies in which Sunzi imparts this advice to his grandson: “Learn to use fire to your advantage, it can be one of the most important tools in battle. It can quickly give you advantage in the battle, and you must also protect yourself from such attacks.”⁴⁷ How babies are to use this advice remains unclear. In order to bypass this difficulty, other adapters simply leave this topic out.

To summarize, many adapters select *Art of War* passages to be included in their books, but they differ in the selections they make and the analogies they draw. In general, the more outspoken the topic is, the clearer the hand of the adapter will be.

3.3 *Complementary Features*

Having selected relevant passages from the ancient military text, the final step for adapters is to tailor them to their modern civilian readers and engage with the problem that plagues them. If this step fails, the endeavor fails as a whole, given that problem-solving is the *raison d'être* of *Art of War* adaptations.

The tailoring involves, among others, changing the “language” of the adaptation by toning down military terminology and adding jargon that readers are expected to be familiar with. For example, adapters addressing corporate leaders tend to embellish their adaptations with “supply dependence,” “customer drivers,” “resource targeting,” and other business speak, while poker players will find their adaptation interspersed with dollar-amounts, such as “\$300 pot,” “\$500 dollar raise,” and “\$940,000 to \$60,000 chip advantage.”⁴⁸

The tailoring also involves adding complementary features to their work, so as to connect even better to the world of their readers. For example, Tamborino’s version for babies offers full-color drawings that cover the entire page; Huang and Rosenberg’s version for women contains “personal profiles” (stories of actual women and how they advanced in life and at work through lessons they learned from the *Art of War*); and Eric Rogell’s version for dateless men is intermixed with illustrative “war stories” (anecdotes of the author’s experiences on the dating scene), while the cover of his *The Art of War for Dating* shows a condom as a not-so-subtle hint to potential readers as to what following the advice in his self-help book might lead to.

46 Hawkins and Rajagopal 2005, 195.

47 Tamburino 2017, n.p.

48 Hawkins and Rajagopal 2005, Apostolico 2005.

By the end of the creative process of “playing with” the *Art of War*, the adaptation has essentially become an independent book. It has been created by a modern author in order to address a modern problem, even though it is inspired by the ancient military text.

4 Adapting the *Art of War* for Children

In order to further explore how the above works, we analyze one particular *Art of War* adaptation in more detail: the richly illustrated *Tsuyoku shinayakana kokoro o sodateru! Kodomo sonshi no heihō* 強くしなやかな心を育てる! 子供孫子の兵法 (*Cultivating a Strong and Flexible Mind! Sunzi's Art of War for Children*; hereafter *Art of War for Children*), written by Saitō Takashi 齋藤孝 (b. 1960) and published by Nihon Tosho Center 日本図書センター in March 2016. We opted for this adaptation for the following reasons:

- (1) Saitō adapts the *Art of War* to a most unexpected demographic of children aged six to twelve. It arguably requires more creativity and ingenuity to adapt the military text to school children than, for example, to the “corporate warriors” of our world. After all, what are the “hundred victories in a hundred battles” (百戦百勝) that children are expected to win? This book therefore offers the greatest potential for shedding light on the *modus operandi* of adapters.
- (2) Unlike many *Art of War* adapters who are surgeons, lawyers, and writers by profession, Saitō is a professor of pedagogy and communication at Meiji University in Tokyo. As an academic, he builds on centuries of *Art of War* scholarship. As a result, his book is based on a solid academic footing, even though it is intended for children.
- (3) Unlike most *Art of War* adapters, Saitō reads Classical Chinese, a skill that provides him with direct access to the source text. His modifications of the source text are therefore especially revealing.
- (4) Unlike some *Art of War* adapters (but similar to Andō's aforementioned work), Saitō thoroughly engages with the text (selecting passages, translating and annotating his selections, et cetera), thereby revealing an elaborate process of adapting the ancient military text to modern civilian readers.
- (5) Saitō's book is recent, widely available, and popular, which provides us with a glimpse of its reception by contemporary readers.

This section focuses on Saitō's motivations for writing *Art of War for Children*, his modifications of the *Art of War*, and the reception of his book.

4.1 *Motivation*

Saitō is a prolific writer with numerous books to his name, on topics such as education and business communication. He is well-versed in the historical context and recent scholarship of canonical texts, several of which he has re-worked into modern adaptations. In the introduction of this particular adaptation, *Art of War for Children*, he explains his motivation for writing the book:

Sunzi's *Art of War* is a book with ideas and strategies for winning military conflicts. It was written in ancient China, but over time it was passed on to different countries and has been read by many people to this day. This is because the *Art of War* contains considerable advice on how to think and behave in the many different situations we find ourselves in during our everyday lives.

