



關門捉賊

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Strategy 22

Shut the Door to Catch the Thief

When one fights an opponent and it appears on the surface that he has been defeated, if his fighting spirit has not yet been eradicated in his heart of hearts, he will not acknowledge defeat.

In that case, you must quickly change your mental attitude and break the opponent's fighting spirit.

You must make him acknowledge defeat from the bottom of his heart. It is essential to make sure of that.

Miyamoto Musashi. *The Book of Five Rings*

If you have the chance to completely capture the enemy, then you should do so, thereby bringing the battle or war to a quick and lasting conclusion. To allow your enemy to escape plants the seeds for future conflict. But if they succeed in escaping, be wary of giving chase.

Warring States Period China

In 449 B.C. the state of Wu had invaded the state of Yue and carried off its duke, *Guo Jian*, holding him prisoner for three years before releasing him back to his kingdom.

When he returned, Guo Jian planned his revenge. For seven years, he ruled with benevolence and generosity, making a reputation as a wise and virtuous ruler until he felt his loyal subjects were prepared to undergo any hardship for him. He accordingly assembled his forces and attacked Wu, gaining a decisive victory (see Chapter 5).

The king of Wu had to flee, but it would only be a matter of time before he was caught. He sent ambassadors to Guo Jian begging for mercy. They reminded him of how the state of Wu had released him to return to his own state. The king of Wu now asked to be granted the same favor.

Guo Jian was contemplating granting this appeal when his prime minister Fan Li intervened and said, "*When heaven gave the duke of Wu the grand opportunity for gaining power, he did not take advantage of it, and so he is a fugitive today.*"

Should you fail to accept what fortune has now given you, you may be driven from your state, and then all the years of hardships you have borne will have been endured in vain."

The duke was swayed by the argument and sent the ambassador back with the message that he would not grant any mercy.

When the king of Wu received the message, he gave up all hope and committed suicide.

Tang Dynasty China

One of China's most notorious female rulers was the Empress Wu. After dethroning her son, Emperor *Zhongzong*, she took over the empire and ruled for twenty-two years.

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During one of the innumerable court intrigues that took place during her reign, she suspected two high and corrupt officials of plotting to usurp her power.

Using the strategy 'It Takes a Thief to Catch a Thief', she ordered one of those officials, *Lai Junchen*, to interrogate the other, *Zhou Xing*.

Seeing an opportunity to escape suspicion while eliminating a rival, Lai invited Zhou for dinner and wine to discuss criminal cases. While pouring wine for his guest Lai asked, *"Now with some prisoners they simply refuse to confess to their crime. Do you have any suggestions on how they might be made to cooperate?"*

"That's very easy," answered Zhou. *"You simply take a large metal vat, fill it with water, and place it over a fire until the water is near boiling. Then order the prisoners to get into the vat. They will confess anything and everything."*

"Excellent," said Lai, who then ordered a large vat to be brought in and heated the way Zhou had advised. When the water was near boiling Lai stood up from his table and said, *"I have received an imperial order to interrogate you on your involvement in a treasonous plot. Now would you please step into the vat."*

Zhou was terrified and immediately dropped to his knees to kowtow. He confessed his involvement, and implicated his co-conspirators. All were executed.

Muromachi Period Japan

In 1554 Mori Montanari sought to avenge the death of his lord, Suye Harukata, who had been overthrown in a palace coup and forced to commit suicide by another retainer. Mori was greatly outnumbered and so decided a stratagem was needed.

He constructed a castle on the small island of Miyajima, situated in the inland sea near Hiroshima Bay. After the castle was completed, he spread the story that he was regretting his decision since he now realized how susceptible he was to attack by the Suye forces.

The Thirty-Six Strategies of Ancient China - S. H. Verstappen

When the story reached Suye Harukata he thought it an excellent suggestion and promptly set off to take the castle. The castle turned out to be poorly defended and Suye took the island without bloodshed. He stationed five hundred troops in the castle and the rest of his thirty thousand troops were bivouacked on the island.

Meanwhile Mori Montanari captured the town of Kuatsu, directly across the straight from the island. Harukata's troops were overconfident from their easy capture of the island and they failed to even post guards. Mori counted on the element of surprise and chose a moonless night to launch his attack. He hired local pirates to ferry his troops over and made them agree to immediately return so that neither army had the opportunity to escape.

Mori divided his flotilla into two columns: one went to the north of the island to attack the Suye from the rear, while the second column crossed further to the south and then hugged the island's coastline to attack from the front. That night there happened to be a blinding rainstorm which further helped conceal the flotilla's approach. Both divisions attacked at dawn and, as expected, caught the Suye army by surprise.

Finding that there were no boats in which to escape (it is presumed that the Mori troops scuttled or burned the ships that carried the Suye troops over), the Suye troops committed suicide by the hundreds. Mori had succeeded in luring his enemy into a position from which there was no escape, and in a single decisive battle completely wiped out his opponent.

Summary

While it is dangerous to corner your opponent into fighting to the death, it is equally dangerous to allow that opponent to escape with a hope of revenge. When you have your enemy cornered, leave a door open until his thoughts turn to escape and freedom, then close the trap and destroy him.