Chapter Thirteen of the ‘New Book of Discipline and Effectiveness’: Archery

by Qi Ji-guang

According to the ‘Biographies of Eminent Women’, you should “draw the bow in a state of tension and release it in a state of relaxation.” The ‘state of tension’ means coming to full draw with all your might; the ‘state of relaxation’ means that your mind should be calm and concentrated.

“The draw-weight of the bow corresponds to the strength of the archer and the spine of the arrow corresponds to the weight of the bow.” This is of the greatest importance. That is why, to quote ‘Xun Zi’, “If the arrow isn’t correctly spined for the bow, even Yi couldn’t score a hit with it.” In ‘Mencius’, it says, “When Yi taught archery, he insisted that that [students] drew their bows fully.” Our students must also draw their bows fully. The archer’s most important technique is “Grasping the bow, concentration and firm stance.” ‘Concentration’ is minute attention [to your shooting]; ‘firm stance’ refers to maintaining a firm grip on the bow. The string slapping against the sleeve is always caused by an insufficiently steady grip on the bow. The arrow porpoising and lacking force is always due to the arrow-head failing to contact the finger. [Wang Ju’s] Manual says, “Without the arrow-head against the finger, there is no potential for a hit; if the finger doesn’t feel the arrow-head, it’s just like being blind.” ‘Finger’ here means the end joint of the middle finger of the bow-hand. ‘The finger feeling the arrow-head’ refers to the feeling the arrow-head against the joint of the middle finger – not using your eyes. You cannot achieve a full draw unless the end of your finger feels the arrowhead. You must do that with every arrow before you can really talk of shooting.

Qi Ji-guang (1528–1587) was born into a military family and learned much from his father. He was appointed general in 1555 and won a decisive victory over the pirates at Taizhou (台州) in 1561. He worked effectively together with Yu Da-you to battle against the Japanese in Guangdong in 1563. He wrote two of the most popular works on Chinese military strategy and training, the ‘Substance and Discipline in Military Training’ and ‘A New Book of Discipline and Effectiveness’. (《練兵實記》、《紀效新書》). His literary style is innovative: much of his work consists of colloquial records of lectures to his troops and commanders and reading them gives a feeling for his personality.
Concentrating is concentrating during the moment between reach full draw and releasing the arrow. Nowadays, archers start this concentrating process as soon as they have drawn the arrow over two-thirds of the way back. What good does that do them? And as for ‘concentration’, lots of people just think it’s no more than concentrating on the target. They do not realise that concentrating on the target is secondary to the issue of concentrating on how you are going to hit it. The point is, at the moment of reaching full draw, your attention in stretched to the full, your arms and legs are no longer straining. If you release without premeditation, then whether the arrow travels straight, and whether it hits is not determined by your conscious mind. You have to deepen this concentration, make your mind open, your arms and legs firm but relaxed. After that, the arrow is released, and there is no reason for it not to fly straight, not to hit the target.

The word ‘concentration’ in [Wang Ju’s] Manual is the same as ‘meditation’ found in the ‘Great Learning’: “He meditates on it and then he is able to achieve it.” When a Gentleman is seeking to prefect himself completely, he knows at what point he should have reached that [perfect] stage, and resolves to attain it, then becomes tranquil, then at peace. And he must be able to meditate on these qualities before he will be able to totally fulfil his aim. When a Gentleman is practising archery, at the point where he has already drawn his bow fully, and in the moments before he releases the arrow, he must concentrate on his shooting stance, and then he will have the assurance of hitting the target. You need to know what is behind the concept of ‘concentration’, relate it to the concept of ‘meditation’ [in the ‘Great Learning’], get completely into it and then you will succeed.

You grip the bow with the thumb resting on the middle finger: this is the greatest of the old shooting tricks. You must never fail to apply it. In horseback archery, always release when you are [at least] ninety per cent of full draw: Never forget! It’s difficult to hit when the bow is just seventy or eighty percent drawn. When it comes to archery on horseback, you should always take two arrows, grasping one firmly against the grip of the bow while nocking the other on the string where

2《禮記·學記》：“和易以思，可謂善喻。”
3《大學》：“大學之道在明明德，在親民，在止於至善。知止，而後有定，定而後能靜，靜而後能安；安而後能慮，慮而後能得。”
it is handy. Sticking arrows into your collar or belt: neither is convenient. Always do exactly as I say!

Whenever your arrow goes off, it's better for it to go high and pass over the target. Watch you don't let it go low and not reach. Everyone makes this mistake. Don’t forget! When you’re shooting in the examination ground, you must keep your cool. The thought of missing must never enter your mind. Carry on as if there were no examining officer watching over you, just be as you would in your daily practice: one arrow – nice and slow – feel the arrowhead with your finger – next arrow – concentrate with each arrow – next arrow: how can you fail to hit? To give you that advance assurance that your are going to hit you must always be at ease and doing things in your own time. That assurance can only come from the absence of nervousness or haste. If you are hasty or nervous and you still hit, that’s no more than a lucky shot.

If you have still not scored a hit after your first five shots, you must still keep yourself at ease, keep up you concentration. You must never rush your movements just because you still have not scored a hit yet. If you rush your movements, then shots six to nine have no way of hitting either.

