



TECHNIUM
SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

Vol. 37, 2022

**A new decade
for social changes**

www.techniumscience.com

ISSN 2668-7798



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Sun Tzu's Dao of Deceit Considering from a Semiotic Perspective

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Abstract. Semioticians' efforts on lie study, mostly focus on lie and sign relationship, its general characteristics on the basis of a static analysis. Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, the existing oldest treatise with the theme on lie whose influence extends beyond battle to other competitive spheres such as politics and business by modern readers cannot be overlooked. Sun Tzu, in contrast to semiotic studies of lying, focuses on the dynamic process of lie-sign signification, stating that lie formation is preconditioned by sign observation from the sender, the recipient, and the surrounding environment. He proposes his Xing (形) theory that the manipulation of recipient through the use of signs is the key to subdue him; he presents the formulating process of a lie-sign from the standpoint of a deceiver, which is uncommon in western culture. This study can shed new light on both the classic and the process of L-sign formulation and signification.

Keywords. sign observation; manipulation; sign behavior; Xing theory

Introduction

Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, one of the most widely read Chinese classics in the west. Its "warfare is Dao (Pinyin of 道, also translated as art or way) of deceit" divides people's opinions: some hold that this is utterly ruthless and immoral, a vile and filthy act that contradicts the spirit of fair play; some even hold that Sun Tzu is the root of the dark side of Chinese civilization (Minford, 2002: 2). Marcel Danesi denounces the application of Sun Tzu's method of gaining victories through artful deception to attain and maintain political power (2020: 3), while sinologist M. Nylan remarks that Sun Tzu can teach people in difficult situations (2020: 10); no one can deny the fact that human history are full of stories of deceptions of any kind, east or west alike, from the earliest written accounts of Pharaoh Ramses II against the Hittite, Gideon against the Midianites in the Bible, to Homer's Trojan Horse epic, not to mention the feints and feccades in World War II, of which Operation Overlord is the most well-known example. General Eisenhower declared that "no major operations should be undertaken without planning and executing deception measures" (Rothstein & Whaley 2013: XIX). Machiavelli argues that deception is the most successful military weapon, stating that "in managing war it is an honorable and magnificent thing, and he who overcomes the enemy with deceit is lauded as much as he who overcomes it with force" (2009: 299); In his masterpiece *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz is generally known with a preference for overwhelming power, yet he understands

that “the weaker the forces that are at the disposal of the supreme commander, the more appealing the use of cunning becomes”(1976: 203). This study does not take a moral and ethical stance on the phenomenon of deception and deceit in military actions, nor does it engage in a debate over whether it is appropriate to apply Sun Tzu's "path to survival or ruin" to other competitive arenas by the modern readers. Rather, the purpose of this investigation is to explicate and explain Sun Tzu's Dao of deceit from a semiotic standpoint to reveal the dynamic semiotic features of lie signs.

Semiotics has always been concerned with deception or lies. Aurelius Augustinus, bishop of Hippo, contributed to the study of the phenomenon with his sign theory, from which some argue that Augustine limited the phenomenon of lying inside human society by means of conventional signs, particularly linguistic signs. “Animals and plants can deceive, but they cannot lie, understanding by ‘lie’ that distinctively linguistic form of deceit which, being linguistic, is also species specifically human” (Deely, 2009:142). But Augustine also wrote that “He lies [...] who holds one opinion in his mind and who gives expression to another through words or any other outward manifestation” (Gramigna, 2020: 157). Robert W. Mitchell extended agents of deceit to organisms and perhaps even interspecies interactions: “deception is used to characterize a type of interaction between organisms” (1986: 19); and proposed a hierarchical four-level of deceptions in which humans ranked the highest:

The fourth level of deception involves an open program which is capable of programming and reprogramming itself based upon the past and present actions of the organism being deceived. That is, the sender corrects or changes its actions both to counteract undesired acts and to encourage desired acts of the receiver. In a sense, the sender becomes the programmer of its own behavior. (26)

Marcel Danesi resonates that "human deception goes far beyond instinctive or reactive behavior, involving the conscious ability to manipulate someone else's mind" (2017: 2).

