

Exchange The Role Of Guest For That Of Host



反客為主

Fǎn Kè Wéi Zhǔ

Strategy 30

Exchange The Role Of Guest For That Of Host

The strategists have a saying: I dare not play the host, but play the guest, I dare not advance an inch, but retreat a foot instead. This is known as marching forward when there is no road, rolling up ones sleeve when there is no arm, dragging ones adversary by force when there is no adversary, and taking up arms when there are no arms.

Lao Zi, *The Tao Te Ching*

Defeat the enemy from within by infiltrating the enemy's camp under the guise of cooperation, surrender, or peace treaties. In this way, you can discover his weakness and then, when the enemy's guard is relaxed, strike directly at the source of his strength.

Qin Dynasty China

Xiang Liang came from a long line of Chu generals but the family lost power when the state of Chu was defeated and annexed by Qin. In his

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

youth he had killed a man and escaped with his nephew *Xiang Yu* to the state of Wu requesting asylum from the governor. The governor welcomed Xiang Liang and gave him an administrative position.

During this time, Xiang secretly formed a band of guests and retainers and trained them in the art of war while establishing a reputation as a competent leader. Then in 209 B.C., the various states and kingdoms rose up in open revolt against the oppressive Qin dynasty. When word of the revolt reached Wu, the governor saw an opportunity to improve his position by joining the rebellion.

He called Xiang Liang and said, *"All regions west of the Yangtze River are in revolt. The time has come when heaven will destroy the house of Qin."*

I have heard it said that "He who takes the lead may rule others, but he who lags behind will be ruled by others." I would like to dispatch an army with you and your nephew at the head."

Xiang Liang, who took the advice in a way the governor would regret, said, *"This is a great honor you have bestowed on my family and I beg leave to call in my nephew Yu, so that he may receive your orders directly."*

The governor consented. Xiang Liang went to summon his nephew and secretly gave him instructions to hold his sword in readiness. They returned to the governor and after some time Xiang Liang turned to his nephew and said, *"You may proceed!"*

This was the signal, and without hesitation Yu drew his sword and cut off the governor's head in a single stroke. Xiang Liang then picked up the head, removed the governor's seals of office, and declared himself governor.

The few attendants that objected were quickly attacked and killed by Yu so that no one else dared to oppose the appointment. Xiang Liang went on to rally several armies to his side in revolt against the Qin.

After numerous victories he re-conquered his home state of Chu and became a contender for the emperor's throne before being killed in battle against another rival for the empire.

Han Dynasty China

In 180 B.C. empress Lu, the wife of the first Han emperor, passed away. For years after her husband's death she had held power, supplanting the authority of the late emperor's Liu clan with her own family, the Lu. Upon her death the Liu family plotted to reclaim their control over the empire.

One of the few remaining members of the Liu clan who had escaped the empress's purge still held a high position as the king of Qi. He received a secret message asking him to raise his troops and march on the capital of Chang'an where he would be assisted by other Liu supporters from within.

The king of Qi ordered his general, *Wei Po*, to secretly ready the army for mobilization, but the prime minister of Qi (a member of the Lu clan) learned of the king's intentions. He intercepted the general's orders and, using the imperial seals in his possession, ordered the army to surround the king's palace and keep him prisoner until further instructions arrived from the capital.²¹

General Wei Po went to speak with the prime minister, pretending that he had no involvement or knowledge of the king's plot, and said, *"Even though the king wants to send out his troops, he cannot since he does not possess the Tiger Seals²² of the Han court which would give him authority to do so. I beg you allow me to take command of the troops for you and keep the king under guard!"*

21 The prime minister was appointed by the court, to watch over the conduct of the king.

22 These small cast bronze figurines of a tiger were split into two pieces. 'male and female' that fit together to make a whole. The king would keep one half and his commanders the other. A courier bearing orders would be given the king's half. A commander, upon receiving the orders, would check that the couriers' half and his own fit together thus insuring the orders were genuine.

The prime minister, believing that Wei Po was on his side, handed over the seals, and put him in charge of the troops. But as soon as he had taken command, Wei Po had the troops surround the prime minister's offices instead.

"Alas!" said the prime minister. *"The Daoists have a saying: 'Strike when the hour comes, or suffer the ruin that follows.' This then is what they meant!"*

The prime minister then committed suicide. The remaining members of the Liu clan rose up in revolt and destroyed the entire Lu family.

Ming Dynasty China

During the Ming dynasty, in the Songjiang region, there lived a wealthy man known as Rich Man Pan. As rich as Pan was, he was always hungry for more and sought out every opportunity to make money. Having heard about alchemy Pan became obsessed with the idea of turning lead into gold and went to great expense inviting wandering sages and alchemists to his house to teach him the secret. Yet after more than ten years of experiments, Pan was still unable to convert even a gram of lead into gold.

