

Comparative Reflections on Embodied Virtue: Performance and Competition in China and Greece

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Performance and competition

There is an apparent incommensurability between Greek and Chinese sport. Greek sport was centralised, democratic, competitive, external and aesthetic (in some contexts erotic). Chinese sport was local, hierarchical, non-competitive, internal, and in some contexts imitative of the whole-body movements of animals.¹ Needless to say, very different social structures and institutions underlie these differences.

In Greece the connection between athletic contests, competition and sacrifice (including the sacrifice of animal victims, libations and feasts) is much older than the establishment of the Olympic Games in 776 BCE.² For example, the Homeric poems devote the better part of a book of the *Iliad* to the funeral games for Patroclus, and describe at length the *ad hoc* games held in honour of Odysseus at the court of King Alkinoos.³ The heroic ethos of competition became a part of such games: ‘always to be best and to surpass others’ (αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων).⁴ Such excellence was encouraged by the perceived approbation, or even active participation, of a divine audience.

Although, the earliest mention of an athletic festival explicitly performed in a god’s honour is a 7th-century (BCE) reference in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, according to at least some legends, funeral games of the kind described in *Iliad* 23 were the basis for the four great Panhellenic festivals (at the shrines of Zeus at Olympia, Apollo at Delphi, Poseidon at the Isthmus of Corinth and Zeus at Nemea).⁵ The Panhellenic festivals combined cult and athletic competition, and the latter became increasingly elaborate over time. The first 13 Olympiads (776–728 BCE) consisted of a single footrace of 200m. They were expanded to include footraces, boxing, wrestling, the pentathlon, and equestrian competitions (**Figs 1 and 2**). In the 6th century BCE, other Panhellenic shrines at Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea imitated the Olympian games by incorporating sacred games into their own festivals. Male athletes from the entire Mediterranean participated.



Figure1 Nike crowns the winner of a torch race © Trustees of the British Museum 1898,0716.6



Figure 2 Pankratiasts, boxers and other athletes. © Trustees of the British Museum (GR 1850,0302.2, Vases E 78)

Warring States textual sources make it clear that Chinese rulers held court competitions in archery, charioteering, swordsmanship and other athletic performances. There are few extant representations of athletic competitions in early China. An exception is shown in **Figure 3**.

In some performances, competition may not have been the primary purpose. The Confucian *Analects* or *Lunyu* refers to ritual archery contests of the nobility, but Confucius praises less the skill of archery than the character of the ‘gentleman’ or *junzi*, expressed in non-competitive behaviour:

孔子曰：君子無所爭。必也射乎！揖讓而升，下而飲。其爭也君子。

Kongzi said: The *junzi* [gentleman] has nothing over which he contends. If [there is a situation where they are unavoidable] this is archery, is it not? But he behaves with ritual courtesy [to competitors] and ascends; he descends, and drinks [the penalty cup, or causes it to be drunk]. In his contentions, he remains a *junzi*.⁶

This view of archery as an expression of the character of the *junzi* belies the fact that bow and arrow were also military weapons with a long history of use in combat. At the private level, highly embodied self-cultivation practices included gymnastics, longevity techniques, and the ancestors of today’s martial arts (as well as cooking and medicine). In these practices, mind and body are a continuum. How do they square with conventional accounts of a Greek philosophical dichotomy between mind and body? Or have we already found ourselves floundering in a morass of incommensurables?

Virtue and self-cultivation

I argue that the answer to that question is ‘no’. For different reasons, and in very different contexts, both Chinese and Greek sport are based on notions of virtue and self-cultivation. (I use these terms beyond the trivial point that athletic excellence, like any other, requires great effort and cultivates, at the very least, the physical self). The institutional contexts for the expression of virtue and self-cultivation in Chinese and Greek athletic performances are very different, as are the relevant epistemologies and metaphysics. Further, viewing sport as an aspect of physical, mental and spiritual self-cultivation adds to the three basic approaches taken by theorists of the origin of sport: the Marxist, ethological and religio-ritual. Orthodox Marxists derive sport from the processes of labour and production; ethologists consider it a manifestation of instinctive behaviour. Others have theorised that all sport is based on ritual, sacrifice, and religion.⁷ All three have their problems. The Marxist definition does not account for the pursuit of health or longevity. The ethological view is better suited to play (with its biological or evolutionary functions) than to sport. The religio-ritualist approach has suffered from methodological problems but the prevalence of religious and ritual aspects of sport have been widely noted. For example, David Sansone has defined sport as ‘the ritual sacrifice of physical energy’.⁸