There are other modern semioticians who probe into sign and lie relations, as well as the truth and falsity of signs. In his *Foundation of the Theory of Signs*, Charles Morris claims that the pragmatic use of signs may result in what he terms the abuse of signs: “in the clearly dishonest cases a purpose is accomplished by giving the signs employed the characteristics of statements...they seem to be rationally demonstrated or empirically supported when in fact they are neither” (1938/1971: 52). And in the subsequent book *Signs, Language and Behavior* (1946/1971), he describes the characteristics of a lie as informativeness with convincing effect, “signs may be informatively adequate even if the signs in fact denote nothing” (178). Lies and semiotics are commonly associated with one another partially due to Umberto Eco's masterwork *A Theory of Semiotics*, in which includes the oft-quoted assertion, “semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie (1976:7)” on the introductory page. Jerzy Pelc afterwards echoes: “lying is a semiotic activity, with a sender and a receiver” (1992: 249); No one disputes the fact that without the use of signs, deceptions or lies are inconceivable, as Deely writes “without signs there could be no deceit. We would live in a world without lies, a world without false identifications. But it would be also a world without truth” (2009: 142). Danesi (2017) coined a term “lie-sign (L-sign)” as a marked form with traits of cultural traditions. The late semiotician Hongwei Jia (2019) was one of the few Chinese scholars who studied the phenomena of deception via the lens of sign theory. Ulla Musarra-schroder analyzed Eco's assertion from the lens of Peircean theory (2017); Remo Gramiga

(2020) evaluated Augustine's theory on the lie and outlined a theoretical framework of falsehood. Therefore, deception shall be included in the scope of semiotic studies.

In a nutshell, the existing semiotic study on lies is either a theoretical explanation why sign determined by its object might be used to lie or a post hoc interpretation of the phenomena. Rare attention is paid to the full dynamic semiotic process of lie-signs, with the majority of research focusing on the definition of lie, its breadth, and the vehicles that can be used to deceive. As a result, the current semiotic studies on lies consist primarily of theoretical interpretations with little insight into how and why lies function. Sun Tzu goes beyond merely asserting that warfare is the Dao of deceit; he discusses how falsehoods are formed from the position of deceivers and how possible lies should be interpreted standing in the shoes of recipients. Enlightened by modern semiotics, particularly Peircean triadic theory and Morris's behavioral semiotics, this study reveals the principle and procedure of lie formulation, Sun Tzu's strategies for combating deception on the battlefield, and his views on sign interpretation, manipulation, and management.

How to Interpret Signs from the Enemy

The interpretation of signs from the enemy is a crucial issue for commanders and strategists, as all conspiracies, deceptions, and schemes plotted are based on a thorough understanding of the adversary. As is frequently the case, relying solely on one's own force to defeat the opponent is insufficient, opportunities are often gained by identifying the enemy's blunders during combat. Clausewitz echoed similar theme, "By the word 'information', we denote all the knowledge which we have of the enemy and his country; therefore, in fact, the foundation of all our ideas and actions" (1976: 215). In general, the interpretation of enemy-signs is considerably more difficult than knowing oneself, as Clausewitz stated, "as each commander can only fully know his own position; that of his opponent can only be known him by reports, which are uncertain" (ibid. 154). Cover, camouflage, deceit, or cheat may be exploited; hence, Sun Tzu advises interpreting these signs in following ways:

① If birds take to flight, He is lying in ambush

When dust rises sharply upward, chariots are coming...

② when the enemy's light chariots appear first and occupy the sides, he will have his troops go into formation...When the enemy's envoys employ obsequious language, his preparations are intensifying, and he is getting ready to advance; when the enemy's language is aggressive and he makes a show of rushing forward, he is getting ready to retreat.

