

# TCU-in-Scotland: Tao of Strategy

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This is the syllabus for *TCU-in-Scotland: Tao of Strategy* (PSYC 40423).  
This is a course about strategy, and here is your first lesson:<sup>1</sup>

The Skillful Warrior of old  
Won  
Easy victories.

The victories  
Of the Skillful Warrior  
Are not  
Extraordinary victories;  
They bring  
Neither fame for wisdom  
Nor merit for valor.

His victories  
Are  
Flawless;  
His victory is  
Flawless  
Because it is  
Inevitable;  
He vanquishes  
An already defeated enemy.

The Skillful Warrior  
Takes his stand  
On invulnerable ground;  
He lets slip no chance  
Of defeating the enemy.

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<sup>1</sup>This is Section 4b, "The Way of Victory," from Minford's translation of Sunzi's *Art of War* (*Bingfa*); Section numbers and titles are given in my document, "Internal Structure of Sunzi's *Bingfa*."

The victorious army  
Is victorious first  
And seeks battle later;  
The defeated army  
Does battle first  
And seeks victory later.

The Skillful Strategist  
Cultivates  
The Way  
And preserves  
The law;  
Thus he is master  
Of victory and defeat.

There are several layers of meaning to this passage, and we will explore them all as part of this course. But the first and most obvious layer of meaning is this: Preparation is the key to success. Or, as Bear Bryant put it, “It’s not the will to win, but the will to prepare to win that makes the difference.”

The key to success in this course is to prepare as well as you can *before* you arrive in Edinburgh. Wait, and you will lose.

## Readings

There are three texts:

- G. W. S. Barrow. *Robert Bruce and the community of the realm of Scotland*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 4th edition, 2005 [This is one of two primary readings for the course; Robert the Bruce will be our major biographical study.]
- John Minford. *Sun-tzu: The art of war*. Penguin Books, New York, 2002 [This is the other primary reading; Sunzi’s *Bingfa*<sup>2</sup> will frame our strategic analysis.]
- Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall. *Daodejing: “Making this life significant”—A philosophical translation*. Ballantine Books, New York, 2003 [This is a secondary reading; Laozi’s *Daodejing* is key to understanding Sunzi’s *Bingfa*.]

You should read *Robert Bruce* and the *Bingfa* in their entirety before Scotland. If you can’t read the whole thing, read as much as you can. From the *Daodejing* you should read the introductory material (pp. 1–76) and a selection of chapters: The chapters denoted “Military” in the thematic index (p. 234) would be a good place to start for this course. Do *not* buy translations of the *Bingfa* and the *Daodejing* other than the two listed above.

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<sup>2</sup>*Bingfa* is pinyin Chinese for *Art of War*.

## Assignments

You can earn points in four ways:

- *Short Essays*: Six short essay topics are listed below. Each essay (750–1,000 words) will be worth 10 points.
- *Participation*: While in Scotland, you will receive three participation grades, one for each week of the program. Your grade will be determined by your *informed* contribution to class discussion. Each weekly participation grade will be worth 10 points.
- *Journal*: Your journal will be graded once each week while in Scotland. Your journal grade will be determined in a manner similar to your participation grade, based upon your reading, class discussion, and reflections. Each weekly journal grade will be worth 10 points.
- *Scrapbook*: After the trip you can turn in a scrapbook, which will be worth 10 points.

You will need 90 points for an A, 80 points for a B, and so on. If you do the math, you will see that there are several ways to earn a good grade. If you are an active, informed participant, and turn in a quality scrapbook, you can earn a good grade by writing only three of the essays. However, if you are not prepared when you arrive in Edinburgh, you will most likely have to write five or six essays in order to earn a good grade. You can do as many of the essays as you wish before the trip, but I wouldn't recommend doing more than three or four.

## Essay Topics

Each essay should be clearly written, and should be 3–4 pages in length (750–1,000 words). When writing these essays, your guide should be Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*. You may submit drafts to me for feedback.

1. Section 1a of Sunzi's *Bingfa* concerns The Five Fundamentals: The Way, Heaven, Earth, Command, Discipline. Your task in the first essay is to discuss how these Five Fundamentals apply to Robert the Bruce as commander, once he began his campaign against the Comyns and the English. Note that the Five Fundamentals are merely outlined in Section 1a—they are fleshed out in the remainder of Sunzi's *Bingfa*, and also in the *Daodejing*.
2. Chapters 2 and 3 of Sunzi's *Bingfa* concern the economics of war, where "economics" is broadly defined so as to include all that can be gained or lost during a conflict. Sunzi's Skillful Warrior is a prudent commander, and your task in the second essay is to discuss how well Robert the Bruce lives up to Sunzi's ideal. Note that although this topic is dealt with most directly in Chapters 2 and 3, it appears throughout the *Bingfa* and the *Daodejing*.

3. Sections 4a and 4b of Sunzi's *Bingfa* contain an exquisite description of The Skillful Warrior, that is closely linked to the key Daoist concept of *wuwei* (see the *Daodejing*). Your task in this essay is to describe how well Robert the Bruce lives up to Sunzi's vision of The Skillful Warrior, as described in these two sections of the *Bingfa*.
4. Section 4c and Chapter 5 of Sunzi's *Bingfa* concern a key concept within Sunzi's system of strategy, *shi*, which Minford translates as "potential energy." Your task in this essay is to describe how Bruce and his commanders utilized *shi* in their campaign against the Comyns and the English.
5. Chapter 6 of the *Bingfa* concerns a key pair of concepts, empty (*xu*) and full (*shi*—not the same "shi" as above). "Emptiness" is also a central theme in the *Daodejing*. Your task in this essay is to describe how Bruce and his commanders utilized *xu* and *shi* in their campaign against the Comyns and the English.
6. Spontaneity (*ziran*) is a central theme of the *Daodejing*, that is also woven throughout the *Bingfa*. Your task in this essay is to (a) describe *ziran* and its relation to *wuwei*, and (b) describe how Robert the Bruce's actions as commander could be seen as *ziran*.

