

Mythical 69

Chapter 69: Victory Without Battle

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"Since ancient times, the military classics are filled with examples of winning with fewer troops against larger forces. However, with our knowledge, we wouldn't blindly believe everything written," Chen Xi's smile held a hint of sarcasm. Thinking of the battles recorded in the military classics, every victory described as outnumbered hardly ever depicted both sides having equal skills, let alone superior forces losing.

Lu Su was surprised by Chen Xi's statement but nodded in agreement, saying, "Indeed, most of the battles recorded in military classics involve winning against the odds. However, historical instances of such victories are likely limited to those few examples."

"I once heard a saying: 'Being undefeated in evenly matched battles is strong, but if others can improve while you only maintain, barely winning even becomes a form of helplessness. True masters leave no trace of their prowess, overwhelming the enemy with far superior strength. Even the most brilliant strategies cannot salvage a fundamentally losing position.'" Chen Xi closed his eyes, contemplating many ancient battles where continuous victories could not prevent eventual defeat.

The Han Dynasty's battles against the Xiongnu initially and later were not always favorable. Although the mid-period victories were impressive with a one to twenty casualty ratio, later confrontations after Emperor Wu saw continued skirmishes, with the Xiongnu often holding their ground. Yet, the Xiongnu eventually faced extermination, an example of winning by attrition.

Similarly, the Tang Dynasty had a high failure rate in foreign wars but still managed to subdue surrounding territories. Small neighboring states couldn't afford to lose even once, while the Tang Dynasty could regroup after losses. This reflects the Tang's strategy of playing the long game, prevailing through resilience.

On the contrary, the Song Dynasty had a high success rate in foreign conflicts but faced annihilation with a failure rate below sixty percent. Despite winning battles, the state was vulnerable to collapses when losses occurred, indicating the critical importance of strength and resilience in maintaining sovereignty.

Because of these perspectives, Chen Xi was uninterested in the apparent victory or defeat. For example, Zhao's Li Mu had a favorable record against Qin's Wang Jian but ultimately, Zhao fell due to Qin's overall superiority, a predetermined tragedy that individual battle victories couldn't change. Thus, Chen Xi focused less on superficial victories.

Lu Su observed Chen Xi, "Our military teachings always emphasize overcoming stronger foes but rarely teach that the simplest strategy is to use superior strength to crush the weak. Zichuan is correct; sometimes, even brilliant tactics can't save the final outcome. Strengthening oneself and weakening the enemy is the true path."

"Indeed, Zijing, do you know what my initial thoughts were?" Chen Xi smiled, intending to share his complete vision with Lu Su but cautiously approached the topic to avoid overwhelming him.

Lu Su shook his head, finding it hard to follow Chen Xi's erratic thoughts but remained intrigued by his wisdom.

"When I realized Lord Xuande couldn't attract top strategists, I turned to another path—strengthening ourselves to a point where even ordinary generals and quickly-trained strategists could defeat our enemies. So, I planned for the worst-case scenario from the start," Chen Xi reminisced about his initial ideas, feeling a rare sense of joy at having someone to share them with.

"How could that be possible? Holding such thoughts while governing, how could you manage?" Lu Su was shocked. Chen Xi's approach was too extreme, even as a contingency plan, yet he managed to function effectively.

"It's not impossible. Don't you think it's great? If I can conquer those adversaries under such conditions, wouldn't it be easier when we actually attract talent?" Chen Xi smiled. "From my perspective, it's doable. 'Three heads are better than one.' If quality isn't enough, quantity compensates. Perhaps one top strategist equals ten of my mass-produced ones, but with enough numbers, I'm not worried. And among many, a few geniuses will surely emerge."

Lu Su felt a cold sweat. Within this short conversation, he had gained insight into Chen Xi's remarkable intellect and boldness. His seemingly insane plans were frighteningly plausible.

Taking a deep breath to calm himself, Lu Su realized he was already swayed by Chen Xi. Now wasn't the time to ponder such minor details.

"May I ask, Zichuan, what do you mean by mass-producing strategists?" Lu Su identified the core of Chen Xi's plan. If Chen Xi's central strategy revolved around producing strategists in bulk, the feasibility of quantity translating into quality became crucial.

"That is my secret method, not to be lightly divulged," Chen Xi haughtily flicked his head, signaling he couldn't reveal it to Lu Su.

In reality, Chen Xi's concept of mass-producing strategists and civil officials involved scouting unformed historical talents and employing a cramming education method for suitable youths.

Chen Xi sought capable individuals, not necessarily geniuses, as genius development usually relied on self-study, with teachers merely guiding them. Like Zhuge Liang, another teacher would have produced similar results. Usually, renowned teachers were notable because they encountered exceptional students, not because they created geniuses.

Chen Xi firmly believed in the adage—relying solely on imparted knowledge prevents one from reaching the top, as someone above always exists and can replicate the process.

Education is uniform. Chen Xi dismissed personalized teaching due to a lack of qualified educators and its unnecessary nature.

Chen Xi designed his education method to be straightforward and effective. He planned to distribute books to youths aged ten to fifteen and let them self-study. Naturally gifted individuals would excel, and after six months, the books would be recollected. The top students would be selected to receive direct mentorship from civil officials, learning through practical governance—this half-autonomous, half-apprenticeship education would allow geniuses to forge their own paths.

Chen Xi couldn't ensure his grooming wouldn't alter their essence, potentially standardizing them—a tragic outcome. For those interested in book knowledge, a three-year cramming education followed. Chen Xi, experienced in this approach, was confident in producing capable, if not exceptional, talents.

Chen Xi was unfazed by the drawbacks of cramming education. In an era where possessing a book was a family treasure, this intensive education method wouldn't be criticized but praised as responsible and beneficial.

Concerns about producing bookworms didn't bother Chen Xi. Historically, students undergoing rigorous education, including supplementary lessons and holiday classes, still retained their essence. Thus, Chen Xi's educational reforms would be lauded for their dedication and efficacy.

In summary, Chen Xi's methods would be seen as virtuous by contemporary standards, reflecting positively on his governance.

Lu Su was momentarily stunned by Chen Xi's words, then realized the secrecy surrounding such matters. He apologized, "Forgive my impudence, Zichuan."

"No matter, Jian, bring those identical books from the shelf," Chen Xi called out casually, leaning back comfortably.

"Yes," Fan Jian's clear voice responded. She was enjoying her life, despite Chen Xi's frequent absences. As the household's mistress without elders, she often neglected the formalities she had learned. For example, Fan Jian insisted on reading, so Chen Xi had someone print elementary-level books for her. Subsequently, surplus copies were used for other purposes, including talent selection.

Fan Jian quickly brought the books and some stuffed buns.

"Compare them, and you'll understand," Chen Xi handed the books to Lu Su, confident that Lu Su's intellect would grasp his strategy immediately.