③ If the enemy forces angrily advance and confront us but wait long without engaging in battle, I must cautiously examine their aims. (Ames:103-104)

Sun Tzu enumerates 32 ways of interpretation, involving signs ranging from enemy behaviors, verbal signs, imprints left by chariots, horses, or others, some of which have no relevance in modern warfare, whereas his interpretation rules are insightful. therefore, flying bird, envoy's words become signs of an ambush and enemy's next military move, the object in semiotic sense. It shall be noted here that not being cheated is Sun Tzu's top concern. Enlightened by Eco's sign classification, Sun Tzu's rules bear the following features: (1) the intention and function of these artificial signs need most attention, as in most cases, a sign can take the place of the object it represents, which is taken as one function the sign serves in our world. Morris (1971: 45) said: "the interpretant is the habit of the organism to respond, because of the sign vehicle, to the absent objects which are relevant to a present problematic situation

as if they were present”. Yiheng Zhao (2016: 1) further echoed that humans need signs sometimes because the absence of the referent”. This explains why these intentional signs like an envoy employ obsequious words to cover his difficulties. Under the rubric of Peircean sign division, natural signs (including unintentional signs produced by humans) can be categorized as indices, to be specific, signs such as animal behaviors, imprints, and unintentional soldier behaviors of the enemy, the interpretation of which depends largely on instinct. For example, when seeing smoke, we unconsciously infer that something is on fire; flock of birds sudden flying in the wood or falls at enemy’s campsite, we guess the presence or absence of the enemy. while other signs are symbols, the interpretation of which can be more complicated, their intention has to be interpreted abductively. (see Table 1). Indices are comparatively difficult to manipulate; thus they are highly reliable, and the information gained is less fallible compared to symbols. Encamping on advantageous terrain and other military deployments are less trustful than indices; the most head-scratching type is the unknown sign, and no prior experiences can be used to decipher their aims.

Table 1: sign types and according interpretation

signs	type	features	fallibility
animal, soldier, nature	indices	Indexicality uncontrollability	low
envoy, encampment	symbols	habituality arbitrariness	medium
military movement	unknown signs	unpredictability	high

It should be noted that all these signs can be deceptive. Indices can be manipulated or fabricated, Eco (1986) noted that smoke can be generated by the use of chemicals, thus simulating the existence of fire despite the fact that it does not exist or has never existed (213-216), as the case to conceal one’s footprints to cover his route. Symbols are untrustworthy due to their features of being autonomous and independent of any particular external context (Morris, 1971: 99-103), another reason of which is the tie connecting a symbol and its object is habit, which is changeable under certain circumstances. Indexical Signs are more trustworthy than habitual signs because it is more difficult to influence the minute actions of each soldier and those wild creatures on a battlefield. The least reliable sign is the unknown military deployment that its interpretation has to be based on guesswork. Sun Tzu's reasoning on the three types of signs provide hints: for type ①, the indexical signs, the assertion is brief and affirmative; for type ②, the symbols, the sentence patterns are longer which reflect more reasoning needed; and for type ③, enemy behaviors as signs are presented precisely, the conclusion of which are not reached, thus, Sun Tzu cautions to analyze extensively before actions.

Sun Tzu's approaches to knowing the opponent can be divided into two categories: bottom-up and top-down, given that the military is a traditional pyramidal organization with strict hierarchy, absolute authority, and ultimate obedience. The bulk of the 32 ways to know the adversary are bottom-up, such as learning the enemy's morale, upcoming activities, and intentions from its lower-level personnel. In his final chapter, in addition to the 32 ways to interpret the opponent, Sun Tzu uses one chapter titled "Using Spies" to provide us another option to know the enemy, in which he illustrates reasons for using spies and the required traits of spies and the commander who can employ them.

Accordingly, five kinds of spies are to be employed: locals, inside agents, double agents, “dead” spies, and live agents...they form a “net devised by the gods” of immense value to the ruler...nothing is closer to the Three Armies than their spies, and none deserves greater reward than the spy...Only the most perceptive ruler understands how to employ spies, and only the most humane and just commander knows how to put them in the field. Only the most subtle interrogator can get the whole truth out of spies. (Nylan, 2020: 123-125)

Employing spies to gain or influence his top-level judgments is a top-down strategy which is risky yet rewarding, requiring dexterity and yielding substantial gains. The combination of both tactics represents Sun Tzu's tactic for gaining an understanding of the opponent.