Greek sport is based on notions of virtue and self-cultivation in several senses. The first derives from its ancient connections with sacrifice to the gods, in which the athlete is a willing offering. As in other contexts, the sacrificial victim must be the best of its kind. An athlete achieves that status through successful competition. A second sense derives from



Figure 3 Bronze Figures of Two Wrestlers. © Trustees of the British Museum Eastern Zhou, 5th or 4th century BCE Reg. no.

the wholehearted effort and concentration of the athlete. As Hermann Fränkel has observed of Pindar and his contemporaries, they considered human virtue or *aretē* to be a unitary whole. In this context, athletic victory is less a specialised technical expertise than a demonstration of the virtue of the athlete, expressed as wholehearted effort, the sacrifice of time and money, the willingness to risk defeat and disgrace, and the discipline of athletic training itself.⁹ A third notion of virtue derives from Greek ideals of health and wellbeing as a balance between the modes of excellence of the mind and of the body.

But Greek views of that balance vary considerably, and overlap with debates about the relationship between the body and the soul. In Plato's account of the soul in *Republic* 4 (435c–439d), the soul is tripartite and soul and body are ontologically distinct, but his views are far from universal. A few examples make this point.¹⁰ Notions of a material soul date from accounts of the 'blood soul' (*thumos*) and 'breath soul' (*pneuma*) of the Homeric poems.¹¹ The pre-Socratic philosophers identified the soul with whatever element they considered the ultimate constituent of matter. The authors of the Hippocratic *corpus* (*On Regimen* 7) describe the soul (*psychē*) as composed of fire and water. And finally, in *De Anima* (412a20), Aristotle defines the soul as the first actuality (*entelecheia*) of the body and (412b6) criticizes Plato's account of the tripartite soul.¹² In summary, no simple contrast between Chinese and Greek views of the relation between mind and body is possible.

The example of archery

Chinese sport is also based on notions of virtue and self-cultivation. Aristocratic competitions in archery, charioteering and the like were judged not only by victory but by the quality of performance, linked to broadly Confucian notions of virtue. Techniques that first emerge in the Warring States, but were extensively developed during later periods, might appear to be athletic activities, but were highly embodied techniques for self-cultivation. Examples include gymnastics or martial arts (*wushu* 武术), medical and other longevity practices, quasi-Daoist self-cultivation techniques, and martial arts.

The example of archery highlights both Chinese and Greek attitudes toward physical self-cultivation as an embodiment of virtue. It could be objected that, in the Greek case, archery was restricted to the aristocratic competitions of the Homeric poems, and was an object of considerable ambivalence in later thinking. Although archery was not an element in Olympic competition, nonetheless archery, archery contests and archery metaphors appear in both Greek and Chinese sources. In very different institutional contexts, it was described as a skilled performance, a means of victory in battle (or the ritual hunt), and a metaphor for various aspects of virtue.

In the archery contest at the funeral games for Patroclus, the prize was offered for hitting a pigeon tied to the mast of a ship. Alkinoos' games do not feature archery, but the *Odyssey* leaves no doubt of the importance of this skill. Odysseus wins his homecoming (*nostos*, the epic theme of the *Odyssey*) through an archery contest. His archery defeats the suitors for the hand of his wife Penelope, and helps secure his status as the hero of the *Odyssey*.¹³

But archery is problematic for several reasons. First, there is a 'dark side' to the virtues of archery. In their seminal study of 'practical and cunning intelligence', Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant argue for the importance of *mētis* or 'cunning intelligence' in many spheres of Greek culture and society.¹⁴ Individuals within Greek society who relied on *mētis* included the hunter, fisherman, rhetor, strategist, and the athlete. From one point of view, *mētis* constitutes a different kind of athletic victory: the complete application of the athlete's concentration and intelligence to the unpredictable and opportunistic field of athletic competition.¹⁵

In *Iliad* 23, Nestor advises his son Antilochus to use *mētis* in a chariot race because he is disadvantaged by slow horses that will mar his chances of victory (Fig. 4):

τῶν δ' ἵπποι μὲν ἕασιν ἀφάρτεροι, οὐδὲ μὲν αὐτοὶ
πλείονα ἴσασιν σέθεν αὐτοῦ μητίσασθαι.
ἀλλ' ἄγε δὴ σὺ φίλος μητιν ἐμβάλλεο θυμῶ.
παντοίην, ἵνα μὴ σε παρεκπροφύγησιν ἄεθλα.
μήτι τοι δρυτόμος μέγ' ἀμείνων ἢ βίηφι.
μήτι δ' αὐτε κυβερνήτης ἐνὶ οἴνοσσι πόντῳ.
νῆα θοὴν ἰθύνει ἐρεχθομένην ἀνέμοισι.
μήτι δ' ἠνίοχος περιγίγνεται ἠνίοχοιο.

