

Roots and Interpretations of The Philosophy of Stratagems

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Abstract: The study of stratagems has deep historical roots, extending from ancient Eastern and Western civilizations to contemporary philosophical thought. This paper explores the origins and interpretations of the philosophy of stratagems, tracing their development from classical sources such as Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, Laozi's *Dao De Jing*, and the Chinese treatise *36 Stratagems*, to Islamic intellectual traditions, including Nizam al-Mulk's *Siyāsatnāma* and Amir Temur's *Temur Tuzuklari*. Special attention is given to the influence of stratagems on governance, military affairs, and socio-political strategies in both Eastern and Western contexts. The works of Aristotle, Plato, and later Machiavelli's *The Prince* are analyzed to demonstrate how stratagems became embedded in Western political philosophy. The study also highlights the contributions of modern scholars such as Harro von Senger and Robert Greene, who systematized stratagem theory for contemporary global discourse. Ultimately, the research reveals that stratagems are not only military or political instruments but also universal cultural phenomena shaping human interaction, governance, and global relations.

Keywords: Stratagems; philosophy of strategy; 36 Stratagems; Nizam al-Mulk; Amir Temur; Machiavelli; Harro von Senger; Robert Greene; Eastern philosophy; Western political thought; globalization; socio-political strategies.

Introduction: Throughout all periods of human development, issues related to the progress of society and the future of a particular nation and state have always received strong attention. The sages and scholars, leaders and statesmen of each era have sought to determine the principles of development of the society in which they lived, to outline its strategy of action, and to define the ways of implementing it.

Development consists of a chain of reforms and renewals that are carried out sequentially and interconnectedly. To implement reforms, first and foremost, profound changes must take place in consciousness and thinking. Indeed, if there were no lofty goals uniting people and turning them into a powerful force, society would have long ago faced spiritual decline.

For this reason, strategies that embody the lofty goals and aspirations of society, inspire people to constructive endeavors, and help realize their potential hold incomparable significance in the lives of society and individuals, of the state and every citizen. This is an undeniable truth of today's reality.

The concept of "stratagem" originates from the ancient

Greek word "stratagemata," which means "military affair" and "military trick." This is confirmed by the fact that the ancient Roman statesman Sextus Julius Frontinus (30–103 CE) wrote a treatise on military tactics titled *Strategemata*.

According to researcher D. Qodirov, as early as 2,500 years ago in China, military and political scholars began attempting to develop a set of rules based on general laws that underlie the science of strategy. This process lasted for more than a thousand years, resulting in the creation of 36 tactical methods for conquering countries, expanding states, and maintaining power. The exact time when the treatise *36 Stratagems* appeared and its author are unknown. Hundreds of politicians, commanders, and ordinary people contributed to its creation. They passed down strategic stories from generation to generation, explaining and refining them each time, selecting only the most important until the essence remained. The process that produced the *36 Stratagems* began in the 6th century BCE and was completed around the 5th century CE. Historical sources repeatedly mention it, and around the 1600s, an anonymous author compiled them into a manuscript titled *The Secret Art of War: 36 Stratagems*.

The 36 Stratagems stands alongside Sun Tzu's The Art of War, Laozi's Dao De Jing, and the oldest Chinese work, Shijing. Like these works, it teaches its readers resilience, survival, and the acquisition of wealth in a dynamic environment.

In fact, all of them trace their foundations back to an even older work, the Book of Changes (I Ching, 12th–6th centuries BCE), which relied on philosophical predictions about the world and humanity to explain the future of the real world and society. On this basis, the spiritual foundations of many stratagems were elaborated.

As some specialists emphasize, stratagems were also studied and given attention in the Islamic world. In particular, in the 12th century, the Sicilian Arab scholar Ibn Zafar wrote a work on stratagems, which Michael Amari later translated into English under the title *Solwan or Waters of Comfort*. A century before Machiavelli, an anonymous author wrote a treatise in Arabic entitled *Raqā'iq al-Hiyal fī Daqā'iq al-Hiyal* ("A Veil Woven from the Fine Fabric of Subtle Stratagems"), which was translated into French and published in 1976.

Among these are also stratagems related to fiqh, which constitutes a part of Muslim law and practice. One of the most important sources for our dissertation topic is *Siyāsatnāma* or *Siyar al-Mulūk* (The Book of Government or The Lives of Kings), written in 1091 by Abu Ali Hasan ibn Ali al-Tusi, better known as Nizam al-Mulk (1018–1092), the wise vizier of the Seljuks, who left an indelible mark on the history of the East and world political thought. Its main stratagem is this: "If a centralized state does not have a single strategy, supporters of different strategies and ideas will fight for power, which may lead to much bloodshed and tyranny."

