



THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN COMPLEXITY

📅 9 Oct 2025

Irene Ng speaks for many who write about “complex systems” when she says: “What has happened in the last 50 years is that we’ve been trying to use deterministic tools to achieve emergent outcomes, essentially because those are the only tools we have learnt (systems thinkers are still a minority unfortunately). We treat complex systems like complicated systems. We try to design, specify, impose, dictate when we should be designing, enabling, intervening, stabilising.”

Is there any historical truth in this at all? Did, say, a midwife 50 years ago only know how to impose and dictate rather than intervene and stabilise? Was, say, managing the Mongol Empire, or Alexander’s conquests, a merely complicated, not complex task?

An often-used example of a complex task is bringing up a child (and I’d agree, loosely). Well, did we have no children to bring up until our frightfully modern era?

Perhaps Irene Ng is writing about *our writing about* management, not how it is or was actually done. But there are ancient books like “[The Art of War](#)” about how to lead, and manage, and reach goals. Were they all merely guides to snapping together simple solutions? Of course not.