The horses of these men are faster, but they themselves do not understand this art any more than you.
But come my dear son, fill up your spirit with every kind of *mētis* so that the prize may not elude you.
The woodman does more by *mētis* than by force;
by *mētis* the helmsman holds his swift ship on course,



Figure 4 Chariot Race. Panathenaic amphora showing a chariot driven at full speed (Athens, 500–480 BCE). © The Trustees of the British Museum, GR 1837,0609.75

though torn by winds, over the wine-dark sea.
and so by *mētis* one charioteer can outpace another.¹⁶

Nestor instructs his son on how to make a tight turn at the post, potentially cutting off another driver. He describes the turning post and advises Antilochus to hug the stump, lean left, rein in his left horse and graze the post with his wheel. If Antilochus can use this strategy to round the stone first, he will have a clear shot, even with slower horses. But when the moment comes, Antilochus swerves in front of Menelaus himself. He wins second place in the race but Menelaus contests it. Antilochus placates Menelaus, who warns him against playing tricks on his elders.

Antilochus may have won his victory by *mētis*, but the master of the games, Achilles, has little use for this quality. It is a direct or indirect factor in all four of the non-equestrian competitions: foot racing, wrestling, boxing and the spear throw. Odysseus wins the foot race. In the wrestling competition, he uses a ruse that almost defeats Telamonian Aias, but Achilles stops the match and declares it a draw. Achilles, a hero of force (*biē*), dominates the *Iliad*, and another hero of force, Agamemnon, also shows hostility to the *mētis* of Odysseus.¹⁷ By contrast, after the *Iliad*, Achilles' devotion to force is portrayed in a less favourable light. In the *Odyssey* Odysseus uses *mētis* both to sack Troy and to achieve his own homecoming. In the *Lesser Hippias* Socrates argues that Odysseus is superior to Achilles in the poems of Homer.¹⁸

Recent scholarship has emphasized the constructive importance of *mētis* in a contemporary social context. In particular, James Scott argues in *Seeing Like a State: How Certain*

Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed that many of the social disasters of the 20th century arose from a neglect of *mētis*. Part of the problem as he sees it is 'high modernism': attempts to design society in accordance with what are believed to be scientific laws. According to Scott, only the presence of individuals of *mētis* within high modern societies has prevented even worse harm being done by such grand schemes of human improvement.¹⁹

But Greek ambivalence about archery does not reduce to Greek ambivalence about *mētis*. After the shift toward hoplite warfare in the 5th century, the hoplite phalanx eclipsed the prestige of older modes of combat. This ambivalence is dramatized in Euripides' *Heracles*, in a debate on the merits of archery and hoplite warfare (lines 151–204). The tyrant Lycus disparages the hero Heracles as a coward who prefers the bow to the spear:

who never took the shield in his hands or came near the spear;
but bearing a bow, the weapon of a coward, was always poised
for flight. The bow is no proof for a man of high soul, who
remains in his ranks steadfast against swift wounds ploughed by
the spear's furrow.²⁰

The noble general Amphitryon defends Heracles and attacks Lycus for maligning 'the wise invention' of bow and arrow (line 190). He responds that: (1) a hoplite is a slave to his weapons; (2) his life depends on the courage of his comrades; and (3) a spear provides one inflexible means of defence. By contrast, the archer's one weapon can let fly countless arrows, and offers other means of self-defence: the protection of distance and the opportunity to strike from under cover without exposure to a foe. 'This is the far wisest course in battle: to harm the enemy and keep safe oneself, independent of chance.' (lines 190–205) The rhetoric of the play favours Heracles and Amphitryon, but Euripides nonetheless portrays archery as an inferior mode of fighting.