Another key source for modern stratagem studies is *Temur Tuzuklari* (The Institutes of Temur), a historical-political treatise that reflects many of the spiritual principles characteristic of the Uzbek people. This valuable work from the 14th–15th centuries tells of Amir Temur's liberation of Mawarannahr from the Mongols, his rise to power, the establishment of an independent and centralized state, and the activities carried out by the Sahibqiran. The ideas in this work remain relevant today and are being used to improve the structure of our state and society.

It should also be noted that valuable insights for our topic can be found in works written after Temur Tuzuklari, such as Mirzo Ulughbek's *Tārīkh-i Chihilgāni* (The History of the Four Uluses), Babur's *Baburnama*, Abulgazi Bahodir Khan's *Shajara-i Turk* (The Genealogy of the Turks), and Ahmad Donish's *Navādir al-Waqā'i*

(Rare Events).

In Western countries as well, scholarly sources have been created to analyze the theoretical foundations of modern stratagem theory. Not only the work *Strategematon* by the ancient Roman statesman Sextus Julius Frontinus (30–103 CE), but also the works of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (427–347 BCE, Athens)—such as *The Republic*, *The Laws*, *Critias*, and *Politics*, along with treatises on political matters written by his student—are considered essential sources for today's stratagem theory.

Similarly, the treatises titled *Politics* by Aristotle (384–322 BCE), one of the greatest thinkers of antiquity who inaugurated a new era in Greek philosophy and science, are also among the most important sources of modern stratagem theory.

The main work of the Italian political thinker Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), *The Prince* (*Il Principe*), written in 1513, is recognized as the first book in the history of European Renaissance socio-philosophical and political thought to substantiate the idea of a centralized state and the strategic principles underpinning it. It is no coincidence that it astonished all of Europe at the time.

Despite being placed on the Index of Prohibited Books by the Pope of Rome in 1559, *The Prince* quickly spread and was introduced to dozens of nations. In particular, translations were published in French in 1544, Latin in 1560, English in 1640, German in 1745, Swedish in 1757, Spanish in 1821, Hungarian in 1848, Polish in 1868, Russian in 1869, Czech in 1873, Danish in 1876, and Norwegian in 1898.

In modern philosophy, the study of stratagems began in the late 20th century, with Swiss scholar Harro von Senger and English philosopher Robert Greene being recognized as the prominent specialists who introduced this concept into discourse. Senger's works *Strategeme. Band 1* (Stratagems, Vol. 1, 1999) and *Strategeme. Band 2* (Stratagems: The Chinese Art of Living and Survival, Vol. 2, 2004), as well as Robert Greene's *The 48 Laws of Power* (1998) and *The 33 Strategies of War* (2006), provide a comprehensive discussion of the subject.

Harro von Senger's aforementioned works, spanning over 1,300 pages, detail the theory and practice of stratagems, their formation and significance, and the origins of Chinese stratagems. They classify stratagems, provide information on their development, and draw parallels with Western analogues.

Admittedly, some research and publications had been undertaken earlier, including articles in scientific and popular journals and collections. However, it was

precisely these scholars who fully introduced Chinese stratagems into European scientific thought, revealing their content and significance as phenomena universal to all humanity.

In an article published in 2008 in the newspaper Hurriyat, Doctor of Philosophy and Professor V. Alimasov also provided a concise overview of this topic. He noted:

“Although globalization processes unfolding in the world today are viewed as a positive phenomenon, it is not difficult to see that they hinder the free expression of the national and individual consciousness of one’s ‘self.’ Through the unification of lifestyles, cultural diversity, modes of thinking, and laws, some politicians and researchers promote strategies for forming global governance or even a planetary state. However, such unification could lead to the uniformity of the very diversity, pluralism, and variety that human reason, consciousness, and spirit constantly desire.

Therefore, while supporting globalization processes, scholars today face the challenge of preserving cultural diversity, different ways of thinking inherent to each individual, the inclination toward unique research, and pluralism. The growing interest in Chinese stratagems in recent years is one example of such research.”

In short, the study of stratagems makes it possible to reveal their philosophical characteristics and to understand the aims of certain individuals, the directions of their actions, their attitudes toward their surroundings, and the ways in which they express themselves.

Without knowledge of these factors, it is difficult to use stratagems effectively, which is why it is of great importance to clearly understand the methods and means of achieving the goals associated with them, as well as their role in life.

Today, stratagems widely spread across the world exert a significant influence not only on the lives of nations but also on relations between them and on the geostrategic development principles of certain countries.

This, in turn, implies that stratagems are directed toward many different objects—be it individuals, specific social strata, ethnic groups and nations, a particular state, or entire regional blocs.

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