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SELBY, STEPHEN. *Chinese Archery*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2000. Pp. xvi+418. Chinese pronunciation guide, traditional Chinese dynastic time chart, photographs and illustrations, footnotes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 pb.

The symbolic power of the bow and arrow is nowhere as pronounced as in the Chinese culture. Imagine Greek mythology without the twelve labors of Heracles, western culture may have been shaped quite differently. Yet, Heracles' accomplishments certainly could not match those of Yi in Chinese mythology who, using his powerful bow and arrows, shot down nine of the ten blazing suns from the sky, restoring the balance of natural forces in the universe and the normal way of life for its inhabitants. Unfortunately, the symbolism of the bow and arrow and the role of archery in the shaping of Chinese culture were not known to most of the western world. This reality is changing, however, thanks to the efforts by Stephen Selby. *Chinese Archery* is a broad view of traditional archery in China as seen through the eyes of historians, philosophers, poets, artists, military strategists and novelists from 1500 B.C. until the twentieth century. The book is written around parallel text translations of classical Chinese sources in which Chinese writers give detailed explanations of the techniques of bow-building, archery, and crossbow technique and their social and cultural significance over four thousand years of Chinese dynasties. Stephen Selby is both a Sinologist and practicing archer. Trained at Edinburgh University with a masters degree in Chinese, Selby's command of the Chinese language and knowledge of the Chinese culture is far more sophisticated than any academic program could have possibly produced.

The wealth of knowledge and information contained in *Chinese Archery* is overwhelming. The traditional Chinese archery, as adequately presented by the author, is far beyond the scope of mere sporting activity. As early as the Zhou Dynasty (1100-221 B.C.), archery had become one of the six basic skills of the Chinese education for the

nobility, along with ritual, music, chariot driving, writing, and arithmetic. Archery was both an essential military and civil skill for men. Whether in the battlefield or in the chase, "the bow and arrow represented the greatest empowerment of the individual over his environment" (p. 51). As a civil skill, archery rituals were an integral part of the social and cultural functions of the ruling class, from honoring the ruler to receiving the visiting dignitaries and to providing entertainment at official banquets. By the time of Confucius (c.551-479 B.C.), archery skills were measures of education, character and, if necessary, competitiveness. According to Confucius

a refined person has no use for competitiveness. Yet if he cannot avoid it, then let him compete through archery! For on entering the archery range he will salute and show consideration for other competitors, and on leaving the range he will share ceremonial wine with them, and thus even in competition he will be acting according to the principles of refined conduct (p. 70).

This utopian ideal of Confucius may not have been obtainable in any human society. For centuries, however, the conduct and movements of the archer in a competition was at least as important as his scores. Archery, at least in the eyes of the ruling class, was not a competition but a celebration of ritual submission. Chinese culture has traditionally regarded law and punishment as a totally inadequate (although necessary) framework for ensuring the preservation of public order. It is the pursuit of self-restraint through the understanding and practice of ritual which is regarded as the best assurance of public order. What better means to achieve this goal than through ritual archery?

By the end of the Former Han Dynasty (A.D. 9), the civil archery ritual had become the exception rather than the rule. Traditional archery skills were used to recognize military excellence, and archery competitions became a favored method of assessing military skills. Consequently, archery developed as a sport, and formal competitions started to appear. In the Tang Dynasty (618-907) under Wu Zetian—the only female absolute ruler of China in its entire history—archery became part of the military examination system. The graduates of this system became the elite of the Chinese civil service, and this phenomenon continued throughout the Chinese dynasties.

The Song Dynasty (960-1279) saw the military application of archery skills rise to prominence. The bow was considered the most valuable weapon and archery the leading martial skill. An overwhelming majority of bowmen and crossbowmen were serving in the royal bodyguard. The Song Dynasty also saw a revival of ritual archery along with the revitalization of the Confucian rituals. Consequently, it put an end to the wide participation of women in active sports in China. By the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), archery was firmly on the examination syllabus. The study of archery technique also flourished, with more than a dozen schools of archery and crossbow theory in existence toward the end of that period. The traditional Chinese archery lost all its importance in warfare in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), largely due to the western imperial invasions armed with the Chinese invention of gunpowder. It only survived as part of the traditional military examination system. With the fall of Qing, the art of Chinese archery was lost along with the demise of the Chinese dynasty.

*Chinese Archery* is truly a masterpiece production, a credit to the author's two-decade-long devotion to the study of Chinese language, culture, and the art of archery.

Hong Kong University Press should be commended for producing such a beautifully furnished volume. Selby's excellent translations and interpretations make the original Chinese texts (many of them written in very difficult classical Chinese even for Chinese-speaking natives) accessible to western Chinese scholars as well as non-specialists. For readers of this journal, the only blemish of *Chinese Archery* is its lack of detailed discussion on archery as a form of recreational and organized sport. Who participated in the competitions? How were the events organized? Were there any written rules and regulations? Were any records kept? Did women compete (despite a few excellent fictional passages portraying individual women's knowledge and skills of archery)? And, if so, did they compete with men or separately? Sport historians certainly want to know more about these issues. This imperfection aside, the book brings the fascinating history of Chinese archery back to life and adds an important chapter to the much needed, but underdeveloped, field of study of sport and culture in ancient China.

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