教騎射箭，法曰： " 劫如追風，目如流電，滿開弓，急放箭。目勿瞬視，身勿倨坐，出弓如，慢中吐月，，平箭如，弦上懸衡，，息一其心志。

Wang Ju’s manual for horseback archery says,

‘As powerfully as if chasing the wind,
The eye moves like a bolt of lightning,
Draw the bow fully, immediately loose off the arrow,
The eye is fixed unblinking,
You body as solid as rock,
Don’t lose your momentum’

Bring up the bow like ‘the moon rising from your breast’. Place the arrow on the string like ‘placing scales on the string.’ Your breathing should co-ordinate with the actions you are carrying out in your mind.

故曰： " 莫患弓軟，服當自遠。莫患箭羸，引之自俠。” 但力勝其弓，必先持滿。射之先近，而遠：此不易之法也。大抵還要學扯滿，射遠及到，然後
So [Wang Ju’s] Manual says: “Don’t worry that the bow’s [draw-weight] is light: get used to it, then you’ll still get a good distance from it. If you’re worried that a bow’s draw-weight is weak: draw it and it will naturally fire crisply.” But to get sufficient strength to draw your bow you must draw it fully. Starting off by shooting at short range, then getting further away is not an easy method. Basically you still have to learn to pull the bow back to full draw and be able to cover a long distance, then you come back in and start working up your accuracy. It’s not as if someone who has never pulled a bow just restricts himself to twenty to thirty paces. That’s just holding oneself back. How can you ever achieve any distance?

Whether you’re shooting at an enemy or at a target, you must take a firm stance and keep your attention on your target or your enemy: don’t look at the arrow while you nock it. If you blink for a moment, you may be unable to dodge in time and someone would get the better of you!

Whenever you shoot, your forward leg position should be as if you were stepping on something and the rear leg should be bowed. Any movement to follow the aim of the arrow should only be with the rear foot. The bow-harm shoulder and the hip should be directly opposite the toes of the right foot, “not quite at right-angles and not quite in a ‘V’”. If you are shooting the right, move onto the left foot; if you are shooting to the left, shift onto the right foot: these two phrases express the knack of scoring a direct hit. That covers foot position.

Then you [push forward] your bow-hand as if pushing away Mount Tai; and your string hand is like hauling on a tiger’s tail. One fist keeps control, keep the front and back fists level and straight, draw the bow slowly then release with your hands held tense. If the target is big (close), drop the hand to the small [area of the target you are aiming at]. If the target is small (distant), raise your hand to aim at the whole of it. ‘Dropping’ the hand means dropping the bow-hand, while ‘raising’ means raising the bow-hand. These two phrases are fundamental to archery. The bow hand ‘thrusts’ and the string hand ‘snaps’: this is the knack of co-ordination. Take up the strain evenly [in both arms] and make both arms and shoulders extend. If you do this right, the arrow will go fast and will reach seven times further than the normal way. That wraps up hand technique.
"Positioning the cheek next to the string, the neck arching back, the chest jutting out, the spine arching backwards — all of these are errors of stance. That wraps up stance.

If the arrow doesn’t fly straight, the problem stems from the draw-hand thumb hooking the string too tightly. This is in turn caused by the ring finger and little finger being open and relaxed. This is a beginner’s error. When you shoot, try pressing an inch or so of straw between your ring finger/little finger and the base of the palm of your hand. The straw mustn’t fall when you release, and then the arrow will fly straight.

When you fire in the face of the enemy, as long as you keep up your courage, keep the level of your strength stable, keep your potential energy high and restrain it on a short leash, then every shot will strike home and no-one will be able to get away from you. To achieve this, you need to keep all of your actions short of the maximum: draw but do not pull the bow to the full extent of your strength; and make sure every shot counts. Only with your arms straight and even can you take a firm stance: this will naturally make you potential energy high. You need to wait until the enemy is within a few dozen paces so that you are sure of hitting with a single shot you are sure to make a kill.

If you are worried about being at close quarters or the enemy’s blades are nearly upon you: this way each shot will be rewarded ten-fold. When you are involved with the enemy in cavalry warfare, shoot the largest target on the field: don’t just shoot at people. The famous poem goes:

[“When you pull a bow, then pull a bow that’s strong,
And when you fire an arrow, fire the one that’s long!
Before you shoot the rider shoot the horse,
First take the leader, ere you take the rebel throng!”]
Always attend to your horse’s appropriate feeding and seasonal rota. Train her to pace correctly, to be obedient over moving on and stopping, not to panic when she encounters obstacles, and not to cut corners at the gallop. The forelegs should move forward together from the level of the ears, and the rear legs need to come forward co-ordinated with the front legs. This makes the movement both quick and stable, allowing the rider to use his weapons. A man’s life depends on his horse. The steppe-land horses are used to warfare much more than those of the Chinese. This is the fruit of regular training.

[Note: the following text and illustrations make little sense. They may have been misprinted in the woodblock printed version. There are insufficient differences between the two illustrations to judge what the text is meant to mean.]

握握射圖
此法，弓滿左臂直如弦，而弓斜如月，前平挟頭。

Illustration of the ‘Firm Grip’ Archery Method
According to this method, when the bow is fully-drawn, the left forearm is straight like the bowstring and the bow tilts like the moon. The bow-arm is level with the nipple.

推心扇射圖。
此法，弓滿則弛之曲心對下，肘平如衡，而弓須兼八分平勢。

Illustration of the ‘Pushing with the Flat of the Palm’ Archery Method
According to this method, when the bow is fully-drawn, the outside of the elbow points down and the elbow itself is straight like the arms of a balance. The bow must be held at the eighty per cent of level position.