



金蟬脫殼

Jīn Chán Tuō Qiào

Strategy 21

Shed Your Skin Like The Golden Cicada

Although it does not mindfully keep guard, in the small mountain fields, the scarecrow does not stand in vain.

Bukkoku Kokushi, *The Unfettered Mind*, Takuan Sōhō

When you are in danger of being defeated, and your only chance is to escape and regroup, then create an illusion. While the enemy's attention is focused on this artifice, secretly remove your men leaving behind only the facade of your presence.

Han Dynasty China

In 204 B.C. the king of Han, *Gaozu*, after escaping his exile through the use of the strategy 'Openly Repair the Walkway, Secretly March to Chencang' (see Chapter 8), suffered several defeats at the hands of his old nemesis, the warlord of Chu, *Xiang Yu*.

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Outnumbered and defeated, Gaozu fled with his remaining troops to Zhongyang where he fortified the city and prepared to make a counter attack. Xiang Yu, however, laid siege to the city cutting Gaozu's supply lines and avenue of escape.

One of Gaozu's commanders, *Ji Xin*, devised a scheme to escape, he said, "*The situation is very grave. I beg you to let me deceive Xiang Yu for you by taking your place as king. In this way you will be able to slip away in secret.*"

Gaozu agreed and, while he prepared his escape, Ji Xin had two thousand women from the city dressed like Han soldiers. Before dawn, he had the women march out the front gate and form battle lines. The army of Xiang Yu rushed to formation expecting a final showdown with Han.

As the first light of dawn began to break, Ji Xin rode forth in the yellow draped imperial carriage of the king and announced to the Chu army, "*The food in the city is exhausted. The king of Han surrenders!*"

While the army of Chu was celebrating their victory, the king of Han and thirty horsemen slipped quietly out of the city. When Xiang Yu learned of the deception he had General Ji Xin burned to death. The king of Han made good his escape and two years later returned at the head of a new army. This time he was victorious while the defeated Xiang Yu was hunted down.

The final scene in Xiang Yu's life is one of the most poignant in China's history. Xiang Yu had fled to the bank of the Yellow River with a Han detachment hot on his heels. He was alone since every one of his commanders were now dead or had turned traitor. There was a ferryman who recognized the great general of Chu and urged him to cross over the river before the Han troops arrived.

But Xiang Yu refused saying, "*I left with the sons and fathers and husbands of Chu, but to return alone without them, how could I face the people with such shame.*"

Instead he paid the ferryman to take his favorite stallion across and free him on the other side. By this time the Han soldiers had arrived and,

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spotting an old comrade among the troops, Xiang Yu called out, "*I hear there is a reward for my head. Since you were a friend of mine I give you this parting gift!*"

And with that he drew his sword and cut his throat. The Han soldiers rushed to retrieve his head and in the melee cut him to pieces.

His faithful horse jumped off the boat to swim back but was swept away by the currents and drowned.

Gaozu went on to found China's longest dynasty, the Han, in 202 B.C.

Three Kingdoms Period China

The warlord *Cao Cao* of Wei was pursuing the fleeing army and population of Shu, led by the 'Heroes of the Peach Grove' ¹⁵ - *Liu Bei* and *Zhang Fei*. The retreating column came upon the Changpan Bridge over the Wei River with the enemy army only hours behind. On the opposite side of the river, there was heavy forest.

Zhang Fei turned to Liu Bei and said, "*This bridge is the only crossing point for miles, and provides us with an advantage. You take the army and people across while I hold off the Wei army to give you as much of a lead as possible.*"

After the Shu army had crossed over, Zhang Fei sent his small group of cavalymen across the bridge into the forest where they tied branches to their horse's tails and rode around in circles. Zhang Fei remained sitting on his charger in the middle of the bridge.

When the pursuing army of Wei came upon the sight of Zhang Fei alone on the bridge they stopped. Cao Cao noticed the huge dust cloud in the distance behind the woods and suspected a trap. Zhang Fei roared out a challenge to the Wei army but Cao Cao, now convinced this was a ruse, turned his men around to retreat.