Knowing the Context

Knowing both oneself and the opponent does not ensure an advantage. Napoleon and Hitler's failures in Russia show the neglect of natural signs is unforgivable. Sun Tzu ranks 天 (Pinyin as Tian, translated as the heavens) and terrain as two of the five most significant factors to consider before going to war: “The heaven refers to night and day, heat and frost, in the seasonal rounds. Terrain refers to the relative distances, the gradient and openness of the terrain, insofar as this makes for life or death” (ibid. 24). Similarly, while Clausewitz does not expound the impact of the heaven on battle outcomes, he identifies geography as one of the five factors of tactical planning. “Geography and ground can affect military operations in three ways: as an obstacle to the approach, as an impediment to visibility, and as cover from fire. All other properties can be traced back to these three” (1976: 485). The two classics both highlight terrain's influence on military operations, whereas their attitudes towards these natural signs diverge and even contradict one another: Clausewitz emphasizes more on the negative impact, and he considers forest, marsh, valley, and hill topography to be impediments, “tend to make warfare more complicated”(ibid), whereas reading between the lines of Sun Tzu, it can be inferred that his proposal is to make the most of natural signs predicated on a reverence for nature, as he puts it, “unless you know the lay of the land—its mountains and forests, its passes and natural hazards, its wetlands and swamps, you cannot deploy the army on it” (Ames, 1993: 95). In chapter VII and IX, Sun Tzu reiterated a concept of far-reaching influence in China: turn the heaven and terrain to your advantage.

Sun Tzu's illustration of semiosis on battlefield, signs from the self-party, the enemy, the heaven and terrain interact with each other dynamically and form unified effect on the battle result. Nature, or in the Cartesian tradition, “the objective world”, is not a passive entity awaiting human settlement. Contrarily, it performs an active and oftentimes dominant role, thus, natural signs can contribute to the success of a battle.

The dynamical Process of Sun Tzu's L-sign Action

Sebeok wrote: “life modifies the universe to meet its needs, and accomplishes this by means of sign action” (1985). Human's operations are sign governed. Different from Augustine, who insists on moral condemnation of all forms of deception, Sun Tzu takes a more tolerant stance on deceit and relocates his attention to the recipient and their interaction, particularly when facing a formidable foe. Sun Tzu outlines 12 ways of manipulation that can be classified into three categories based on sign manipulation and all the three acts are controlled by signs.

① when you can, feign incapacity, and when deploying troops, appear to have no such plans. When close, seem to them to be far away, and when far away, seem near.

② If they are solid, prepare well for battle. If they are strong, evade them. Display some profit to entice them. Create chaos to take them.

③ If its commander is bad-tempered, irritate to make he lose his rationality, foster his arrogance, If the enemy is rested, tire him out. If his troops are like family, drive a wedge between them. (Ames, 1993: 25)

Type ① is to conceal oneself and generate misleading signs. L-signs of this type are designed to have dual referents, one explicit but misleading, while the other hidden but true. As seen in Figure 1, the referent₁, or intentional interpretant, to which the L-sign is linked by a solid arrow implies a manipulative signification, whereas the dotted arrow shows that the relationship between the sign and its referent₂ is concealed and difficult to notice. One may argue that L-signs should be ignored, and the commander should only focus on signs that reveal the genuine state. However, so often is the case that the more explicit the cheater behaves a certain way and the clearer his aim appears, the more cautiousness one shall as the easy signification, referent₁ is probably a lie or a trap, and reverse thinking sometimes is applicable to reveal the enemy's concealed referent₂.

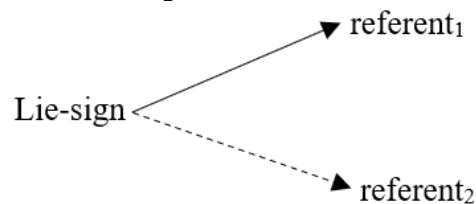


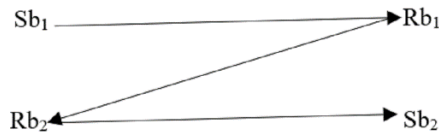
Figure 1: signification of a L-sign

Concealment, cover, and camouflage as such pertain to this type of deception, the generation of which is more grounded in one's own sign features than the recipient's, thus makes the lowest level of deceit on a battlefield.