「孫子の兵法」は、争いに勝つための考え方や戦い方のことです。むかしの中国で生まれた「孫子の兵法」は、国をこえ、時代をこえ、いままでたくさんの人に読まれてきました。なぜなら、「孫子の兵法」には、ぼくたちが生きていくなかで、どのように考え、どのように行動すべきかのヒントがたくさんあつまっているからです。⁴⁹

He proceeds to explain why he thinks the text is useful for children:

I think it would be a waste to leave Sunzi's *Art of War* only to grown-ups. Kids also often find themselves in situations in which they have to compete with one another, and they also often worry about their relations with others. They may also be worried when thinking about their futures. [...] Therefore, I am sure that Sunzi's *Art of War* will be helpful for kids too!

ぼくは、この「孫子の兵法」をおとなだけのものにするのは、とってももったいないと思います。こどもだって、競争をしなければならないときもあるし、人間関係で悩むこともあるからです。将来に不安を感じることもあるかもしれません。[...] だから、「孫子の兵法」はきっとこどもにも役立つはず!⁵⁰

49 Saitō 2016, 2-3. Unless otherwise specified, translations in this article are our own.

50 Saitō 2016, 2-3.

In other words, Saitō presents the *Art of War* as an ancient text that has stood the test of time, and the wisdom it contains, if read properly, as useful for children too. Similar to other adaptations, as discussed in the previous section, his adaptation primarily seeks to help readers with the problem that they face, namely children's struggles in everyday life.

4.2 *Edition and Selection*

The *Art of War for Children* is based on the original text in Classical Chinese, more specifically, on Kanaya Osamu's *Art of War* edition, published in 2000, which contains pronunciation glosses and annotations for Japanese grammar.⁵¹

In his book, Saitō selects twenty-four "must-know" quotations from the *Art of War*. He borrows fairly evenly from across the text, with generally one or two quotations from each chapter. The quotations include single phrases and short passages. For example, from the opening chapter he quotes Sunzi's famous maxim "warfare is a way of deception" (兵者詭道也).⁵²

As Saitō selects two dozen *Art of War* quotations, there is much that he leaves untouched. For example, he does not draw on Chapter 10, "Terrain Types" (地形), which focuses on how to use topography to one's advantage, a topic he may have deemed irrelevant to his target audience of school children.⁵³ Other aspects of the *Art of War* that he leaves untouched include its wealth of practical advice on armed warfare, such as how to lead troops through deep ravines, what to do when there is rain upstream, and so on. In addition, the *Art of War* contains several numbered lists, such as the three respects in which the army may be troubled by the ruler. These lists serve as mnemonic devices that allow students of military thought to keep the essentials of warfare in mind.⁵⁴ However, they may not be particularly useful to school children. Two further *Art of War* topics that are not included in the *Art of War for Children* are fire and spies, each of which fills a chapter in the *Art of War*. As we have seen, contemporary adapters struggle to incorporate such contentious topics into their work, and Saitō may have left them out because he considered them unsuitable for children.

⁵¹ Saitō 2016, 9.

⁵² Tr. Mair 2007, 78.

⁵³ The chapter does contain phrases that could easily be applied to the world of children, such as "if you know your opponent and you know yourself, victory will not be at risk" (知彼知己勝乃不殆, tr. Mair 2007, 116). It is unclear why Saitō did not include this phrase in his book.

⁵⁴ Van Creveld 2002, 24.

As demonstrated in the previous section, *Art of War* adaptations come in many forms. Some hardly quote the ancient military text at all, while others adapt the entire text. With two dozen quotations and their adaptation into children's Japanese, Saitō's book is clearly positioned in between these two extremes.

4.3 *Adaptation*

Saitō's work comprises four main parts of six chapters each, creating a total of twenty-four chapters, one chapter for each *Art of War* quotation. The book's structure is as follows:

- Introduction
- Table of Contents
- How to Use this Book
- Keywords to Memorize
- Part 1: Advice for Winning
 - Sidebar: Why Did Sunzi Write the *Art of War*?
- Part 2: Advice for Making Your Dreams Come True
 - Sidebar: What Was Sunzi's Era Like?
- Part 3: Advice for Dealing with Adversity
 - Sidebar: Who Were Fans of Sunzi's Work?
- Part 4: Advice for Taking One More Step Forward
- Phrases to Read Out Loud
- Afterword

Each of the four main parts focuses on an area of a child's life in which Sunzi's advice may be useful, such as succeeding at school or winning in sports. In addition to these four general areas of advice that are inspired by *Art of War* quotations, the book contains so-called "columns" (*karamu* カラム), which are sidebars that offer information about Sunzi, his era, and his readership. The final part of the book contains a section with phrases from the ancient military classic for children to read out loud, which is Saitō's preferred method for reading these texts.

