

You can see the virtue in a man when he shoots an arrow

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Respected provost and Miss Deng, my name is Xue Chunyuan. The topic I want to share with you today is ‘You can see the virtue in a man when he shoots an arrow’ 射以觀德. I will introduce the traditional Chinese archery ceremony according to the chapter Sheyi 射藝 in The Book of Rites. Then I will analyze why the sport of archery can reveal a person’s virtue.

This is my outline.

1. Introduction
2. The texts analysis
3. Self-reflection
4. Conclusion

Introduction

Today’s presentation will be based on the first paragraph of Sheyi. Let's look at the original text first. The translation of this sentence is, ‘Therefore, the archers should be polite between the salute of advancing and the salute of retreating. His inner goal should be right, his outer body decorous. If he could, he would have been able to aim and steady with his bow and arrow. Then he can hit the target and this overall process can observe people’s virtue.’¹ At the end of this paragraph, it is mentioned that the process of archery ceremony can observe a person's virtue. Now let us try to analyze why this can reflect a person’s virtue.

The texts analysis

First of all, let us understand the traditional Chinese archery culture. Mr. Lu Dalin has a very good comment on point. He mentioned that, ‘Archery was a male activity

¹ Su Xidan 孫希旦, *Li Ji Ji Jie* 禮記集解(Beijing: Zhong Hua Book Company, 1989)p.1438.

in ancient China, when there was no war in the country, people would take archery as a ceremony like Dashe 大射 ceremony and Xiangshe 鄉射 ceremony. In this process, people will practice their appearance and archery skills. At the same time, the leader can observe a person's virtue and select good talents. However, when the country is at war, it is used for war, so hitting the target and showing strength is to prevent insult and conquering the enemy.’²The Dashe ceremony and Xiangshe ceremony mentioned here are the archery ceremony. It is just that the name is different because of the different status of the organizer, but they are actually an archery ceremony. From this we can see that the traditional Chinese archery is not only a weapon for war in the full sense. It is also a tool that people use to practice etiquette. In fact, it is also used by people to socialize, because before each archery ceremony there is Xiangyinjiu ceremony, which is used by the host to entertain guests. In the process, the order of the elders and the young is especially emphasized, and it is also used to examine the virtue of people. After that, people take part in the archery ceremony together. Therefore, we can see that archery has many functions in Chinese traditional culture. It can be used as a weapon, as entertainment after a banquet, or as a tool for people to practice etiquette and virtue. Now we will continue the focus of this article, why this sport can be used as a tool for people to improve their virtue?

In the original text, it is mentioned that ‘Therefore, the archers should be polite between the salute of advancing and the salute of retreating.’ What is mentioned here seems to have nothing to do with archery, but in fact it is an indispensable part of archery and why archery can improve one’s virtue. Mr. Lu Dalin interpreted this sentence that, ‘Ancient sages instituted the ceremony of archery when they were emperor. Use it to help people ascend when there is no war. A man of noble character corrects his heart with respect and corrects his outer body with righteousness and then he does not hesitate in his actions. Therefore, he who fires and cannot hit the target is not always respectful in his heart. If his heart is respectful, his outward expression must be grave. Practice this internally and externally first and you can hit the target in

² Su Xidan 孫希旦, *Li Ji Ji Jie* 禮記集解. p.1438.

everything.’³ From this explanation we can understand that archery is not only an exercise in how to hit the target, but also an exercise in our mind. And this is also why in the process of archery, the final firing is only a moment, but people have so much etiquette in advance. In fact, in the process of these ceremony is to exercise our hearts. For example, in the archery ceremony, two groups of people need to bow to each other if they meet in the process of walking. There is also music throughout the ceremony, and every step we take in the process and every step we walk must be in tune with the rhythm of the music. You also need to salute to the target before pulling the arrow from the target. The whole process needs to be respectful and just orderly. However, in these processes, if the heart is not respectful, it will naturally feel that these formalities are cumbersome. When the heart began to impetuous when nature in the launch of the time is difficult to calm down to aim. As the original said, ‘If he could, he would have been able to aim and steady with his bow and arrow.’ But if he cannot, he cannot aim and stabilize the bow. It would be hard for him to hit the target. And that is why we can tell a person's virtue from archery ceremony.

