

The Research on the Stratagem of Pretended Surrender

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Pretended surrender is a kind of traditional stratagem which was commonly seen in the war history of ancient China. As a matter of fact, it is a kind of special psychological tactic, making full use of the enemy's carelessness. In the war culture of ancient China, strategic deception is one of the most important parts. In history, ancient Chinese military strategists developed many kinds of strategic deceptions in the process of the wars. Pretended surrender is one of the most basic ones. Though it looks simple, this stratagem requires the users to have really excellent psychological analysis ability and acting skill so that they can successfully fool their enemy. This stratagem appeared in ancient China in a very early time. With time going by, it developed some new forms, letting the battlefields become more inscrutable. However, this stratagem has its basic logic. After knowing this logic, we can easily see through most of the stratagems of pretended surrender. This stratagem is still of great use in today's political struggles and commercial warfare.

Keywords: stratagem, pretended surrender, psychological tactic

Introduction

As a kind of traditional stratagem, pretended surrender was really common in the war history of ancient China. In some western countries such as the UK and the US, until the early 20th century, war was still seen as the game of gentlemen (Lewis, 2015). During the cold war (1947-1991), this thought was finally given up by the strategists and politicians of these countries (Lewis, 2015). As a matter of fact, at the very beginning, ancient Chinese people also thought that war was a game with fixed rules. However, in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.), because of many reasons, the military strategists of China had to accept the fact that the form of war was greatly changed. In this period, *The Art of War* written by one of the most famous Chinese military strategists named Sun Tzu (545-470 B.C.) proposed an important viewpoint that all warfare was based on deceptions (Cheng, 1999). This event showed that strategic deception had become the necessity of Chinese war culture in the Spring and Autumn Period. The stratagem of pretended surrender also appeared in this period. About the pretended surrender of this period, I will introduce it in one of the following parts of this paper. In the warring states period, a Chinese philosopher named Han Fei (280-233 B.C.) also had a similar sentence: In war, deception is not to be despised (Han, 2013).

In the war history of ancient China, there were two kinds of common deceptions named pretended surrender and pretended defeat. In history, these two deceptions were always adopted by the weaker armies, making full use of adversaries' psychology of taking the enemy lightly. Compared with pretended defeat, pretended surrender is much more difficult.

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This paper is a summative research of the stratagem of pretended defeat. In this paper, a few classic examples of this stratagem will be introduced. After analyzing these examples in detail, we will find the basic logic of this stratagem.

The Stratagem of Pretended Surrender at the Tactical Level

In the history of China, there were two military groups that were good at this stratagem. The first one was the Jiangdong military group of the late Eastern Han Dynasty (184-220). This military group finally built the Wu Kingdom (222-280) during the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280). The second one was the military group of the Li family of Xiazhou area (located in today's Jingbian County, Shaanxi Province, China). This military group finally built the Western Xia Regime (1038-1227).

In Chinese history, the most famous example of pretended surrender happened in the late Eastern Han Dynasty. During the battle of the Red Cliffs (located in today's Xianning, Hubei Province, China), after seeing the warships of Cao Cao's (155-220) army were connected with iron chains, Huang Gai (?-?), a general of Jiangdong military group, thought that it would be an opportunity to adopt incendiary tactics (Chen & Pei, 2006). However, the warships of Huang needed to get close to the warships of Cao. Thus, Huang first wrote a letter to Cao, saying that he would like to surrender (Chen & Pei, 2006). After that, he successfully gained an opportunity to get close to the Cao army's warships (Chen & Pei, 2006). Finally, the incendiary tactics were adopted successfully. In this battle, Jiangdong military group saw the power of pretended surrender. In subsequent history, this stratagem was adopted many times by the generals of Jiangdong military group and the Wu Kingdom.

Then, let's talk about the pretended surrender of Li Jiqian (963-1004), one of the leaders of the Li family of Xiazhou area. In his military career, the stratagem of pretended surrender could be seen as his specialty. As a matter of fact, he was not a really excellent commander. However, with this stratagem, he successfully defeated many powerful adversaries. The most famous battle happened in 985 (Tuotuo, 2000). With this stratagem, Li successfully trapped and killed Cao Guangshi (931-985), a famous general of Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) (Tuotuo, 2000). Wanting to take all the credit, Cao went to the base of Li with only a few hundred cavalymen without letting other generals of the Song army know (Tuotuo, 2000). Li's army easily killed all of them. However, there was a dark humor that Li was also finally killed by this stratagem during the war between his military group and the Tibetans (Tuotuo, 2000).