Archery appears indirectly in Chinese ritual and historical texts through ritual hunts. The emperor and his officials personally shot game and sacrificed the meat at imperial tombs.²¹ But archery as a manifestation of the virtue of the athlete first appears in the *Analekts*. In addition to suggesting a moral component to the practice, Confucius also remarks that in archery the important point is not going through the leather (hitting the target), because people's strength is not equal.²²

The *Zhongyong*, a chapter of the *Liji* that became one of the *Four Books* of Confucianism, ascribes to Confucius the view that archery revealed the moral status of its practitioner:

子曰：射有似乎君子，失諸正鵠，反求諸其身。

The Master said, 'In archery we have something like (the way of) the superior man. When the archer misses the centre of the target, he turns round and seeks for the cause of his failure in himself.'²³

The *Liji* also contains a chapter devoted to archery, which describes the conduct and meaning of ceremonial archery contests. This text explicitly links archery style to character:

射故者，進退周還必中禮，內志正，外體直，然後持弓矢審固，持弓矢審固然後可以言中，此可以觀德行矣。



Figure 5 Archaic Greek gem engraved with a naked youth shooting a bow and hunting dogs, c. 500–480 BC. © Trustees of the British Museum, 1892,1128.1

The archers, in advancing, retiring, and all their movements, were required to observe the rules. With minds correct, and straight carriage of the body, they were to hold their bows and arrows skilfully and firmly; and when they did so, they might be expected to hit the mark. In this way (from their archery) their characters could be seen.²⁴

This text makes an explicit link between archery and benevolence:

射者仁之道也。射求正諸己，己正而後發。發而不中則不怨勝己者，反求諸己而已矣。

Archery suggests to us the way of benevolence. (The archer) seeks to be correct in himself, and then discharges his arrow. If it miss the mark, he is not angry with the one who has surpassed himself, but turns round and seeks (for the cause of failure) in himself.²⁵

But is there a problem in the idealised picture presented by these explicitly Confucian texts? Do we really believe the archer was not trying to win? Are there other ways of using archery to describe virtue?

The metaphor of the skilled archer

Another approach to this question comes from the use of archery as a metaphor for virtue, or rather for virtues. The behaviour of the archer becomes a significant metaphor in both Chinese and Greek rhetoric, in a wide range of analogies. Metaphors from archery typically illustrate some aspect of technical or moral excellence in a particular domain of expertise.

Consider Plato's use of archery metaphors in various dialogues. In the *Laws* he compares archery to a good law that aims solely at its proper target and hits nothing else. Similarly, he likens the accuracy of a good archer to judges and lawgivers who accurately mete out punishment in correct amounts.²⁶ A very different use is provided by the descriptions

of *hamartia* in epistemological dialogues such as the *Theaetetus*. Here *hamartia* is a metaphor from archery. Plato compares the origin of false opinion to the bad archer who misses the mark because he lacks accurate perception.²⁷

This usage has counterparts in the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles. In the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, Cassandra uses the archer hitting the mark as a metaphor for accurate prophecy. Sophocles uses arrows as metaphors for the false divination of greedy prophets, and for grief to come accurately foretold. In the *Antigone*, Creon accuses Teiresias of shooting prophetic 'arrows' at him, like archers at their mark. Teiresias responds 'archer-like in anger' to this provocation by launching 'arrows for [his] heart', that 'fly true', and from which Creon cannot run.²⁸

Plato also associates archery with love and desire, described as resourceful and predatory. In the *Symposium*, Plato describes Apollo's invention of archery, medicine and divination under the guidance of Desire and Love. Love is the son of Poverty (Pēnia) and Plenty (Poros). Like his mother he is always poor, but like his father, he is always scheming for what is good. He is a famous hunter, wise, always weaving stratagems, and a master of juggling, witchcraft and artful speech.²⁹ In these metaphors, Plato uses archery to illustrate a variety of virtues, with little apparent interest in the qualities of archery itself. By contrast, a range of Chinese narratives focus on moral aspects of (and problems with) the details of the practice of archery. These texts praise archers for a range of virtues, and not necessarily the same ones ascribed to the Confucian *junzi*.

One is the conspicuously value-neutral virtue of concentration and accuracy, particularly associated with the legendary Archer Yi 羿.³⁰ On the one hand, he is portrayed as a saviour of humankind, for using his skill to shoot down the suns that threaten the world.³¹ Other stories also praise his archery skills in moral terms. Some compare his archery to the work of a skilled craftsman or a good ruler. The *Guanzi* compares his archery to the craftsman's intuitive grasp of axe and adze to cut along a mark. He hits the mark by careful adjustment of his bow and arrows, and by accurate judgment of the height of his target.³²

Mencius (Mengzi) selects a different set of skills when he compares the skilled archer to a master carpenter. In this analogy, his students imitate his 'natural' drawing of the bow as a master carpenter's students imitate his 'natural' use of compasses and square. Here the archer's virtue is naturalness (*ziran*). Ever practical, Xunzi compares Archer Yi's expertise at training archers to an enlightened official who is expert in 'training' men.³³