On the contrary, ② and ③ share the common feature that both types of deception are recipient-centered. The third contains actual combats or other acts (such as causing a wedge between the king and his commander), as what Fan Ju as prime minister of state Qin did in the Battle of Chang-ping against Zhao State.

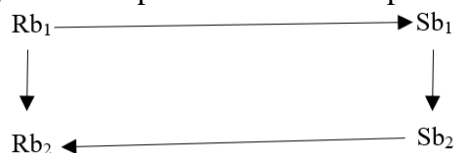
Nonverbal signs or in Morris's term "post-language symbols" play an important role in communication. "Nonverbal forms of communication are perceived as meaningful, not just decorative accompanying features of spoken or written language" (Danesi, 2014: 30). In particular, the recipient's actions sometimes are more informative than his words. Sun Tzu's first set of deception is sender-centered, and the process of which is as follows: the tactic begins with Sb₁ (sender-behavior 1) with the intention to incite Rb₁ (recipient behavior 1), a proof that the enemy has entered the trap, which is the premise of Sb₂ (a prepared surprise attack), of course, leads to Rb₂ (recipient behavior 2), an irreversible loss for the opponent. (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: sender-centered deception (Behaviors of the sender and recipient, abbreviated as Sb₁, Sb₂, Rb₁ and Rb₂, the connecting arrows between them is in the manner of stimulus-response controlled by signs)



Typically, a mousetrap falls under this sort of deception: put up the bait, ambush and capture it. However, it is often the case that the recipient is far more intelligent than a mouse and triumph derives from a perception on the recipient's behaviors, such as seeking manipulable weaknesses in his character flaws or finding a vulnerable point of his deployment. Therefore, it is essential to focus more on the opponent's behaviors than a self-centered expectation as the rabbit or mouse may never trespass as you expected, an example of which is the famous Maginot Line. Sun Tzu places a great emphasis on analyzing the recipient's actions from which develop one's own strategy. He makes it plain that "the expert in battle ... wait for the enemy to expose his vulnerability. Invincibility depends on oneself; vulnerability lies with the enemy" (Ames, 1993: 83). Figure 3 illustrates how a scheme is formulated: a correct perception of Rb₁ leads to Sb₁ (sometimes appears as walking to the trap set by the enemy willingly), followed by Sb₂ (grounded on a detection weakness from Eb₁) that will result in a desired reaction Rb₂. What should be made clear is that Rb₁, in Sun Tzu's sense, reveals the true state of the recipient. The fundament of following actions—Rb₁, may be an insignificant gesture "emitted without awareness of the sign function and without communicative intent" (Posner, 1987: 31), or a known trick that will be met with one's own trick. In the strategy known as "beat someone at their own game", pretending to be duped is a useful tactic if one can create the semblance that he is into the trap while secretly employing countermeasures to defeat his opponent, a well-known example of which is "Jiang Gan Stole the Letter" from *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Jiang staged a reunion with his old buddy Zhou Yu, the commander in chief of the south (referent₁) with the ulterior motive of spying on him (referent₂), and Zhou Yu did not denounce his old friend, instead welcomed him, and realized his own deceitful plot.

Figure 3: recipient-centered deception



In a nutshell, Sun Tzu's Dao of deception, either sender-centered or recipient-centered, the core concept is to continually surprise his opponent, as he asserts "Attack him when he's unprepared; appear suddenly when he least expects it" (ibid.), thus, it would be at his discretion to resort to bluff, feint, ambush, surprise or murder of the commander, or any other tactic if it is helpful to win the battle.