These examples show the basic usage of the stratagem of pretended surrender at the tactical level. The purpose of this stratagem is gaining victory in a battle. From these examples, we can summarize that the basic logic of this stratagem is as follows. Firstly, pretend to surrender and let your adversaries lose their vigilance. Then, you can defeat them with a surprise attack. In a word, the pretended surrender of this level is a kind of simple psychological tactic. However, it will be really useful when facing a proud adversary.

Pretended Surrender Combining With Deceiving the Enemy by Torturing One's Own Man

Deceiving the enemy by torturing one's own man is a stratagem recorded in *Thirty-Six Stratagems*, a famous military book of ancient China (Cheng, 1999). According to the theory of some modern military scientists, it is a kind of strategic deception (Gao & Zhang, 2015). About this stratagem, *Thirty-Six Stratagems* explains that because most people will not hurt themselves, the injury must be caused by a mutual enemy (Cheng, 1999). Therefore, this injury will help you dispel your adversary's suspicion and gain an opportunity to get close to him (Cheng, 1999). In the war history of China, it was proved that this stratagem could combine with pretended

surrender.

Sometimes, the enemy will not easily believe your surrender. In this situation, adopting the stratagem of deceiving the enemy by torturing one's own man will be a good choice. This is the basic usage of this special tactic.

A famous example of this tactic happened in the Three Kingdoms Period. In 228, the Wu army successfully defeated the Wei army with this tactic. In this period, both sides wanted to gain an opportunity to annihilate the enemy's main force. The emperor and the generals of the Wu Kingdom decided to adopt a baiting tactic. Zhou Fang (?-?), a general of the Wu Kingdom, wrote a letter to Cao Xiu (?-228), the Chancellor of Wars of the Wei Kingdom (220-266), announcing that he would like to surrender to the Wei Kingdom (Chen & Pei, 2006). In order to let Cao trust him, Zhou cut down his hair (Chen & Pei, 2006). After seeing it, Cao immediately led a large army to coordinate with Zhou. Finally, the Wei army was defeated by the Wu army's ambush (Chen & Pei, 2006). In Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Zhou's deed was adapted into one of the chapters of a famous classical Chinese fiction named *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Luo, 2006).

Some readers may ask why Cao would trust Zhou after he cut his hair. Here, we need to know about the culture of ancient China. As an old Chinese saying goes, body, hair, and skin are all received from one's parents; one dare not damage or injure them (Wang, 2004). Therefore, in the dynasties built by the Han Nationality, the behavior of cutting down hair was usually seen as a kind of self-harm. Therefore, Zhou's action could be seen as the stratagem of deceiving the enemy by torturing one's own man. His self-harm successfully let Cao believe that his surrender was a real one.

Actually, stratagems should be based on the cultural background. As time goes by, the forms of the stratagems will change because of the differences of human's thoughts. In reality, self-harm is not the only method of the stratagem of deceiving the enemy by torturing one's own man. As a matter of fact, pretending to be persecuted is a much more common method of this stratagem.

In a word, the pretended surrender combined with deceiving the enemy by torturing one's own man is also a stratagem at the tactical level.

The Stratagem of Pretended Surrender at the Strategic Level

The examples introduced before are all about the stratagem of pretended surrender at the tactical level. Does it exist the stratagem of pretended surrender at the strategic level? The answer is yes. As a matter of fact, this kind of pretended surrender appeared as early as the Spring and Autumn Period.

During the war between the State of Wu (?-473 B.C., mainly located in today's Jiangsu Province, China) and the State of Yue (2032-222 B.C., located in today's central and northern regions of Zhejiang Province, China), the King Gou Jian (?-464 B.C.) of the State of Yue successfully subjugated the State of Wu by adopting this stratagem.

At the very beginning, in 494 B.C., the Yue army was defeated by the Wu army in the battle of Fujiao (located in today's Jiangsu Province, China) (Sima, 2006). After the battle, the Yue army did not even have the ability to protect the capital of the State of Yue (Wu & Mu, 2016). Fan Li (536-448 B.C.), a senior official of the State of Yue, suggested the King Gou Jian adopt the stratagem of pretended surrender.

Here, we need to know that the stratagem of pretended surrender mentioned by Fan was different from those of the tactical level. It was the pretended surrender at the strategic level, aiming to subjugate a whole country and having a different logic from that of the tactical level. Its basic logic is as follows. When you do not have the

ability to defeat your enemy, you'd better stop him from continuing attacking you with a pretended surrender. After that, you need to show your loyalty, keeping a good relationship with him so that you can buy enough time to develop your own. In this process, you need to do something secretly to confuse and weaken him. When you are powerful enough, you can start counterattacking.