Other archery comparisons in Mencius are more morally focused. The archer should check his stance before shooting. As in the *Analects* and the *Liji*, if he misses the mark, he should seek the cause of the error within himself, rather than begrudge the victor.³⁴ In a more complex analogy, Mencius compares wisdom to skill and sagacity to strength. Strength/sagacity brings the arrow to the target, but skill/wisdom hits it:

智譬則巧也，聖譬則力也。由射於百步之外也，其至爾力也，其中非爾力也。

Wisdom may be likened to skill and sagacity to strength. Coming

from being shot from over a hundred paces away, [an arrow's] reaching [the target] is a matter of your strength, but [its] hitting the centre is not a matter of your strength.³⁵

But there is a problem with this passage, as Mark Csikszentmihalyi observes, because wisdom, rather than the prime virtue of sagacity makes it possible to hit the target, with the very un-Confucian implication that wisdom is more important than sagacity. Commentators have tried to argue that success required both the innate quality of sagacity and the learnable quality of wisdom. But particularly in the light of discussions of the transforming effects of a sage in recently excavated texts such as the *Wuxing*, the above passage in Mencius 5B1 could be reinterpreted to mean: 'hitting the centre is not a matter of *your strength* [emphasis added]: but rather a matter of the strength of the transformative influence of a sage'. Understood this way, Mencius too uses archery as a metaphor for the pervasive morality of the Confucian sage.

But moralising analogies of this kind are not unique to explicitly Confucian texts. A similar idea appears in a passage from the *Huainanzi*:

夫矢之所以射遠貫牢者，弩力也；其所以中的剖微者，人心也；賞善罰暴者，政令也；其所以能行者，精誠也。故弩雖強，不能獨中；令雖明，不能獨獨行；必自精氣所以與之施道。

Now the means by which an arrow can penetrate the rigidity of a distant target is the extension of strength, but the reason that it can split a hair is human minds. What rewards good and punishes evil is governance and edicts. The means by which these may be applied is essential sincerity. Therefore, even if one's strength is great one cannot hit the target alone, and although edicts are clear they cannot be applied alone. It is necessary to put the Way into effect using what essence and *qi* has bestowed.³⁶

These Chinese narratives share a detailed comparison of the skill of the archer with a range of virtues. These metaphorical accounts of archery are more sophisticated than the broad moralising treatment of the *Analects*, in that they focus on different aspects of the archer's skill, for different rhetorical purposes.

Finally, it is striking that both Aristotle and the *Zhongyong* conspicuously characterize virtue as a mean. Both describe it by analogy of archery, and both may conceive of virtue as an archery-like quality. Yu Jiyuan argues that the archery metaphor helps unite two separate accounts of the mean as (1) an intermediate between excess and deficiency and (2) what is right or appropriate.³⁷

The ethics of instruction

Other Chinese narratives use archery to illustrate a very different virtue: the moral responsibility of a teacher. I am unaware of a Greek counterpart to these, and indeed, Greek ambivalence about the ethics of archery might tend to preclude them. The issue in these stories is the master archer's choice of a student to whom to teach his skills. Unlike the archery metaphors, these stories vary considerably in the fates of the archers.

Mencius recounts the tale of how Archer Yi's student Peng Meng 蓬蒙 learned everything his master could teach, and then killed him. The interesting point here is that Mencius

considers Yi partially to blame for his own end.³⁸ Mencius specifically contrasts Yi's lack of responsibility with the choices of other archers who are more careful in their choices of student. Mencius's counterexample is Zizhuo Ruzi 子濯孺子 of Zheng 鄭. Pursued by an archer from Wei 衛, debilitated by illness and unable to hold a bow, he anticipates death until he learns that the Wei archer is his own student's student. He reasons that his student, an upright man, would only instruct an upright man. (The implication is, of course, that Zizhuo himself is an upright man.) The pursuer resolves the conflict between his obligations to his teacher's teacher and to Wei by shooting arrows harmlessly in the air.³⁹

These stories use the example of archery to demonstrate two kinds of error in acquiring a skill. One kind of problem occurs when a skill is not gained completely. The other is the full acquisition of a trivial skill because of a wrongheaded focus on 'small knowledge'. This theme occurs throughout the *Zhuangzi*, which uses Archer Yi as an example of 'trivial' skill. He could hit the smallest target, but could not avoid praise. (By contrast, the sage is skilled in affairs of Heaven rather than in human affairs.) Archer Yi could hit a sparrow but was 'caged' by Tang.⁴⁰

Another *Zhuangzi* narrative, the story of the archer Lie Yukou 列禦寇, presents a case of incomplete skill. Lie could stand still as a statue and shoot rapidly, but when invited to do the same thing on a mountain ledge, he lost all equanimity.⁴¹

