



Jiǎ Dào Fá Guó

## Strategy 24 Borrow The Road To Conquer Guo

*A samurai in service may be said to borrow his master's authority and also rob him of it. And similarly his lord may lend it to him or let him steal it.*

Daidoji Yuzan, *Budo Shoshinshu*

Borrow the resources of an ally to attack a common enemy. Once the enemy is defeated, use those resources to turn on the ally that lent you them in the first place.

### Spring And Autumn Period China

The small states of Yu and Guo bordered the larger state of Jin. Duke Xian of Jin desired to conquer both states. This desire was not unknown to the two smaller states and both had taken steps to defend their borders with Jin.

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

The duke's general, *Xun Xi*, suggested they make a roundabout attack at Guo through the state of Yu to catch them by surprise.

General Xun suggested that since the duke of Yu was a greedy man he could be bribed with gifts of jade and horses in exchange for safe passage through his territory.

Duke Xian objected to the idea of giving away so much treasure and asked, *"What if the duke of Yu accepts our gifts but refuses us passage?"*

General Xun replied, *"If he doesn't intend to let us through, then he wouldn't accept them, but if he does accept the gifts, and he does let us through, then it will only mean that the treasure is stored temporarily in his storehouse rather than ours."*

When the bribe was sent to the duke of Yu one of his ministers, Gong Ziqi, cautioned against accepting them saying, *"Yu is to Guo, like lips are to teeth. Our ancestors had a saying: 'If the lips are gone, the teeth will be exposed to cold.' Guo's existence depends on Yu, while Yu's ability to survive hinges on Guo."*

*If we make way for Jin, then the day will see Guo perish in the morning only to be followed by Yu in the evening. Why should we ever let Jin pass?"*

The duke of Yu, however, refused to listen to this advice.

Jin was given safe passage and succeeded in conquering Guo. On their way back they stopped to conquer Yu. After taking the Yu capital and recovering the treasure, General Xun returned the jade and horses to the duke.

Duke Xian was pleased and said in good humor, *"The jade is untouched but the horses seem to have gained some more teeth!"*

## Warring States Period China

King *Xiong* of Qi was of an ungenerous nature. During his father's rule, Qi's ablest general was *Tian Dan*, who had distinguished himself

during the war with Yan. When he was still the heir apparent, Xiong worried that the renowned general would seize the throne for himself after the king's death. But Tian Dan was too loyal to contemplate such a move and when Xiong ascended the throne he served under him as minister.

One day while Tian Dan was inspecting the countryside, he came upon an old man who had just crossed a river. The water was so cold that the old man had collapsed on the bank, too weak to move. When Tian Dan saw this he dismounted and wrapped his own fur cloak around the old man to warm him.

When King Xiong heard this he hated Tian Dan and cried aloud, *"Why would Tian Dan do a thing like that if he did not intend to take my kingdom from me?17 I must have a plan to use against him now or I will be too late."*

He looked about for someone to advise him, but the court was empty. Looking out his balcony the king noticed a bead stringer in the street below and called out to him, *"Did you hear what I just said?"*

*"I did,"* replied the bead stringer.

*"And what do you think I should do about this?"* asked the king. *"If I were the king I would use him to make me appear good."*

*"How?"*

*"You should praise the goodness of Tian Dan and issue a statement saying,*

*'When we are troubled by famine Dan feeds them; when we grieve that our citizens are cold, Dan gives them the cloak from his back. When we are troubled over our people, Dan is troubled. In gauging his king's intentions, none is the equal of Dan, and I praise him.'*

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17 In ancient China, any official who acted in an upright and moral manner immediately fell under suspicion, since such behaviour was thought to be a first step in achieving power.

*In this way Dan's virtue will become the king's virtue."*

"Excellent!" said the king and the next day he summoned Tian Dan to court. There the king bowed before Tian Dan praising his virtue and awarding him with honors. Then the king turned to the assembly and said, *"If any officer should find the people cold and hungry, then he should receive them and provide warmth and food. In this way you would serve your king."*

The next day the king's spies returned with the report that in every village the people were saying, *"Tian Dan's love for the people is nothing more than carrying out the orders of the king!"*

### **Yuan Dynasty China**

In 1293, the Great Kahn sent twenty thousand troops to subdue the island of Java under the pretext of avenging the murder and mutilation of a Mongol envoy sent earlier. (A more likely explanation is that the Mongols wished to control the lucrative spice trade in the Moluccas.)

Using the strategy 'Borrow the Road to Conquer Guo', the Mongols made allies with a rebel Javanese prince and his army. Together they succeeded in destroying the local king. However, once the king was defeated the rebel prince quickly turned on his Mongol allies forcing them off the island.

Thus the rebel prince used the Mongol sword to destroy his enemy, and then he used the tactic of 'Exchange the Role of Guest for That of Host' to turn on the Mongols after they had weakened themselves fighting the old king.

### **Summary**

In the struggle for power, alliances are formed only if both parties believe they can profit from each other. These alliances last until one party no longer finds profit in the other. The aid you lend an ally might as easily be used against you. It depends whether your ally should find it more profitable to return the favor, or become your enemy.