How did King Gou Jian show his loyalty to Fu Chai (?-473 B.C.), the king of the State of Wu? He adopted the method of bribery including sex bribery and money bribery (Wu & Mu, 2016). After gaining the gifts and two beautiful women of the State of Yue, Fu Chai no longer saw Gou Jian as his enemy. As moral people, we may not accept this method. However, we still have to admit that this simple method is of great use no matter in history or in reality. As a matter of fact, before Fu Chai accepted the gifts of Gou Jian, a senior official of the State of Wu named Bo Pi (?-473 B.C.) had been bought over by Gou Jian with eight beauties, becoming his lobbyist (Zuo & Wei, 2015). After gaining the trust of Fu Chai, Gou Jian started to prepare for the counterattack. With the help of Fan, he secretly destroyed the economy of the State of Wu. At the same time, Bo Pi provoked the political struggle of the State of Wu, killing Wu Zixu (?-484 B.C.), the most loyal senior official of the State of Wu (Wu & Mu, 2016). Also in this process, Gou Jian successfully recovered the power of the Yue army. In 482 B.C., Gou Jian started to attack the State of Wu during a natural disaster (Wu & Mu, 2016). In 473 B.C., the State of Yue gained the final victory (Wu & Mu, 2016).

Most of researchers including me myself will pay much attention to the famous beauty trap of the State of Yue when researching the war between these two states of the Spring and Autumn Period. According to *Thirty-Six Stratagems*, the beauty trap adopted by Gou Jian was called using seductive women to corrupt the enemy (Cheng, 1999). From the example, we can easily see that these seductive women were the sharp knives stabbed into the enemy's heart. They could indirectly provoke internal conflicts within the enemy faction. More importantly, they could confuse the king of the State of Wu, letting him lose the judgement. However, from the angle of the whole strategy of Gou Jian, the beauty trap was just one of the methods to ensure the success of his pretended surrender at the strategic level. In other words, the beauty trap was just one of the parts of his whole strategy. As a matter of fact, in history, he did many other things to make sure the success of this strategy.

From this example, we can see that the key to this stratagem is gaining the trust of the enemy by adopting the method of pretending to be loyal. Of course, direct bribery is not the only method of pretending to be loyal. Providing the opportunities of cooperation in the field of economy and offering discounts in trade are also really common methods. Of course, there are also many other methods such as attacking the people that are hated by the enemy. In a word, trying everything to let the enemy believe the authenticity of the surrender is the key.

There is another important point that pretending to be loyal is just the beginning of the whole stratagem. The actions of weakening the enemy are also necessary. From the example of Gou Jian, we can see that he successfully weakened the State of Wu by adopting two important methods, economic combat and beauty trap (Wu & Mu, 2016), which were both non-military methods. Also from this example, we can see the power of the beauty trap which could easily provoke the political struggles of the hostile country indirectly by confusing the important people with seductive women (Wu & Mu, 2016).

In summary, the strategic level's pretended surrender usually consisting of three steps: showing the loyalty, weakening the enemy secretly, and preparing for the counterattack. It will be a relatively long process to finish all the steps of this stratagem.

The Relations Between Beauty Trap and Pretended Surrender

As mentioned before, the war between the States of Wu and Yue was famous for the application of beauty trap. There are many methods which can be used to weakening the enemy. Beauty trap is one of the most common ones. According to *Six Secret Teachings*, a famous military book of ancient China, beauty trap is one of the twelve useful non-military ways which can be adopted to weaken the enemy (Cheng, 1999).

However, weakening the enemy is not the only function of beauty trap. As we all know, when facing the males who are proud enough, being really confident about their masculinity, there's no stratagem better than the beauty trap. When facing these males, letting them gain some seductive women will be a good method to make the pretended surrender looks more realistic. It will also better hide your intention of weakening the enemy. It is a simple but useful psychological tactic, really common in history and in reality.

Here, about the beauty trap which is adopted to assist the stratagem of pretended surrender, there are some interesting questions that are worth thinking about.

Except confusing the important people and provoking the political struggles, in the process of weakening the enemy, does the beauty trap have some other usages? For example, can it combine with human wave tactics, totally destroying the social ethos of the hostile country? Besides, how to artificially create a seductive woman is also an interesting question which is worth discussing in detail. In Chinese, this method is called Renge Meirong (translated as personality grooming) which is a concept introduced by a Chinese political novel named *In the Name of People* (Zhou, 2022).

Interestingly, in different periods, the tactics which are adopted to reach the strategic goal of weakening the enemy will change because of the development of humans' thoughts and technology.

Conclusion

Compared with other stratagems summarized by ancient Chinese strategists, pretended surrender was not quite complex. However, the war history of ancient China has proved that it was of great use. We may see it as a despicable conspiracy but it is still necessary for us to understand its basic logic. Only in this way can we escape from being conspired against. Even in the future, this stratagem will not disappear. Therefore, the research of this stratagem is a good reference for today's politicians and military strategists.

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