Each chapter of the *Art of War for Children* occupies two pages. On the one page, we find the chapter title, the *Art of War* quotation, Saitō's translation for children, and a colorful hand-drawn illustration to help them grasp its meaning. On the opposite page, we find Saitō's commentary. This general setup enables him to remain relatively close to the *Art of War* on the one page, while musing on relevant topics on the opposite page. His *Art of War* quotations consist of the original Chinese text, with pronunciation glosses and annotations

for Japanese grammar. Aware that the quotations may be too difficult for children, he also provides easier translations in a large font. These “child translations” (*kodomo yaku* こども訳) are liberal renderings of the source text. To illuminate the phrases even further, Saitō offers elaborate commentaries on the opposite page. His commentaries generally explain the meaning of the *Art of War* passage in accessible language, and they explain how this knowledge can be applied to everyday life. We can consider two examples to see how this works.

(1) One passage in the *Art of War* discourages military commanders from cornering enemy forces, as their only remaining option would then be to fight to the death, which would benefit neither side. In Mair’s translation this advice reads:

Be sure to leave an opening for an army that is surrounded; do not press a desperate foe.⁵⁵

圍師必闕，窮寇勿迫。

After quoting this advice in Classical Chinese, with pronunciation glosses and annotations for Japanese grammar, Saitō offers the following succinct rendering for children:

Do not push your opponent too close to the edge.

相手を追い詰め過ぎてはいけないよ。⁵⁶

In his commentary, he explains:

Sunzi not only taught about winning, but he was also particular about how to behave after winning. [...] Even if you beat someone in studies or sports, laughing or making fun of your opponent is wrong.

孫子せんせいは争いに勝つことだけでなく、勝ち方にもこだわっていたよ。[...] 勉強でもスポーツでも、もしきみがだれかに勝ったとしても、けっして相手をばかにしたり笑ったりしてはいけないよ。⁵⁷

55 Tr. Mair 2007, 104.

56 Saitō 2016, 22.

57 Saitō 2016, 23.

In this passage, Saitō encourages children not to pressure their already hard-pressed opponents, and he uses studies and sports as examples of situations in which this may occur. There are two main differences—textual and conceptual—between Sunzi's exhortation and Saitō's adaptation. Textually, the Japanese author removes the military context and introduces child-friendly terms. Where Sunzi refers to a surrounded army, Saitō speaks more generally about pushing someone towards the edge. Where the former mentions a "foe" (*kou* 寇), the latter prefers the milder word "opponent" (*aite* 相手), presumably because it would not be ethical for children to perceive their classmates as foes. Conceptually, Saitō alters Sunzi's *pragmatic* motive for not pushing opponents towards the edge by telling his readers that to do so is *morally* wrong. By suggesting that the military commander disapproved of laughing at one's opponents, the modern author borrows Sunzi's authority in order to instill proper behavior into his young readers, which is a recurrent theme in his book.

(2) Another *Art of War* passage encourages military commanders to get the most out of their troops. In Mair's translation this encouragement reads:

If you throw them upon forsaken terrain, they will survive; if you sink them in desperate terrain, they will still live.⁵⁸

投之亡地然後存，陷之死地然後生。

Saitō's rendering for children reads:

When intentionally making things difficult for yourself, you may display strength you did not know you possess.

あえて自分を追い込んで自分でも予想していなかった大きな力を発揮しよう!⁵⁹

In his commentary, he elaborates:

Sunzi says that the way to gain maximum strength out of soldiers is to let them fight in dangerous circumstances. You might think: "That's absurd!" However, people do their absolute best when under pressure, and it can be that they reveal strength that they never knew they possessed. That is what Sunzi is actually saying. [...] If you are never under pressure and

⁵⁸ Tr. Mair 2007, 123-24.

⁵⁹ Saitō 2016, 26.

always remain in safe environments, you will never be challenged and will not grow up at all, don't you think? So, let yourself be cornered and become desperate sometimes. [...] Surely, it will make you confident. The experience will allow you to become mentally mature.

