



抛磚引玉

Pāo Zhuān Yǐn Yù

Strategy 17 Toss Out A Brick To Attract Jade

Bait them with the prospect of gain, bewilder and mystify them.

Sun Zi, *The Art of War*

Prepare a trap, and then lure your enemy into the trap by using bait. In war, the bait is the illusion of an opportunity for gain. In life, the bait is the illusion of wealth, power, and sex.

Warring States Period China

The earl of Zhi was preparing to attack Lesser Wei. To prepare for his attack he presented the king of Wei with four hundred mustangs and a beautiful white jade *Bi*.¹² The king was overjoyed and his ministers all

¹² A ceremonial jade ornament taking the shape of a carved disc or cylinder. They were highly valued in ancient times though their exact purpose remains a mystery.

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

offered their congratulations, but one minister, *Nanwen Ci*, looked distressed.

The king seeing his demeanor asked, *"The great state is very pleased with us! Why then do you look troubled?"*

The minister replied, *"One must always examine thoroughly a reward given for no merit and deference shown where no force has been applied. Four hundred mustangs and a white jade Bi constitute the kind of gift a small state might give when serving a great one. But in this case the larger state makes the gift. Your majesty should ponder this."*

As a precaution, the king of Wei told his commander of the border guards what his minister had cautioned and ordered his troops to be on full alert.

Shortly thereafter, as the minister intimated, the earl of Zhi arrived at the border with a large army. But when the earl saw the border guards posted at full strength, he retired saying, *"Alas, there are worthy men in Wei, for they have anticipated my plans."*

Han Dynasty China

During the Han dynasty, General *Li Mu* was sent north to deal with the continuing problem of the Xiongnu. Every time General Li sought to fight a decisive battle with the nomads they would melt away into the endless expanse of the grasslands.

Seeking to entice them into a position where they could be attacked, General Li devised the following strategy: He departed southwards with the main body as if returning home, but he ordered that his baggage train and accompanying herd of cattle lag behind.

The Xiongnu, believing the general had given up, saw an opportunity to raid his trains and capture the prized herd. They followed behind the retreating army waiting for the right moment to seize the baggage train.

Each day General Li allowed the baggage train to trail further behind until he came to a fork in the road that was surrounded by gently rising hills.

Judging this terrain to be ideal for his plans, General Li positioned his best troops in ambush behind the hills. He then gave orders for the baggage train to rest in the fork while the remainder of the army continued along the road.

The Xiongnu, seeing the main body off in the distance while the baggage train was resting unprotected, rushed into the valley to attack.

There they were ambushed from three sides, and over one hundred thousand nomad cavalymen were killed.

Three Kingdoms Period China

General *Cao Cao* of Wei used a similar tactic in his campaign against his rival General *Yuan Shao*.

Hearing that Yuan Shao had crossed the Yellow River and captured a vassal city of Yanjing, Cao Cao led an army out against him. As he neared the enemy's territory Cao Cao had his column reverse positions so that the baggage train led while the army took up the rear. He ordered the army to lag further and further behind until the baggage train was over two hours ride ahead of the main army. The baggage train was thus the first to encounter the advancing army of Yuan Shao.

The train handlers and guards, upon seeing the approaching army, abandoned the supplies and ran back down the road to warn Cao Cao of Yuan Shao's approach.

Several advisors became anxious at this news but Cao Cao brushed off their concerns and even ordered his men to dismount, abandon their horses, and rest up on the side of a hill overlooking the main road. Soon after, Yuan Shao's army slowly came down the road encumbered by the plundered supplies from the baggage train.

When the Yuan soldiers saw the abandoned horses they ran about wildly racing to round up as many horses as they could. With the Yuan forces in such total disarray, Cao Cao ordered his infantry to charge down the hill.

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

The Yuan were caught by surprise and could not form battle lines. They were completely routed and the scattered remnants of the army fled back over the border.

Summary

To know where and when your enemy plans to move is to have the advantage of foreknowledge. This can be accomplished by offering your enemy something he greatly desires, then you can control when and where he will be.

