



The Dao of the Military: Liu An's Art of War (Translations from the Asian Classics)

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Master Sun's *The Art of War*, the best-known ancient text on adversarial strategy, is by no means China's only treatise on military affairs. A single chapter in the *Huainanzi*, an important compendium of philosophy and political theory written in the second century B.C.E., synthesizes the entire corpus of military literature inherited from the Chinese classical era. Drawing on all major, existing military writings, as well as other lost sources, it assesses tactics and strategy, logistics, organization, and political economy, as well as cosmology and the fundamental morality of warfare.

This powerful work set out to become the last word on military matters, subsuming and therefore replacing all preceding literature. Yet scholars have largely ignored the text and its singular perspective. Written under the sponsorship of Liu An, king of Huainan, the *Huainanzi*'s "military methods" elevates the preservation of peace as the ultimate value to be served by the military, insisting that the army can be effectively and rightly used only when defending the sacred hereditary position of the emperor and his vassals. This position stands in stark contrast to *The Art of War*, which prioritizes the enrichment and empowerment of the state. Liu An's philosophy also argues that military success depends on the personal cultivation of the commander and that deception is not enough to secure victory. Only a commander with exceptional qualities of insight and cognition, developed through a program of meditative practice and yogic refinement, can control and interpret the strategic situation. Andrew Seth Meyer offers a full translation of this text and extensively analyzes its historical context. His thorough treatment relates Liu An's teachings to issues in Chinese philosophy, culture, religion, and history and lays the groundwork for interpreting their uncommon message.

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