孫子先生は、兵士たちの力を最大限に引き出すための方法として、兵士たちをあえて危険な状態において戦いをさせることが重要だといっているよ。「そんなのむちゃくちゃだよ!」と、きみは思うかもしれない。でも、人はプレッシャーのなかでこそ、必死になれるし、自分でもそれまで知らなかった力を発揮できることがある。孫子せんせいはそのことをいっているんだ。[...] □まったくプレッシャーがなく、自由で居心地のよい環境にずっといたら、チャレンジすることもなく、成長しないままになってしまわないかな? だから、ときにはあえて自分を追い込んで、プレッシャーのなかで必死になってみよう。[...] きっと大きな自信がつくはずだよ。そして、その経験は、きみをひとまわり成長させてくれるんだ。⁶⁰

Saitō's children's translation freely adapts Sunzi's words. Where Sunzi addresses those who command others, Saitō lectures those who wish to improve themselves. Where the former discusses troops surviving in desolate places, the latter speaks more generally of resilience in the face of adversity. In other words, he again turns a military-specific situation, with imagery ill-suited for children ("forsaken terrain"), into something his young readers will more easily identify with. Conceptually, Saitō translates the training of troops into the mental growth of children. As armies fight to the utmost under difficult circumstances, so children grow stronger by challenging themselves, which enables them to reach mental maturity. Taking Sunzi's lesson to heart, Saitō explicitly challenges his young readers in this book in the hope of making them grow stronger, as we shall see further below.

These two examples demonstrate how Saitō offers a short and sweet translation for children for each *Art of War* quotation, together with an elaborate commentary. Throughout his book, in both translation and commentary, he makes subtle adjustments to the text in order to make it more suitable for his target audience. Where Sunzi speaks of "warfare" (*bing* 兵), Saitō instead speaks of "fighting" (*arasoi* 争い). Where Sunzi portrays warfare as a "field of life and death" (*si sheng zhi di* 死生之地), Saitō merely warns of the "danger" (*kiken* 危険) of fighting. Where Sunzi discusses the "enemy" (*di* 敵), Saitō prefers the word "rival" (*raibaru* ライバル). Finally, and perhaps most tellingly,

⁶⁰ Saitō 2016, 27.

whereas Sunzi famously states that “warfare is a way of deception,” Saitō writes: “It is important to be fair and square, but sometimes you also need to be strategic.” (正々堂々はとても大切だ。でも時には駆け引きも必要だ。)⁶¹ The word “deception” (*gui* 詭) in the *Art of War* is rendered as “strategic” (*kakehiki* 駆け引き) in the *Art of War for Children*, presumably because it would be unethical to recommend that children deceive their parents or peers. Through these and other subtle textual changes Saitō makes the text less combative and more competitive, less soldier-oriented and more child-friendly. This shows even in the way that he addresses his readers, namely by using the informal second person pronoun “you” (*kimi* きみ), which is commonly used to address children. Thus, in adapting the *Art of War* for children, he makes sure that he speaks to them in a language they are used to, which gives the *Art of War for Children* a friendly, fatherly flavor.

4.4 Complementary Features

Similar to other adapters, who include additional features to tailor their work to their audience, Saitō adds features that he believes are useful for his young audience. These features include: (1) sidebars, (2) idioms, and (3) phrases to read out loud.

(1) The sidebars in his book offer information about Sunzi, his times, and his readership. For example, in the sidebar on the era in which Sunzi lived, Saitō explains that prior to Sunzi, people saw individual courage, not strategy, as the most important factor in winning a war. However, when wars lasted longer and armies became bigger, it became necessary for troops to act on the basis of a coherent military strategy, which explains why the *Art of War* was written.⁶² With this sidebar, Saitō gives his young readers a sense of the military history of China. Similarly, in the sidebar on the “fans” (ファン) of Sunzi, Saitō notes that the *Art of War* has been appreciated by samurai such as Takeda Shingen 武田信玄 (1521-1573), and business magnates such as Bill Gates and Son Masayoshi 孫正義, the richest man of Japan, whose surname happens to be identical to that of Sunzi.⁶³ This sidebar is informative, as it discusses the book’s reception in Japan and elsewhere, but it also connects the military classic to the

61 Saitō 2016, 64.

62 Saitō 2016, 38. This echoes scholarship by Kanaya 2000, 15-16, and others.

63 The banner of this pre-eminent samurai famously read “wind, forest, fire, mountain” (風林火山), which is short for the phrase “swift as the wind, calm as a forest, raging as a fire, immobile as a mountain” (其疾如風, 其徐如林, 侵掠如火, 不動如山) from the *Art of War*. The samurai’s vexillary tribute to the text notwithstanding, his knowledge of it may have been limited, as Asano 1993, 223, suggests.

successes of these diverse people, thereby suggesting that the text can help anyone to succeed, including children.

