CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE NINE METHODS

Introduction

Military theorists have long been interested in China’s rich tradition of writings on warfare and strategy, but scholarship in the early history of the field remains patchy. Many surviving ancient Chinese military texts are strongly associated with the state of Qi, which seems to have produced a series of exceptionally important strategists, beginning with Guan Zhong, advisor to Lord Huan of Qi and putative author of the Guanzi.¹ However, the conflict between the ancient kingdoms of Wu and Yue was also extremely important in terms of the development of texts about strategy and warfare in Chinese military history. This is largely because of the association of their wars with the famous strategist Sun Wu, the putative author of the Sunzi bingfa, who was said to have been the commander of the Wu forces in many crucial battles. The Sunzi bingfa may be said to represent a fusion between the Qi tradition and southern writings on strategy, given that it is attributed to a man from Qi who apparently spent his entire career in the south.² Though the Sunzi bingfa

¹ The Guanzi includes a number of military chapters; see Guanzi, 105–124 [“Qifa 七法”], 528–532 [“Ditu 地圖”], 316–329 [“Bingfa 兵法”], 897–900 [“Jiubian 九變”]. Two of the seven great Chinese military classics are strongly associated with the state of Qi, including the Liudao 六籍 (Six Secret Teachings) attributed to Taigong 太公, the founder of Qi; see Sheng Dongling 盛東鈴, Liudao yizhu 六籍譯注, in Wujingqishu 武經七書, ed., Pian Yuqian 駿宇驌 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 353–512; and the Sima fa 司馬法 (The Marshal’s Arts of War) which is supposed to have been used by Lord Jing of Qi. See Mou Hong 卞虹, Sima fa yizhu 司馬法譯注, in ibid., 137–186. For a study and translation of these texts; see Ralph Sawyer, The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China, 23–105, 111–143.

² A number of scholars on ancient Chinese military texts have noted that Sunzi bingfa, in spite of its southern associations, does not really mention naval warfare, which was the dominant fighting method in the region. This would seem to reflect the northern, chariot-based patterns of warfare that Sun Wu was familiar with from Qi; see for example Liu Zhan 劉展 et al., Zhongguo gudai junzhi shi 中國古代軍制史 (Beijing: Junshi liaoxxue chubanshe, 1992), 83. The biography of Sun Wu in the Shiji, which gives the earliest known account of his life, is thought to be largely fictional, with strong associations with
is by far the most famous of all the military texts associated with the wars between Wu and Yue, the “Yiwen zhi” chapter of the *Hanshu* records a number of other military and strategic texts which were clearly concerned with this conflict, such as the *Fan Li and Dafu Zhong*, both in two pian, which are classed as *quanmou* 權謀 (strategic planning) texts under the same category as the *Sunzi bingfa*. In the introduction to this category in the catalogue, it says:

> Strategic planners safeguard the kingdom by pinning down the enemy, and use troops to make surprise attacks on them. They plan first and then do battle. They employ both terrain and circumstance [in their own favour], incorporating *yin* and *yang* [into their plans], and use cunning and skill.  

A number of these southern military texts were particularly associated with the figure of Wu Zixu, one of the closest advisors to both King Helü and King Fuchai of Wu, and the moving spirit behind the invasion of Chu which took place in 506 BCE, and which resulted in the Wu army sacking the Chu capital. For example, the “Yiwen zhi” mentions a text named *Wu Zixu* in ten pian with one scroll of illustrations, which is ranked as a *jiqiao* 技巧 (cunning and skill) text, though this was also apparently lost in antiquity. Wu Zixu is also said to have written a text on the subject of naval warfare, the *Wu Zixu shuizhan bingfa* 伍子胥水戰兵法 (Wu Zixu’s Arts of Naval Warfare). It has even been suggested that the *Sunzi bingfa* was originally written by the great general Wu Zixu and misattributed to Sun Wu. There is a certain reverse symmetry between the figures of Wu Zixu and Sun Wu, prior to the discovery of the *Gailü* text at Zhangjiashan in 1983, in that Wu Zixu was a famous general, in command of the enormously important invasion of Chu in 506 BCE which saw the Wu army enter and sack the capital, Ying. Wu Zixu put King Zhuang of Chu to flight, and eventually forced the removal of the Chu capital to Ruo. Sun Wu, on the other hand, was famous for the text on strategy attributed

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3 *Hanshu*, 30:1758. The difficult concepts of *zheng* 正 and *qi* 奇, which have challenged numerous translators of ancient Chinese military texts, have here been translated according to Benjamin Wallacker, “Two Concepts in Early Chinese Military Thought,” *Language* 42 (1966): 295–299.

4 *Hanshu*, 30:1761.