Sun Tzu's Soul of Deception

The Art of War exerted profound influences on Chinese military thought, especially since the Song Dynasty (960A.D.-1279A.D.) when it became a required reading for military officers. However, the book did not guarantee all its readers become successful commanders, as evidenced by the fact that both Han Hsin(?-196 B.C.) and his subordinates read the book. They questioned Han: "According to Sun Tzu, one should deploy with one's back to the mountains and water to the front, yet you deployed oppositely and still won (the author's translation from *Shih Chi*)?" Han answered:

[I]n *the Art of War* ...“Only if you throw them into life-and death situations will they survive; only if you plunge them into places where there is no way out will they stay alive”. Moreover, I lacked experienced, familiar troops and was compelled to chase men from the market and fight with them. If I had not thrown them onto fatal terrain, causing every man to fight to the death, but instead emplaced them on sustainable terrain, they would have all fled, so how would I have been able to employ them? (2008: 288-289)

Han grasps the essence of *The Art of War*, whilst his subordinates grasp merely the rigid dogmas. One can never win a battle by adhering to doctrines of prior commanders only; suffice to say, sign interpretation then and there is a more important issue. Therefore, it is Sun Tzu's spirit and soul of strategy formation, among which his abductive inference, deception by means of Xing and sign vehicles that shall be appreciated.

Xing theory

Apart from the nature of inference, Sun Tzu identifies three normal processes for executing deceptive tactic: hiding one's Xing, showing a misleading Xing, and uncovering the enemy's Xing (Li, 2006: 174). Xing (形 means shape or form in modern Chinese), a complicated term in classical Chinese philosophy coined by Sun Tzu, refers to the visible (in certain cases hidden by the agent), constant, and objective strength or capability of someone or a team, party, or country. a narrow sense which means the configuration and disposition of force on a battlefield.

Typically, the initial stage in carrying out a deceit is to conceal one's strength or attack points by means of manipulation of signs so that the opponent is unaware of one's capabilities, moves, or potential targets. Yaochen Mei in Song dynasty annotated this as hiding the form, disciplined inside, and waiting for weak points and slack from the enemy (1999:69). hiding the form means to be formless, one must make his configuration and tactical moves imperceptible to his enemy. “If your position is formless, the most carefully concealed spies will not be able to discern it, and the wisest counsellors will not be able to lay plans against it” (Ames, 1993: 91).

Formlessness is merely a starting point; it does not imply concealing every single maneuver or deployment from the enemy, which is also unachievable. Sun Tzu also holds to reveal some form, hence, a skilled commander who is adept at luring the enemy will display himself (Xing) in order to entice the adversary to follow him, for instance, luring the enemy into a trap he cannot resist. It is to generate an illusion: hiding the truth and displaying false appearance (or creating noise) by means of signs. The difficulty lies in how to make the enemy walk into the trap willingly; Sun Tzu said: “The ability to make the enemy come of his own accord depends upon your offering him benefits; the ability to prevent the enemy from arriving at a given place depends on your harming him” (Nylan, 2020: 94). Typically, Sun Tzu's Dao of deceit entails exhibiting benefits and prospective harm, which is also a standard procedure in persuasion and other sorts of manipulation.

In addition to being formless and displaying some form, Sun Tzu recommended a third tactic that carries some weight due to the dynamic character of semiosis and the deceiving nature of battlefield signs. As often the case, the enemy's deployment and weaknesses are classified as top secrets that are so difficult to find out that even spies are ineffective sometimes; Sun Tzu proposes testing or direct interaction in order to know his strengths and shortcomings. The fight per se may not be the primary concern, but the knowledge obtained upon which future act will be based on is significant. Sun Tzu said: “Provoke him [so that he makes his move], to better

understand his characteristic patterns of motion and stillness. Make the enemy assume visible form, to better understand the ground for life and death. Prod and jab him, to see which positions have surplus strength or too little" (Nylan, 2020: 45). Modern scholars resonated that "awareness of another's awareness" (Mitchell, 1986:3) is the premise of deceit, and "the deceiver must have beliefs about the intended victim's beliefs" (Dennett, 167). More than a mere recognition, Sun Tzu probed actions to reveal the mysterious opponent: collecting information through interaction with him. Such knowledge is vital in times of war for the deployment of one's forces depends on his opponent. as Sun Tzu's water metaphor, "The formation of the troops is like water. Just as water's flow avoids the high ground and rushes to the low, so, too, the victor avoids the enemy's strong points and strikes where he is weak" (Nylan, 2020: 46). Thus, it is essential to obtain information as such in order to plan and execute his tactic. The form of water depends on its container, and a competent commander must recognize that any prewar plans likely fall short of addressing every possible occurrence on a battlefield and be ready to adapt to the ever-changing environment, just like water does. Prewar intelligence from any source may not reveal the true disposition, while information gained in the heat of conflict is fresher, more accurate (and more difficult to manipulate), and has a greater impact on the outcome of a battle.