(2) The *Art of War for Children* also includes several “four-character idioms” (*yoji jukugo* 四字熟語). Many Japanese four-character idioms are derived from Chinese “set phrases” (*chengyu* 成語), which in turn are often based on classical texts. In his book, Saitō explains the meaning of idioms that are based on the *Art of War*, such as “a hundred battles, a hundred victories” (百戦百勝). In and of itself, this idiom might conjure up the image of an invincible warrior who has not lost a single battle. However, Saitō explains to his young readers that the idiom comes from a larger passage in the *Art of War*, and that ignoring the latter part of the passage has led to a misunderstanding of its meaning. The passage reads: “Being victorious a hundred times in a hundred battles is not the most excellent approach. Causing the enemy forces to submit without a battle is the most excellent approach.” (百戦百勝，非善之善者也；不戦而屈人之兵，善之善者也。)⁶⁴ Saitō explains:

“A hundred battles, a hundred victories” means to be victorious whenever you fight, in whatever circumstances. You might think: “Awesome! I want to become like that!” But Sunzi says that there is an even greater fighting method, which is to win without fighting.

「百戦百勝」というのは、戦えばいつでもどんなときでも勝てるという意味。きみは「すごい！自分もそうになりたい！」と思うかもしれない。でも孫子せんせい、もっとすごい戦い方があることといっている。それは戦わないで勝つということなんだ。⁶⁵

Learning about the four-character idioms not only enhances his young readers’ understanding of the *Art of War*, but also improves their vocabulary and their knowledge of the history of well-known sayings in their language.

(3) The *Art of War for Children* also contains a section entitled “Phrases to Read Out Loud.” Saitō laments that few children today are capable of reciting texts by heart, which is remarkable, he asserts, because in Japan memorization and recitation date back to time immemorial, and people started reading books silently only in the postwar period.⁶⁶ He argues that contemporary

64 Tr. Mair 2007, 85.

65 Saitō 2016, 17.

66 The memorization and recitation of texts that Saitō promotes resembles the education system of Edo period academies and private schools. For more on the latter, see Dore 1965, 124–36.

education fails to take advantage of the benefits of reading out loud, as the echoes of words help us to pictorialize what we read, which facilitates our memorization, understanding, and appreciation of their quality.⁶⁷ Apparently many people believe in the effectiveness of his reading strategy, as Saitō's earlier work, *Koe ni dashite yomitai nihongo* 声に出して読みたい日本語 (*Japanese Phrases I Want to Read out Loud*) has sold over 2.5 million copies since its publication in 2001 and caused a veritable "reading out loud" (*ondoku* 音読) boom in Japan. His *Art of War for Children* builds on that success, as it includes eight phrases from the *Art of War* to say aloud, such as 利に合えば而ち動き、利に合わざれば而ち止まる ("when an action is advantageous, take it; when an action is disadvantageous, refrain from it").⁶⁸ Saitō hopes that reading these phrases out loud will help his young readers to internalize Sunzi's military classic, which will provide them with the wisdom, confidence, and strength they need in their daily lives.

4.5 Reception

As noted earlier, Saitō provides three arguments why he considers the *Art of War* to be relevant for children. They compete with one another, worry about their relations with others, and feel uncertain about their future, just as adults do. Do readers agree with him? In the absence of expert book reviews in dedicated academic journals, we explored the customer comments at one of Japan's largest online book retailers, Amazon.co.jp, where the book has been reviewed over sixty times since its publication three years ago. The reviews are mostly written by verified buyers who are parents who had purchased the book for their children. We investigated what they think of the book and whether they share Saitō's belief that the *Art of War* is suitable for their children.

Most of the reviews express positive sentiments, and only a few are negative. The latter voice complaints such as: "The source material is *Sunzi*. The text is about warfare. I feel that, no matter how you look at it, the text is not yet suitable for elementary school children." (元は孫子です。中身は兵法です。いくらなんでも小学生には早いかなと感じます。)⁶⁹ The positive reviews praise the book for several reasons, as seen in the following comments taken from three different reviews:

67 Saitō 2002, 124-27.

68 Tr. Mair 2007, 119.

69 <https://www.amazon.co.jp/dp/4284203770/> (last accessed: July 31, 2019). Other reviews mentioned in this article are from the same webpage.

As adults, we know what it's like to survive in our tough society, but there are things that are difficult to communicate to children. I believe this book really manages to communicate these important matters in an easy and warm-hearted manner.

厳しい社会で生きる大人はわかっているけど、なかなか子どもには伝えにくいことってあります。そんな大切な事柄をわかりやすく、そしてあたたかい心で伝えてくれる本だと思います。

These days human relations have become complex for children too. I want to raise my child in an honest way, but also make sure he manages to deal with life. Professor Saitō has brilliantly managed to explain how to achieve this through Sunzi's words.

今の小学生は人間関係も複雑になりました。真っ直ぐ育てて欲しい、でもうまく切り抜けて欲しい。藤先生が孫子の言葉を使ってうまく解説しています。

As an introduction to the classics that elementary school children can read, this book is excellent.