Other political persuasions use archery as an example of the dire consequences of misdirected or incomplete skill. One *Guanzi* passage compares government without understanding standards for measurement or patterns of behaviour to turning one's back on the target and being confident of hitting the mark.⁴² Another analogises skill in archery to military training and preparation:

Having archers who cannot hit the target is the same thing as having no arrows. Their hitting the target but not piercing it is the same thing as having no arrowheads. Being a general over untrained men is the same thing as having no armour. Using short weapons against long-distance arrows is the same thing as sitting down to wait for death.⁴³

In these examples, for the ruler to act without essential political knowledge is like performing archery without the requisite skills or materiel, and unrealistically expecting a satisfactory outcome. Elsewhere in the *Guanzi*, archery is a distraction from proper rule, since archery and hunting could cause rulers to neglect the empire.⁴⁴

Finally, archery is also recommended in the very different context of household management. Late Han handbooks of household management recommend the practice of archery as an immediate deterrent to thieves. One example is a monthly guide for daily activities, which gives some indication of the practical activities of the farming estates of mid-level Later Han officials, c. 25–220 CE.⁴⁵ Its instructions for the second month include the instruction to practice archery in accordance with the Yang forces in order to prepare for the unexpected (the unexpected movements of bandits).⁴⁶ Similarly, the instructions for the ninth month include:

繕五兵，習戰射弛竹木弓弧以備寒凍窮厄之寇。

Repair the five weapons, and practice fighting and archery, in



Figure 6 The Guiding and Pulling Diagram (Daoyin tu) from Mawangdui. © Wellcome Images

order to be ready for the [people who become] bandits due to cold and poverty.⁴⁷

In summary, the example of archery demonstrates how one kind of ritual, practical and athletic skill was linked to moral excellence, in quite different social and institutional contexts, in early China and Greece. Yet, again in quite different ways, both Greek and Chinese athletics ethics may incorporate notions of strategy, deception and cunning.

Indirection, deception and virtue

The *mētis* of Odysseus would be inimical to the archer-*junzi* of the *Analecets*, but it does have its Chinese counterpart in the ethics of strategy and martiality.⁴⁸ The ability to understand, and thereby deceive, an opponent is at the heart of the martial strategy of the *Sunzi* and other military strategy manuals.⁴⁹ As Mark Edward Lewis has shown, the virtues of the sage-general of the *Sunzi* closely correspond to the virtues ascribed to sages in other Warring States texts.⁵⁰

A detailed consideration is beyond the scope of the present discussion, but I would suggest that such ‘deceptive’ strategies reappear in exercise techniques such as *taiji quan*, which combine fighting or self-defence techniques with self-cultivation practices for health and longevity. For example, the exercise of Pushing Hands (*tui shou* 推手) employs strategies that use stillness to defeat motion and use softness to defeat hardness. In the Pushing Hands version of using stillness to defeat motion, the goal is to detect an opponent’s intention in time to counteract it without in turn signalling one’s own intentions. Similarly, in using softness to defeat hardness, the goal is to divert an opponent’s attack by turning his own force against him.⁵¹

References to both indirect strategies and to physical exercises for health and longevity appear in passing in Warring States texts such as the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi*, and in excavated texts. The *Zhuangzi* mentions a method of ‘guiding

and pulling’ (*daoyin* 道引), used in conjunction with breath exercises for health and longevity:

吹响呼吸，吐故納新，熊經鳥申，為壽而已矣；此道引之士，養形之人，彭祖壽考者之所好也。

To blow out and breathe in, spitting out the old and breathing in the new, to bear-hang and bird-stretch; only concerned with longevity, this is the master of Guiding and Pulling, who nurtures the body, desiring to live as long as Pengzu.⁵²

Accounts of daoyin practices appear in more detail in excavated texts. The ‘Guiding and Pulling Diagram’ (*Daoyin tu* 導引圖) from Mawangdui consists of 44 drawings of human figures performing exercises (Fig. 6).⁵³ Some are described in the ‘Pulling Book’ (*Yin shu* 引書) from Zhangjiaoshan.⁵⁴

Conclusion

The Chinese and Greek athletic performances discussed here took place in vastly different contexts. These differences only begin with questions of sponsorship and the kind of sacrifice that they accompanied or embodied. These practices also were informed by different metaphysics and views of the relations of mind and body, and we find important differences of opinion about this question within each tradition. Yet in different ways, Chinese and Greek athletic performances formed a continuum with embodied self-cultivation practices. No doubt the goal of many athletic competitions was victory over an opponent. Especially for athletic practices that mimicked warfare, the potential for military advantage would have been a strong motive for state patronage. Even so, both societies also recognised the centrality of virtue (variously understood) to athletic practice and performance. Implicit in that recognition was the view that, under the right circumstances, physical practices can develop ethical and moral virtues.



