



Chapter One

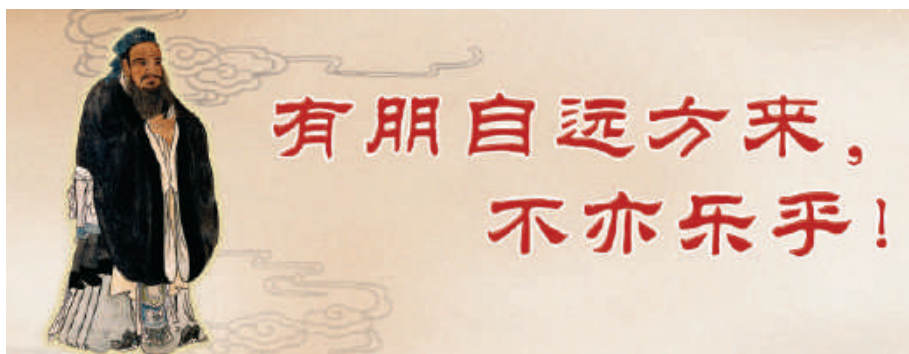
Text Analysis



Confucius's View on Sports: A Modern Interpretation of *The Analects*

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Confucius was a master of the Chinese “six classical arts” —rituals, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and arithmetic. Many of his views recorded in *The Analects* can be identified in concepts of modern sportsmanship.



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“It’s a great pleasure to have friends come visit from afar.” This quote from Confucius was cited at the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Games at Beijing and was a sentiment echoed by Chinese people as they extended a warm welcome to visitors from all around the world.

You have probably heard of Confucius, a great Chinese thinker, educator, and philosopher. Two centuries after his passing, his disciples collected his sayings and compiled them into *The Analects*, which is considered the most important Confucian work.

The quote cited during the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games reflects the book’s unparalleled influence on Chinese culture. Quotes from *The Analects* cover almost every facet of Chinese life, passing on the great sage’s wisdom regarding life and society, with some wisdom pertaining to sports.

Friendship Before Competition

Confucius said, “Gentlemen never compete, except perhaps in archery. But even then, they courteously bow and make way for each other before advancing to the archery ground; and, on returning, they drink together and salute one another. This is the way of gentlemanly



competition.”

The meaning of Confucius's words was to emphasize the importance of ethics and integrity during the course of a competition, and that players should prioritize friendship and courtesy, rather than who finishes in first place. Confucius valued the participation in the competition more than the end result. To paraphrase his statement in a modern context, it was Confucius's belief that sportsmanship and ethical conduct of the contestants was more important than the final rankings.

Passion Being the Best Teacher

Confucius said, “To be fond of something is better than to know it; to enjoy it is better than to be fond of it.”

This means that those who know how to study are not as good as those who like to study; and those who like to study are not as good as those who find joy in it. In short, passion is the best teacher.

In sports, it is better for a person to like the sport they practice rather than simply knowing how to practice it, and it is even better for a person to have a passion for their sport than simply be fond of it.



Truly enjoying the sport can create a deeper sense of achievement, making it rewarding to participate in the sport, learn how to master it, and explore new approaches. Those who love the sport are better motivated.



The Making of a “Perfect Person”

Zilu, a disciple of Confucius, inquired about what made a perfect person. Confucius said, “A perfect person is as wise as Zang Wuzhong,



as nonmaterialistic as Meng Gongchuo, as brave as Bian Zhuangzi, as versatile as Ran Qiu, and also cultured with rites and music. Then he can be called a perfect person.”

“But,” Confucius added, “to be a perfect person nowadays does not require all these qualities. If one remembers appropriate conduct at the sight of profit, is ready to sacrifice one’s life in the face of danger, and honors one’s promises while enduring strained circumstances for a long time, then one can be regarded as a perfect person.”

It can be seen that Confucius maintained that people should strengthen their own ethical cultivation while also building up wisdom, detachment from desire, bravery, and versatility. All these fine qualities can be reflected in the way he conducts himself. Such a person could be called “perfect”.





From the perspective of sports, the players are expected to be more than courageous and skillful; they also need to be wise and restrained from desire. Such is the skill set for athletes.

A Healthy Diet

Regarding food, Confucius said, “During sacrifice rice should never be too fine, nor meat too finely cut. Do not eat rice or meat which has a bad smell. Do not eat discolored food or anything that has a strong smell. Do not eat undercooked or overcooked food, nor dine at inappropriate times. Do not consume meat improperly cut. Do not eat meat without the right condiments. When meat is plenty, avoid eating more meat than rice. Regarding wine, there is no rigid limit, but one should drink with decorum. Do not consume wine or dried meat bought from street stands in the interests of hygiene. Ginger can be served on the table, but do not eat more than is necessary. After the sacrifice, one should not keep his portion of meat overnight. After three days, the meat can no longer be eaten.”

Though Confucius was talking about food concerning sacrificial rituals, his ideas can be applied to everyday eating habits. In essence, it is about dining regularly on a balanced variety of healthy food, understanding food hygiene, and restraining from over-