これは小学生にも読める古典の紹介としてもよかったです。

The most commonly expressed sentiment relates to the restrictive and competitive society that reviewers find themselves in. Similar to what Saitō writes in his introduction to *Art of War for Children*, they feel that the contemporary world is difficult for children to grow up in, and that Sunzi's ideas, channeled through Saitō's translation and commentary, can help children to overcome their daily difficulties. Parental anxieties concerning the competitive nature of the Japanese education system clearly play a role here, with concerns about tough entrance exams, public test grades in school ranked by score, and employment based largely on the name of the university that students graduate from. Some reviewers are convinced that Saitō's advice, which is rooted in the warfare tactics of the ancient military classic, can help their children to make it through this competitive education system, in which they must learn from a young age to be more successful than their peers.

A second sentiment expressed in the reviews, which echoes one of Saitō's goals, is the importance of knowing the classics. The reviewers enthusiastically claim that Saitō's translation enables them to teach their children canonical works such as the *Art of War*. This enthusiasm may derive in part from the fact

that adults, although buying the book for their children, also find this edition easy to read themselves. This is apparent from reviewer comments such as: “the book can be enjoyed by adults too” (大人も楽しめます).

To conclude, Saitō has written a pragmatic modern-day *Art of War* adaptation that readers believe to be highly relevant for their children, who are facing tough educational trajectories in today’s competitive society. The relative success of Saitō’s book points to a demand among consumers for books such as *Art of War for Children*.

5 The Appeal of the *Art of War*

While *Art of War* adaptations are diverse, they do share one commonality, namely, their reliance on Sunzi’s work. What draws adapters to the *Art of War*? Why do they tack their ideas onto that text? After all, they could just as easily, and perhaps more logically, write a self-help book for lovers, children, etc., without reference to the military classic. In our view, Sunzi’s enduring appeal to adapters stems from three related areas: text, authority, and philosophy.

5.1 Text

The *Art of War* is a short text. It counts merely 5,400-odd characters in the original language, making it only slightly longer than the *Daodejing* 道德經 (or *Tao Te Ching*), another popular source of adaptations. Judging by these two examples, it seems that the length of a text is inversely proportional to its chances of being adapted. Michaelson, who (co-)authored several *Art of War* adaptations, remarks about Clausewitz’s military classic *Vom Kriege* (*On War*) that “one English translation is over 600 pages long,” which probably influenced his choice of not adapting that text.⁷⁰ The *Art of War*’s brevity invites adaptation, as it does not require excessive amounts of time and energy, which explains in part why Gary Gagliardi has over twenty *Art of War* related titles to his name.⁷¹

Another feature that the *Art of War* shares with the *Daodejing* is that both are “universal” texts that hardly contain any culture-specific references. The *Art of War* mentions only a few names of specific people (e.g., Zhuan Zhu 專諸 and Cao Gui 曹劌) and locations (e.g., Wu 吳 and Yue 越), but otherwise it speaks in general terms. The infrequency of culture-specific references increases its appeal to people unfamiliar with these names and facilitates its

⁷⁰ Michaelson 1998, 2.

⁷¹ <https://scienceofstrategy.org/main/catalog/art-war-books> (last accessed: July 31, 2019).

rendition in other languages. Accordingly, the *Art of War* has been translated into almost any conceivable language, including Klingon,⁷² and there are over twenty translations in English. These make it easy for people who do not read Classical Chinese to study the text. Moreover, the availability of a translation in the public domain (Giles 1910) enables adapters to freely play with the text and adjust the translation to their needs.

The way in which the *Art of War* is structured as a text also enhances its appeal. It counts thirteen chapters, and so do many adaptations, even those that do not adapt the military work in its entirety. Using Sunzi's text as a vehicle for one's own ideas facilitates the structuring of those ideas, as the subjects of the thirteen chapters in the adaptations tend to parallel those in the military classic. Moreover, the thirteen chapters of the *Art of War* offer advice in pithy phrases and brief self-contained paragraphs—"nuggets of wisdom" that can be applied in diverse situations. When Sunzi writes that "Causing the enemy forces to submit without a battle is the most excellent approach,"⁷³ he does not provide a step-by-step guide how to achieve the enemy's submission, leaving much of the tactics open for adapters and readers' interpretation and imagination to comment on and project their own views on the text.

5.2 Authority

Other elements that imbue the *Art of War* with a strong appeal are the authority of its title, its alleged author, its famous readers, and the time and place of its creation.

The text is blessed with powerful titles. The assonating sounds of "Sun Tzu" just roll off the tongue, and "Art of War" is even stronger, for "war" suggests strength and "art" suggests skills or talent. In other words, the title embodies both "martiality" (*wu* 武) and "civility" (*wen* 文). While self-help books in the "Complete Idiot's Guide" and "For Dummies" series define their "readers as insufficient, as lacking some essential feature of adequacy,"⁷⁴ the powerful title of the *Art of War* promises readers that they might embody the qualities of martiality and civility too.