Figure 7 Odysseus escaping the Cyclops by *metis*. © Trustees of the British Museum, 1864,1007.228

These practices also coexisted, in very different ways, with an ethics of indirection that accommodated ruses and even deception (Fig. 7). At first glance, the deceptions of the *Sunzi* general or the *mētis* of an Odysseus are far removed from the virtues recommended by Confucius or Plato. Yet both were models of sagacity. Interestingly, each case has its counterpart in sport, and in the use of metaphors that compare sport to wisdom or moral excellence. These accounts show very different moralities of competition, and complex relations between virtue, victory, performance, and entertainment.

Notes

The translations are the authors' unless otherwise stated. Chinese words are transliterated in the Pinyin system; most Greek terms are transliterated according to the 3rd edn of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, except for terms that are well known in an alternative version.

- 1 For the history of Chinese sport, see Ren Hai 1988. This very general account of Greek sport draws on the textual tradition. Inscriptional sources present a broader view. For some inscriptional sources, see Miller 2004.
- 2 For an overview of the history of the relation between religion and Greek sport, see Scanlon 2002, especially chapter 1. It has been claimed that training for warfare was a primary purpose of Greek sport, but this claim is also disputed. See Golden 1998, pp. 23–8.
- 3 For the funeral games, see *Iliad* 23.256–897. For the games for Odysseus, see *Odyssey* 8.97–384. There is also a spontaneous boxing match between Odysseus and the beggar Iros (*Od.* 18.66–897).
- 4 *Il.* 6.208.
- 5 *Hymn. Hom. Ap.*, lines 146–50. See Scanlon 2002, p. 28.
- 6 *Analects* 3.7.
- 7 For detailed discussion, see Sansone 1992, pp. 15–28.

- 8 Sansone 1992, p. 37. This is not to say that self-sacrifice was the only motivation or conception of sport. Other attitudes include considering one's talents as a divine gift, and also taking personal credit for one's achievements. Some of these attitudes appear in inscriptional sources.
- 9 Fränkel 1975, pp. 487–88.
- 10 For a fuller discussion, see Lloyd 2007, especially pp. 139–140.
- 11 Discussed at length in Snell 1953 [1948] and Padel 1992.
- 12 Literally, the 'the first actuality of a natural body that has the potential for life': ἐντελέχεια ἡ πρώτη σώματος φυσικοῦ δυνάμει ζῶν ἔχοντος.
- 13 For these aspects of the *Odyssey*, see Nagy 1980.
- 14 Detienne and Vernant 1978. They describe *mētis* as a way of knowing, with complex but coherent mental attitudes and characteristic intellectual behaviour, which was typically applied to shifting, ambiguous situations unamenable to rigorous logic or calculation.
- 15 On this point, see Dunkle 1987, p. 15.
- 16 *Il.* 23.311–318.
- 17 Agamemnon: *Il.* 4.336–348.
- 18 *Plat. Hip. Min.* 371E. For discussion, see Lampert 2002.
- 19 Scott 1998.
- 20 *Eur. Heracl.*, lines 159–65.
- 21 These sacrifices are described in the *Zuozhuan* and systematised in the *Zhouli*. See Lewis 1990, pp. 145–51.
- 22 *Analects* 3.16, cf. *Analects* 3.7.
- 23 *Liji* 31, 'Zhongyong', p. 884, trans. Legge [1885] 1967, p. 307.
- 24 *Liji* 46, 'She yi', p. 1014–15, trans. Legge [1885] 1967, p. 446.
- 25 *Liji* 46, 'She yi', p. 1020, trans. Legge [1885] 1967, p. 452.
- 26 See *Plat., Leg.* 705E and *Leg.* 934B, respectively.
- 27 *Plat., The.* 193E.
- 28 See Aesch., *Ag.* 1195 and *Soph., Ant.* 1033 and 1085, respectively.
- 29 *Plat., Symp.* 197A and 203CD.
- 30 Archer Yi is also described as Houyi 后羿, Yiyi 夷羿 or Pingyi 平羿.
- 31 Accounts of Yi saving the world by shooting the 10 suns appear in *Shanhaijing* 18:7b and *Huainanzi* 8:118–19 and 13:233. Accounts of his misdeeds appear in the *Zuozhuan* (Xiang 4) and 'Tianwen' (*Chuci* 3:15b). Archer Yi and Peng Meng are described as the best archers in the world in the *Huainanzi* (17:292) and Xunzi (8:80 and 11:69).
- 32 The *Guanzi* (1:5a and 20:5) also compares Archer Yi hitting the mark to the government of an enlightened ruler. Here the analogy is that each is a master of his respective way.
- 33 See Mencius (Mengzi) 6A20 and Xunzi 11:69–70.
- 34 Mencius 2A7.
- 35 Mencius 5B1, trans. modified from Csikszentmihalyi 2004, pp. 183–84.
- 36 *Huainanzi* 20:350, trans. Csikszentmihalyi 2004, pp. 189–90.
- 37 Yu 2007, especially pp. 79–84.
- 38 Mencius 4B24. Here he follows the *Analects* (14.5), in which Confucius contrasts Archer Yi's violent death with the agricultural successes of Yu and Hou Ji.
- 39 Mencius 4B24. A somewhat different account of an astute teacher appears in the *Liezi* story of the master Gan Ying 甘蝇, his student Fei Wei 飞卫, and Fei Wei's student Ji Chang 纪昌. When Fei Wei tried to kill Gan Ying, he caught the arrow in his teeth. When Ji Chang tried to kill Fei Wei, their arrows met in mid-air. Fei Wei blocked Ji Chang's last arrow with a thorn, whereupon both wept, threw down their bows, became as father and son, and vowed to instruct no one else. See *Liezi* 5:61–62. Another *Liezi* narrative (5:58–59) describes balancing give and pull as the ultimate principle in dealing with the world, exemplified by the skill of a fisherman at equalising the push and pull on his line, based on the model of archery.
- 40 *Zhuangzi* 23:813–14.
- 41 *Zhuangzi* 21:724. Similarly, the *Lienüzhuan* (story 6.3) story of the wife of the bow-maker of Jin correlates the Duke of Jin's ineptness in archery with his deficiency in moral judgment (in condemning her husband for making a bow the duke cannot shoot). She remedies both in a persuasion that combines instruction in ethics and instruction in archery. For detailed analysis of this argument, see Raphals 2001.
- 42 *Guanzi* 2:2b.
- 43 *Guanzi* 10:9a.

