



苦肉計

Kǔ Ròu Jì

Strategy 34 The Strategy Of Injuring Yourself

To be the first to gain victory, initially display some weakness to the enemy and only afterward do battle. Then your effort will be half, but the achievement doubled.

The Six Secret Teachings of the Tai Gong

Pretending to be injured has two possible applications. In the first, the enemy is lulled into relaxing his guard since he no longer considers you to be an immediate threat. The second is a way of ingratiating yourself to your enemy by pretending the injury was caused by a mutual enemy.

Three Kingdoms Period China

During the last days of the crumbling Han Empire the renowned general *Sun Ce* was on campaign against a rival province. He had chased the enemy to the walled city of Moling where they were holed up.

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Sun knew it would be too costly to attack fortified positions, so he attempted to arouse the enemy's anger by parading up and down the city walls hurling insults at the defenders. But the commander of the city, *Xue Li*, refused to come out to fight despite the taunts.

One day while Sun was out riding, a soldier on the city wall shot an arrow that hit Sun in the thigh, only slightly penetrating his armor. Sun rode back to camp where he was treated for a flesh wound. However, rumors were spreading that the general had been mortally wounded.

The commanders thought he should go out of his tent to reassure the troops, but Sun used the situation to play a stratagem.

He let it be known that he was mortally wounded and had his soldiers pretend to prepare for a funeral ceremony. Hearing that Sun Ce was dead, Xue Li saw this as his chance and rushed his army out to attack the camp.

Sun Ce's troops pretended to retreat leading the attackers into an ambush that closed in from four directions with Sun charging out on his horse to the shouts of "Sun Ce lives!"

The shocked city garrison threw down their arms and surrendered while Xue Li and a few loyal guards were slain trying to escape.

Edo Period Japan

During the Tokugawa period, Kaei Juzo, a former spy, had come under suspicion and was in danger of being assassinated. It turned out that the man sent to kill him was a former acquaintance called Tonbe. Not wishing to kill his old friend, Tonbe and Juzo worked out the classic ploy as follows.

Tonbe brought Juzo back as a prisoner to the Shogun. Juzo begged the Shogun to allow him one last dignity: permission to commit Seppuku.
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25 A form of ritual suicide by using a dagger to disembowel yourself.

The Strategy Of Injuring Yourself

The Shogun, curious to see the notorious spy's bravery in death, allowed him that privilege. Juzo was given a dagger, which he plunged into his belly, and, cutting sideways, he spilled his intestines onto the ground before falling over. The guards removed the body and threw it in the castle's moat.

A short time later Juzo quietly swam to shore and escaped the district.

Knowing that his warrior's reputation would merit him the right of committing seppuku, Juzo had strapped a dead fox across his abdomen, when the fox's intestines spilled out it was indistinguishable from human intestines.

Three Kingdoms Period China

Zhou Yu was the chief advisor for the state of Wu, which was at war with the powerful kingdom of Wei lead by the warlord *Cao Cao*.

Cao Cao had sent two spies posing as defectors over to the Wu capital but Zhou Yu spotted them immediately. Rather than have the spies executed, Zhou Yu again used the tactic of the "doomed spy" (see Chapter 33).

Zhou Yu sent for his senior and most trusted naval commander, *Huang Gai*, and together they devised a strategy. The next day at court Huang started an argument with Zhou Yu that escalated to the point where Zhou Yu ordered the naval commander's execution. Horrified at the prospect of losing one of their ablest commanders, the other court advisors intervened on Huang's behalf.

Reluctantly, Zhou Yu commuted the sentence to fifty strokes of a staff to be carried out in the town square. This punishment was often fatal in itself, and the Wei spies who watched the beating were convinced that Huang Gai and Zhou Yu had truly fallen out. The next day, while still recovering from the ordeal, Huang secretly sent a message to the Wei camp offering to defect.

At first, Cao Cao was suspicious, but when he called in his spies, they confirmed seeing Huang beaten to near death in the city square. Cao Cao was in desperate need for an able naval commander (having

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recently executed his top two admirals on suspicions of treachery), so he gave the order to have Huang smuggled into his camp. After the usual formalities, Cao Cao asked for Huang Gai's advice on how to train his land based infantry in naval warfare.

Huang Gai said, *"Since the men of Wei are used to fighting on solid earth we should make the war junks as stable as the earth. Your lordship has a great number of boats, and if we had them strung together with chains, and the gaps between the boats covered over with planking, then it would be as stable as land."*

Cao Cao agreed to the plan, and after weeks of construction the huge floating platform proved so stable that the Wei soldiers felt like they were walking on solid ground.

When Zhou Yu's spies reported Cao Cao's new naval strategy, he was ready to attack.

The next day, some say by divine intervention, the winds changed direction enabling Zhou Yu to send fire ships down-wind against the floating island of Wei. When Cao Cao felt the change in wind direction and saw the burning ships bearing down, he knew all was lost. The minute one of his ships caught fire the whole fleet was doomed since, being chained together, no ship could escape.

The entire Wei armada was completely destroyed and Cao Cao himself barely escaped with a handful of troops.

Summary

The tactic of feigning injury to lower your opponent's guard or avoid aggression is so universally applied that it is even found among many species of birds, fish, and animals. The principle is simple: if you are sick or injured, you are less of a threat.