Sunzi may not have written the *Art of War*, or even existed at all, but the adapters gladly echo the traditional depictions of him as a successful strategist, irrespective of the doubtful veracity of those depictions in Chinese historiographical sources. The underlying idea appears to be that if someone is successful at winning wars, his advice must be heeded. We find this idea not

⁷² Solska 2018.

⁷³ Mair 2007, 85.

⁷⁴ McGee 2005, 18.

only presented in the adaptations themselves, but also in their (sub)titles, such as “Master Sun’s Tactics to Win Over Women” and “Sun Tzu’s Ultimate Guide to Winning without Confrontation.”⁷⁵ In portraying Sunzi as an authoritative figure and basing themselves on his book, the adapters borrow his authority.

The *Art of War* has been read by some of the most successful people in history, and adapters readily name these samurai, statesmen, businessmen, and others, which further endows the text with authority. By suggesting that the text played a role in their successes, the adapters imply that it can also help their readers to successfully overcome their own problems.⁷⁶

The origins of the *Art of War* in China are another source of authority. In many adaptations, the text is presented as a representative example of “Eastern thought.” For example:

The simple truths from Sun Tzu underlie much of Eastern strategic thought. Understanding both Eastern and Western strategies can help you be more successful. While Western thought focuses on strategies that engage the opponent, Eastern thought stresses strategies that win before the battle—that is, “winning without fighting.”⁷⁷

The *Art of War* is not the only representative of Eastern thought, which is why adapters such as Schwanfelder also wrote management books based on the theories and practices of the Buddha, Confucius, Laozi, and the Shaolin monks. Importantly, the idealization of Eastern thought is not limited to American and European *Art of War* adapters; many of their Asian colleagues likewise present the text as an Eastern counterpart, or complement, to Western thought.⁷⁸

The *Art of War* was written more than two millennia ago and has been popular ever since. For adapters, the length of its existence is yet another important source of authority, as they hint at “ancient wisdom” or “ancient secrets” contained in the text.⁷⁹ While the ancient text may be outdated in some regards—“You don’t see a lot of chariots, shields, or swords in modern warfare, and even fewer in business deals”⁸⁰—there is an inherent belief among adapters that the ancient wisdom somehow strengthens the application to a modern

75 Rogell 2011, Chu 2010.

76 McGee 2005, 13, points to a troubling corollary: “if success is solely the result of one’s own efforts, then the responsibility for any failure must necessarily be individual shortcomings or weaknesses.”

77 Michaelson 2003, xi.

78 E.g., Li et al. 1990, 15.

79 McCarthy 2001, cover; Smith et al. 2011, cover.

80 McCarthy 2001, xii.

situation, more so than a self-help book would do on its own, without reference to the ancient text.

5.3 *Philosophy*

The most important aspect of the *Art of War*'s appeal is its philosophy. While the military classic contains practical advice such as "When setting up defensive earthworks on hills and ridges, the general must place his army on the sunny side with its rear against the higher ground above it,"⁸¹ which may be difficult to adapt to non-military contexts, broader insights can be drawn from the text as well. These insights transcend the battlefield, which is why some authors refer to them as "life philosophy."⁸² Here we briefly touch upon three aspects of the text that are popular among adapters: the idea of winning without fighting, the importance of unconventional thinking, and the figure of the commander.

(1) One of the most influential lessons from the *Art of War* is the idea of "winning without fighting," which several adapters even borrow for the subtitle of their book.⁸³ The text expresses this idea in various ways, including by saying that there is something even more important than winning one hundred battles. This idea applies not only in warfare, but in other areas of life as well. As Huang and Rosenberg write in *Women and the Art of War*, "the time-honored female wisdom of avoiding direct confrontation is very much in keeping with the teachings of Sun Tzu."⁸⁴ And Saitō, as we have seen, uses this idea to warn schoolchildren not to strive to win at all costs, since "even if you beat your competitors, if you don't reach your goals it will still mean failure."⁸⁵ The superior kind of winning involves several other key concepts in the *Art of War*, such as the importance of thorough preparation, developing a keen knowledge of yourself and your opponent, readiness to deceive others if necessary, and so on. These are understandably popular among adapters.

