

Random Thoughts 46

The Art of War

This is one of my favorite books. It was written in the 5th century BC by the Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu. It is every short – only 13 chapters – but very deep. My favorite part is the last chapter about the use of spies.

This chapter emphasizes the importance of foreknowledge¹. This, it goes on to say, can be obtained by any other means than the use of men; that is to say, spies. Sun Tzu says there are five types of spies: (1) local spies, (2) inward spies, (3) converted spies, (4) doomed spies, and (5) surviving spies. In essence these refer to what I would call “dedicated” spies, those who only work for one side and are dedicated to it; “double spies”, who work for both sides; and what I call “triple” spies, those who appear to work for two different sides but in fact work for themselves or a third party. These, in my opinion, are the cleverest and thus most able to survive.

Recently I saw an excellent movie that was a story of a triple spy. The movie was so well made that until the very end it was not possible to determine whether the protagonist was a dedicated, double, or triple spy. The title of the movie is *Atomic Blonde* and stars Charlize Theron, James McAvoy, and John Goodman as well as several other excellent actors. It is a rather new movie that came out in 2017 and is set in Berlin during the final days before the Berlin Wall came down. If you like action-packed movies full of intrigue and realistic, then I recommend this movie. I thoroughly enjoyed it!

I prefaced this essay by saying how much I liked *The Art of War*. One of the reasons is because the more times I read the book, the more often I began to find my own ways of interpreting it. Written about 2,500 years ago a literal interpretation would not seem to be relevant to today, however, parallels can be seen in descriptions of ancient practices and situations with those of today. To do so, though, requires imagination and the confidence to seek one’s own interpretation of the book.

If you have some free time this summer, I recommend reading *The Art of War* in a language of your preference and also seeing the movie *Atomic Blonde*!

¹ 予知