Sign vehicles and potential victims of Deception

From Peircean triadic relation, the sign mediating between its object, the determinant of it, and its interpretant, the determinand or effect of the sign, this dynamic and interdependent process of semiosis is further emphasized by its open character: the chain of interpretants, ad infinitum (C.P.2.303). Therefore, the fusion of the intentional and effectual interpretant is not easy, as the recipient is typically dominant over the interpretation of the sign he has received, and infinite semiosis is recipient dominant. "Peirce's system does not purport to attain definitive truth" (Bankov, 2004:176). The deceiver must utilize the resistant forces of human semiosis to truth — the context, intentions, and habits of the recipient — in order to achieve the "intended interpretation." (Zhao, 2016:180). In other words, deceptive sign vehicles shall base on the context and understand the subject for the desired effects. For example, a sniper must wear camouflage to blend in with his surroundings; his battledress, face paints, and the like are his deceptive vehicles. The deceptive formulation of Sun Tzu is considerably more complicated than camouflage. He repeated "Li" (利 profit, benefit, or advantage) and its antithesis "害 (Hai)" many times in a book of only 6000 Chinese words (Li appeared 52 times, Hai seven times, and its synonym "患(huan)" three times), as Sun Tzu asserts that war is premised upon deception, motivated by advantage, which also demonstrates his pragmatic attitude toward war. Typically, the intended interpretation can be achieved by luring advantages or revealing potential harm. Such deceptions or manipulations have been evident in battle throughout human history.

Who is the target of deception? The answer to this question is obvious: the opponent, while in *The Art of War*, for the final victory, Sun Tzu's possible victims of deception also comprises one's own soldiers and his neighbors.

Taking the Han Hsin as an example, it is quite impossible for him, as a commander, to disclose to his soldiers that his deployment would throw them into a life-and-death situation. The secrecy of an upcoming military operation is one concern, while maintaining morale under a desperate situation that no one but himself can help is another.

Neighboring states who incline to become embroiled in a war make targets of deception, too. Sun Tzu once advised his leader of Wu state to be cautious with his neighbors when fighting, and what happened scores of years later demonstrated the accuracy of his warning: “If battle is protracted...the neighboring rulers will take advantage of your adversity to strike. If this happens, even an intelligent commander will not be able to remedy the results” (Ames, 1993: 75). Sun Tzu's approach to this situation is to first understand the neighbors' mentality and possible strategies, and then to prevent him from forming alliances with the enemy, manipulating them by displaying disadvantage to subjugate them, displaying advantage to compel them to pledge allegiance, or burdening them with service.

Conclusion

Modern semioticians' interest in studying grows since Eco's claim that lies have semiotic proprium. Existing research illustrates why sign determined by its object can be used to lie, as well as properties of L-sign. This paper's semiotic investigation of Sun Tzu's Dao of deception can provide insight into the formation of a deception and gain a new understanding of the classic from the perspective of sign process on the battlefield.

Neither a moral indictment nor a glorification, the purpose of this study is to unearth how a deceit is formulated according to Sun Tzu. As described supra, seeking an advantage or benefit is always behind every deception. As the oldest existing military classic, *The Art of War* is multidimensional and widely applicable. The use of deceit shall not be blamed, as fair play or gentlemanly pursuit has never been a case in human war history, nor shall we criticize Sun Tzu for the application of his "path to survival or ruin" concept into business competition, management, political campaigns, and others by modern readers, just as a gun can be used to protect oneself or to rob others. As it is multidimensional, further studies can be conducted on its other semiotic features such as a marriage of semioethics and Sun Tzu's attitude toward war, a precise exploration of Sun Tzu's pragmatic principles, as well as his rules of sign taxonomy, interpretation, and transformation.

Funding: this study is supported by Philosophy and Social Science Planning Project of Anhui Province, China “Sun Tzu’s Semiotic Thoughts and Reestablishment of his International Image” (AHSKQ2021D187).

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