However, in modern times, many people ignore this ritual when practicing archery. In such cases he was merely practicing the skill of archery, but not his virtue. If he were required to complete these formalities in the process of shooting, he would be impatient and find it difficult to hit the target. In the traditional archery ceremony, there are only four arrows in each people, but the ceremony takes a long time. In Japan, however, one can only carry two arrows at a time. Therefore, in the whole process is a very test of one's patience. A test of whether one can keep one's heart respectful throughout a long practice. And if the whole process is in accordance with the etiquette and finally can hit the target, then the person must have a certain virtue to be able to do so. During the whole process, there are other distractions that can affect the final send up. And that is reflected in the result that we cannot hit the target, the arrow might go around the target. And if we do not keep our bodies in good shape, our power will not be transferred to the arrow. The result of that is that the arrow hits

³ Su Xidan 孫希旦, *Li Ji Ji Jie* 禮記集解. p.1438.

the target but falls off and does not stick. In ancient Chinese, targets were made of cow skins stacked on top of each other. Therefore, if the arrow is not strong enough, it will not penetrate the target, so the arrow will not stay on the target. However, the problems of the body are also reflected from the heart, so in the final analysis, it comes back to our virtue. At the same time, inner respect is not something that can be trained overnight. It must require our constant training to ensure that we remain respectful for a long time during the ceremony. And finally to be able to maintain respect at all times and in all places. If we cannot do these things, the outward manifestation will be shown in the archery ceremony. And when people see it, they can naturally know how our virtue really is. And that is why archery can tell a person's virtue. If we do not remain respectful and calm during the process, we will not be able to concentrate on the aim.

Self-reflection

That is my analysis of the texts. Next, I would like to share with you my feelings after learning. There was traditional Chinese archery class in my previous school. I liked it very much when I first got into it. I think archery is a very handsome sport just like the warriors in ancient times. However, my teacher did not let me use them when I could not wait to touch them. Instead, let me calm down and start practicing the basics. After that, for a long time, I did not touch a bow or arrow and just practiced the movements and manners like the posture when walking and the bowing before practicing and so on. And after we can master these, and can calmly face the bow and arrow began to let us use the bow and arrow to practice. After these trainings, I not only made rapid progress in using the bow and arrow, but also found that my heart was calm enough, and the impetuous feeling I once felt was less. But just as I was getting better and better, a test came to me. My teacher hopes that I can participate in the competition because I can meet many traditional archery masters during the competition, and I can learn a lot from them. However, as I was just older than the age of the student group, I had to compete with adults, and the distance of adults was much farther than that of my usual practice. So as you can imagine, I might have done

my best but the results were not good. And the test I mentioned was one of my classmates who trained with me and he won the championship in the children's division and his technique was not as good as mine. At that time my heart was really uncomfortable, there was jealousy. And that's why I haven't learned anything in the course of this competition and I have not been able to observe other people's strengths. Since then, every time I shoot arrows, I aim to get a good result in the next competition. However, since then, my archery skills are not as good as before. This continued for a long time until I read this article again and realized my problem. Since I did not have any requirements when I first started practicing archery, I just kept myself quiet and remained respectful to everything. But when I went through this match, I could not calm down every time I practiced, which also caused me to not shoot as accurately as before. I have tried to improve myself with a lot of practice but the results were very small, but when I really let go of the obsession with ranking I improved very quickly. At that moment I really felt why archery can tell a person's virtue. In the process of archery, it is not my skill that I constantly adjust, but my heart.

Conclusion

Overall archery is really an amazing sport. There was a time when he could be used as a weapon to defend our country. It is also used to help people practice etiquette. At the same time, it is also a tool for us to practice self-cultivation and exercise our virtue. This is all my report for today. All suggestions are welcome. Thank you for listening.

Bibliography

Books (Chinese)

Su Xidan 孫希旦, *Li Ji Ji Jie* 禮記集解(Beijing: Zhong Hua Book Company, 1989)