Meanwhile, Pan's interest in alchemy became known far and wide. One year Pan went on vacation in the luxurious resort town of West Lake just outside of Hangzhao. Pan's villa was large and sumptuous, but next door was an even grander villa. Over the weeks, Pan observed his neighbor who appeared to be fabulously wealthy and who was accompanied by a stunningly attractive young woman. Pan contrived to meet this elegant stranger, and over the weeks they became acquainted.

The man's name was *Jia Wuzhi* and Pan was anxious to find out the source of his wealth. After discreet questioning, Jia told Pan that he was an alchemist. Pan was stunned and told him of his own efforts in that field. Pan doubted that it was possible after all, but Jia chided his lack of faith and as a matter of honor offered to demonstrate his technique.

He brought out a tripod which he set over a fire. Cradled on the tripod was a porcelain dish containing what appeared to be common lead. Jia

heated the dish until the lead melted then, removing a silk bag from his person, he scooped out a small amount of black powder and mixed this with the molten lead. The lead instantly transformed into valuable silver.

Pan was astonished and asked him how it was done. Jia explained that the process was long and costly but once the powder, called the "silver breeder," was produced, it would transform enough lead into silver to make Pan the wealthiest man in China. Pan explained that he already had a laboratory set up at his home and he begged Jia to be his guest there and help him to create the silver breeder.

"Well, since you have already studied the art yourself, it may be all right. But be warned that the rules are strict and I will only show you the process once." said the alchemist.

When Jia and his beautiful wife arrived, Pan was stricken by the woman's beauty. Jia explained that the more silver used, the greater the potency, so Pan bought as much silver as he could get hold of, over four thousand Taels. The next day they began. Jia explained that the process was one of purification and refinement and that both he and Pan must wash, fast, and avoid any activity that was impure. Most important, only he and Pan could enter the sacred area to attend the fire. But, in case of emergency, Jia's wife could substitute since she was specially trained for this job.

The process would take eighty-one days to complete. Pan was warned not to look into the covered cauldron before the final day. A few days later a message arrived informing Jia that his mother was ill and that she requested his presence at her deathbed. Jia explained the situation to Pan who was deeply concerned about the silver breeder, but Jia reassured him saying he would leave his wife behind to oversee the process.

After Jia left, Pan grew ever more lustful for the alchemist's wife. One night in a fit of passion he seduced her in the sacred chamber. On the eighty first day, Jia returned and he and Pan went to inspect the boiler, but as soon as Jia opened the lid his facial expression turned to anger.

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

"What has happened to the silver breeder?" he shouted. "Has anyone done anything here that could have affected the purity of the atmosphere?"

Pan was shocked into silence. The alchemist summoned his wife and angrily asked her if anything had occurred in the room while he was gone. At first, she denied everything, but after Jia grabbed a whip and threatened to beat her with it she confessed to the seduction.

Jia was furious, he turned to Pan and said, "You greedy scoundrel! With all your money you could buy as many wives as you want, but you still wanted to defile my wife. Well, you have your just reward since the silver breeder has all evaporated. And I will never show you the secret now."

Whereupon the alchemist and his wife left, ignoring Pan's pleas for forgiveness.

Two years later the still brooding, Pan returned to the West Lake area, but under more modest conditions. There, one day he spotted a woman who looked like the alchemist's wife. He questioned her and she did indeed recognize him.

Pan asked about her husband and the woman replied, *"Oh, I was never married. I was hired for three months to pretend to be the wife of an alchemist, but now I am working for another alchemist who is at this moment meeting with his new client."*

Japanese Folk Tale

In feudal Japan, there lived a venerable kendo master who decided to test his three highest ranking students. He brought them one by one to an old temple in the nearby mountains where he told each student, *"You have studied with me many years, now let's see if my teaching has been in vain. There, within the temple, awaits your test. Pass and you will have graduated."*

Within the dimly lit temple, the Master had hidden four samurai armed with clubs and instructions to jump anyone who entered the temple.

Exchange The Role Of Guest For That Of Host

The first student entered the temple and, before his eyes could adjust to the light, he was surprised and beaten by the samurai.

"I am sorry, you have failed," said the master.

The second student entered the temple and sensed the attackers. He was able to deftly evade their attack and defeat them. The student came out of the temple triumphant, but again the master said, *"I am sorry, you have failed."*

Finally, the third student was brought to the temple and told about the test. The student replied, *"But venerable master, protocol dictates that when entering a temple the master must always precede the student, so if you please, I shall follow you in."*

To which the master replied, *"You rascal! You have learned all I can teach you."*

Summary

When you are weak but your enemy is strong there is no chance for victory in a direct contest. Instead, by assuming a subordinate position, you may have the chance of undermining and subverting your enemy's power.