¹⁵ So called because they swore the oath of brotherhood in a peach grove. A similar oath is sworn by members of almost every secret brotherhood in China ever since.

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Zhang Fei seeing the Wei army retreating spurred his charger towards the Wei as though to attack them single-handedly. This so unnerved the Wei forces that they made a mad scramble to escape the area convinced a trap was closing around them. This trick bought Liu Bei and Zhang Fei enough time to escape with their men and regroup at Jiangling.

Six Dynasties Period China

In A.D. 431 the Song emperor, *Wendi*, launched a campaign to win back the province of Henan that was under the control of the kingdom of Wei.

The emperor sent his general, *Tao Cu*, to attack Wei. The Song army fought and won more than thirty engagements, penetrating deep into Wei territory. Now, every commander knows that when an army is deep inside enemy territory his supply lines are the most crucial and vulnerable.

Wei took advantage of this weakness to secretly send a detachment of cavalry that succeeded in cutting off the Song supply lines. The Song army was without provisions and in desperate straits. Tao Cu was planning to retreat, but this would leave the army extremely vulnerable to a rout and slaughter. To make matters worse, many of his soldiers, afraid and starving, deserted to the Wei side and divulged to Tao Cu's the plan to retreat.

The Wei readied their forces to pursue the Song the instant they broke camp. To avert the impending tragedy, Tao Cu devised a stratagem.

During the night he ordered his troops to carry baskets of sand and pile them into great heaps within the compound. The Wei scouts, listening to the night-long commotion, were curious and crept closer to the Song positions in order to see by first light what was happening. Tao Cu then had the piles of sand covered by a thin layer of grain.

The next morning the Wei scouts were shocked to see huge piles of grain that they assumed were smuggled in during the night. When the Wei commander heard this, he suspected that the deserters' reports were a ruse to lure him into a trap, and had them all executed.

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The Wei canceled their planned attack. Two days later the Song army quietly escaped to their home territory.

Hojo Regency Japan

In 1331 the emperor Go Oaigo rebelled against the Hojo Shogunate which had ruled over a series of puppet emperors. The emperor fled Kyoto with the imperial regalia and took refuge in a mountain monastery. ¹⁶ The emperor's loyal commander, Kusunoki Masashige, in order to divert the impending attack away from the emperor, erected a wooden palisade on the side of the mountain.

When the Hojo army arrived, they saw the poor construction of the defenses and rushed to attack the encampment. Kusunoki's troops, though numbering less than five hundred, had constructed several ingenious defenses such as pitfalls, trenches, and logs suspended along the steep slopes that they could unleash to roll down onto the advancing attackers.

After several failed attacks, the Hojo troops resolved to blockade the fort and starve the defenders out. Kusunoki had only a few days' worth of supplies left, and he knew that his troops would soon be too weak to fight. So he devised a strategy in which he could escape without pursuit.

A huge funeral pyre was prepared and covered with the bodies recovered from the battlefield. One volunteer remained behind to light the fire and wait for the Hojo troops.

Under cover of darkness, Kusunoki and his troops quietly escaped through a hidden trench cut through the stockade. Once they were in the mountain forests, their familiarity with the terrain enabled them to disperse into the undergrowth. At the same time, the funeral pyre was set ablaze and it burned so brightly that it lit up the sky.

Hojo sent scouts to find out the cause of the blaze. When they found the compound undefended, the Hojo troops rushed in only to find a huge funeral pyre with a solitary attendant kneeling before the fire.

¹⁶ Consisting of a mirror, sword, and jewels. They were akin to the nine imperial tripods of ancient China - emblematic of the right to rule.

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When he was questioned, he told them that Kusunoki and his troops, knowing they would be defeated, committed suicide en masse. As the Hojo could see burning bodies among the embers they believed the story and did not search for any remaining troops.

Kusunoki escaped that night and he continued to fight for the imperial house for another seven years. He became known as one of Japan's greatest heroes renowned for his unflinching loyalty to the emperor.

Summary

It is a well-known rule of war that troops are extremely vulnerable when retreating. A strong attack against retreating troops usually leads to a rout and slaughter. Whenever you are moving troops, leave behind something that will divert or slow potential pursuers.