- 44 Thus 'Queries' (*Wen*) asks how many young people take the lead in working the fields, and how many lead others away to hunt with bow and arrow (*Guanzi* 9:13a). In 'Admonitions' (*Jie*), Guan Zhong admonishes Duke Huan for shooting arrows, neglecting the empire and oppressing the people (*Guanzi* 10:3a–b). Positive views of archery stress its ceremonial aspects in archery competitions at banquets, e.g. *Shi jing*, Mao 220 and *Lunyu* 3.7.
- 45 Cui Shi 崔寔 (c. 110–170 CE), *Simin yueling* 四民月令 (Monthly Instructions for the Four Classes of People).
- 46 *Simin yueling jiaozhu*, pp. 19–20, trans. Ebrey 1974, p. 181.
- 47 *Simin yueling jiaozhu*, p. 65, trans. Ebrey 1974, p. 190.
- 48 I discuss this point at length in Raphals 1992, where I argue that, as in Greece, metic intelligence tacitly informed many aspects of early Chinese society, including both personal and social morality, military strategy and statecraft.
- 49 For detailed discussion of strategy manuals (*bingfa* 兵法) see Lewis 1990 (especially pp. 98–103) and Raphals 1992, chapt. 5 (pp. 101–28).
- 50 Lewis 1990, chapter 3 (pp. 97–135).
- 51 The development of Pushing Hands is ascribed to the semi-mythical Daoist priest Zhang Sanfeng 張三豐 (c. 17th century) or to Chen Wangting 陳王廷 (1600–1680), the founder of Chen style *Taiji quan* 太極拳. For Zhang Sanfeng see Seidel 1970. For Chen Wanting see Wile 1996, pp. 114–16. For the origins of *Taijiquan* see Wile 1996.
- 52 *Zhuangzi* 15: 535.
- 53 Daoyin tu, *Mawangdui Hanmu boshu*, 1979. For translation and discussion, see Harper 1998, pp. 310–27.
- 54 For summary of the contents of the Pulling Book, see 'Jiangling Zhangjiashan Hanjian gaishu', *Wenwu* 1985.1:9–16. For transcription see 'Zhangjiashan Hanjian yinshu shiwen', *Wenwu* 1990.10:82–86 and *Zhangjiashan Hanmu zhujian* (*ersiqi hao mu*) 2001. For discussion, see Peng Hao 1990.

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