



笑裡藏刀

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Strategy 10 Hide Your Dagger Behind A Smile

Speak deferentially, listen respectfully, follow his commands, and accord with him in everything. He will never imagine you might be in conflict with him. Our treacherous measures will then be settled.

The Six Secret Teachings of the Tai Gong

Charm and ingratiate yourself to your enemy. When you have gained his trust, you move against him in secret. 7

7 Another Chinese proverb that refers to the same strategy is known as: *Ho Lian, Hei Xin*, “Thick face, black heart”. The ‘Thick face’ refers to one’s ability to hide your innermost schemes behind the façade of benign innocence., the ‘Black heart’ is one’s true intentions.

Warring States Period China

The king of Wei sent a beautiful courtesan to the king of Chu who took great delight in the new girl. His queen, *Zheng Xiu*, knowing how fond the king was of his new woman, treated the newcomer as a sister supplying her with gifts and treasures and whatever she needed.

The king, hearing of this, summoned his queen and said, *"A woman serves a man with her beauty and thus jealousy is a part of her very nature. Yet you, knowing how much I am pleased by the new woman, have treated her more kindly than I have myself. These actions are those of a child to her parents or a minister to his ruler. How unexpected it is to find this in a queen to her husband."*

The queen thus knew that her husband did not suspect her of jealousy.

When she next met with the new girl the queen told her, *"His majesty is much taken with your beauty but he dislikes the shape of your nose. When next you serve him be sure to cover it with your hand."*

Grateful for the advice, when she next served the king this is what she did.

The next day the king asked his queen, *"The new woman covers her nose when she is with me. Do you know why?"*

"I know," replied the queen.

"Well then no matter how unpleasant, you must tell me the reason."

"It seems she does not like the way your majesty smells."

"The shrew!" cried the king.

In a rage the king ordered that the unfortunate girl's nose be cut off

Warring States Period China

In 342 B.C. General Yang of Qin invaded the state of Wei and laid siege to the city of Wu. The king of Wei, already weakened from a

previous battle, was unwilling to face another engagement and asked his counselors for advice.

One of his officials, minister Ying, said, "*General Yang was originally a native of Wei and in our youth he and I were close friends. I therefore request to be allowed to go personally to appeal to our friendship and try to persuade him into lifting the siege.*" The king agreed and sent the minister to Wu.

When he arrived, minister Ying sent a message asking for a meeting outside the city walls in three days to discuss a mutual retreat. When general Yang received the message that his old friend was in charge of the city's defense and was requesting peace negotiations he readily agreed.

Three days later minister Ying left the city and, to show his good faith, was accompanied by only three hundred men. General Yang greeted his old friend with open arms and invited him and his men to a banquet.

During the celebrations, minister Ying and his men were seized and their uniforms taken. Dressed like Wei soldiers, the men of Qin marched back to the city and ordered the gates opened. As soon as the gates were open they rushed in and seized the city.

The trusting minister Ying was taken back to Qin as captive.

Yuan Dynasty China

In 1320, after the death of emperor *Renzong* (the great-grandson of Kubalai Khan), there followed two years of turmoil in the court over who should succeed to the throne. One faction installed the nine-year-old son of the late emperor, but the new prime minister, seeing an opportunity to advance his status, conspired to have the young emperor and his supporters massacred.

He then sent for Prince Huai, who had been banished to the south years earlier, and installed him on the throne in hopes of manipulating the inexperienced ruler. Prince Huai, however, wanted to make his elder brother Heshi emperor.

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

When Prince Heshi received the message that his brother had become emperor and wanted to hand the throne to him, he became suspicious and refused to go to the capital. ⁸ In order to assuage his elder brother's fears, the young emperor offered to meet him halfway.

Prince Heshi agreed and set out along the road to the capital. When the two brothers met along the road they rushed to clasp each other's arms with tears in their eyes.

For three days they feasted and drank well into the night. On the morning of the fourth day the elder brother, Heshi, emerged alone from his brother's tent. The body of the emperor was discovered minutes later and Heshi became the new emperor.

No one ever mentioned the late emperor or his sudden death again.

Summary

In any contest where the stakes are high, kindness and goodwill are quickly discarded. To hide sinister intentions behind the facade of friendship and loyalty is standard practice in the upper echelons of power. Given the history of imperial intrigues, such an offer could not do anything but arouse suspicion.



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