(2) The *Art of War* promotes achieving victory through what it calls "unconventional" (*qi* 奇) tactics. These receive a fair share of attention in adaptations. Interestingly, the adaptations themselves can be seen as the materialization of an unconventional tactic. When thinking of possible ways to tackle issues such as anxiety among schoolchildren, the *Art of War* is unlikely to be the first solution that springs to mind, as the ancient world of halberds and crossbows is a

81 Tr. Mair 2007, 109.

82 E.g., Okuda 1990, 2.

83 Chu 2010, Huang and Rosenberg 2011.

84 Huang and Rosenberg 2011, 10.

85 Saitō 2016, 36.

far cry from the modern world of lunchboxes and school bags. That adapters such as Saitō nevertheless propose the ancient military classic as a solution to modern non-military problems reflects the kind of outside-of-the-box thinking that is praised as unconventional in the *Art of War*.

(3) The key figure in the *Art of War* is the military commander, who embodies several positive qualities, including knowledge, trustworthiness, humaneness, bravery, and sternness. As McCreadie notes, these qualities “weave together to form leadership excellence,”⁸⁶ and this excellence, again, is not limited to the battlefield but applies to other areas of life as well. By mastering such qualities, the commander is literally in command of the situation, which is precisely what readers of self-help books are after. They buy these books because they, too, wish to have some control over the problems that they face.

To conclude, these three aspects render the *Art of War* applicable in a wide range of modern contexts, from education to business environments. They are what draws adapters to the text, and ultimately what draws readers to the adaptations.

6 Conclusion

In this final part of our paper, we briefly reflect on the value of *Art of War* adaptations. Naturally, each individual work should be assessed on its own merits, based on questions such as: How deep an understanding of the *Art of War* does it display? How creatively does it adapt the ancient military text to a modern non-military audience? How useful is the self-help book for its intended audience? However, our present concern is not with individual works, but with *Art of War* adaptations as a type of text.

Similar to translations, *Art of War* adaptations are a means of making the ancient text relevant to modern readers. With translations widely available, allowing readers direct access to the military text, where is the need for adaptations? For this we must consider the main differences between translations and adaptations. Translations transmit the source text from one language into another and, as such, they are bound by its content, tone, and style. They essentially serve “as replacements for, rather than supplements or additions to, original works.”⁸⁷ When “replacing” the source text in the target language, translators tend to use their prefatory remarks or notes to explain how the text should be read, or how it can be useful to the reader. Paradoxically, the liter-

86 McCreadie 2008, 7.

87 Yao 2002, 232.

alness of the translation, and the separation of translation and explanation, gives the readers the liberty to interpret the text at their own discretion. By contrast, adaptations are transmutations of the source text for specific purposes. Adapters do not transpose but interpret, by “re-working the precursor text and choosing the various meanings and sensations they find most compelling.”⁸⁸ This means, as Tak-Hung Chan observes, that adapters take the liberty “to modify and adjust, play with and manipulate, as well as tease out the meanings, apparent and latent, in the source text.”⁸⁹ The freedom of adapters to play with the source text is boundless, as shown by the diversity of *Art of War* adaptations, which understandably leads to concerns about creativity gone wild. Nevertheless, once an adaptation’s boundary is set by targeting a specific demographic, attempts are made to create a coherent work for this specific group of people. In so doing, adapters paradoxically narrow the possible interpretations of the source text as their books are less relevant to those outside the target audience. *The Art of War for Writers* is of little use for babies, just as *The Art of War for Dating* is not intended for managers who strive to make their companies thrive.

Thus, it appears that translations and adaptations neatly complement one another. Translations enable us to read texts from different cultural-linguistic contexts. By transmitting those texts fairly literally and essentially replacing them in our language, they allow us to freely apply our own interpretation. Adaptations lack the accuracy of translations and are more forceful in asserting their interpretation. However, by filtering the most useful phrases, explaining the text’s meaning, teaching its importance, and demonstrating its problem-solving ability, adaptations bring out the text’s potential and relevance.

To conclude, the *Art of War* is one of the most widely-known ancient Chinese texts. Its popularity is due to the efforts of scholars throughout the centuries who studied and taught the text, appended commentaries, and made translations. Nevertheless, similar effort went into other texts, which are not nearly as widely known. There is no *Analects for Architects*, but there is an *Art of War* for almost every conceivable demographic. The popularity of this text is clearly related to its all-round applicability. The adaptations demonstrate the extraordinary potential of the *Art of War*, as they show how the text can be useful to corporate leaders, chess players, lawyers, lovers, men, women, and children alike. Even Sunzi himself probably could not have imagined that his writings would be used to improve the lives of the “schoolyard soldiers” of today.

88 Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins 2010, 16.

89 Chan 2009, 397.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the editors of the *Journal of Chinese Military History* for accommodating an article that does not strongly focus on China, the military, or history, as it studies modern non-military uses of an ancient Chinese military text. We are also thankful to Gabe van Beijeren and the anonymous reviewers of the journal for their constructive comments and questions to earlier versions, and to Milan van Berlo for his help with Japanese sources.

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