

JIANGNAN PROVINCIAL EXAMINATIONS RESULTS

Reflections on a page with examination results of the 11th year of Guangxu, or 1882.

INTRODUCTION

Soldiers of the Qing military had two ways of getting up in rank. One was by showing merit in battle, organization or administration and getting promoted by a higher ranked officer who noted one's skill. Another was getting up in rank by taking the imperial examinations. Etienne Zi witnessed such examinations in Shanghai and wrote a book about it in 1895 that provides us with very good insight in the workings of the examination. It also lists a page of results of a Guangxu era (1882) Jiangnan county provincial examination which is the subject of this paper.¹

THE EXAMINATION

The examinations consisted of the following disciplines: horseback archery, standing archery, pulling a heavy bow, a routine with a heavy pole arm and lifting a heavy stone. The horseback archery exam consisted of five targets and a so-called "ground ball", a felt or leather ball or semi-round object that was to be shot with a special blunt arrow. The foot archery exam of the late Qing consisted of shooting six arrows towards a rectangular target at 48 meters. The target was 192 cm high by 90 cm wide. The horseback archery targets are 150 cm high by 50 cm wide and are standing alongside a track.

MARTIAL ABILITY

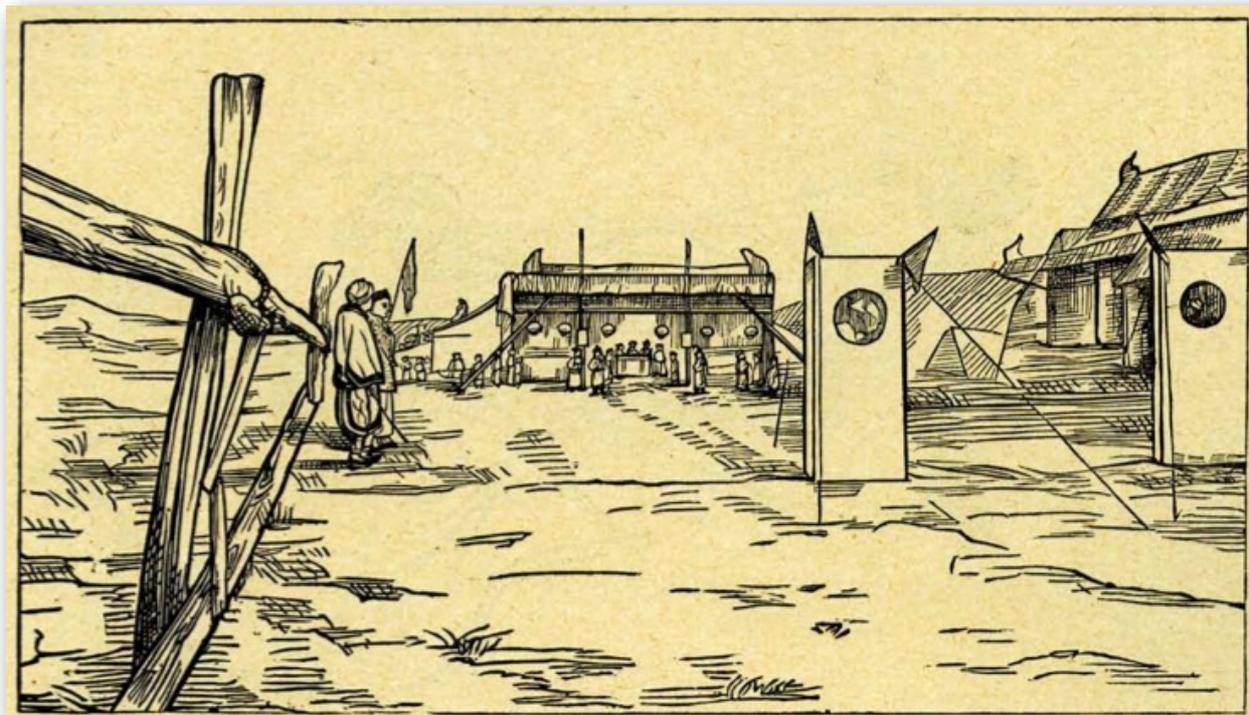
From the Kangxi era onwards emperors complained about a drop in skill of their men, and it is believed that by the late Qing archery skills had declined considerably across the empire. To see to what extent this was true it would be interesting to compare the early results of these examinations with the later results. We will hopefully get our hands on some more documents, bits and pieces of which are now scattered in libraries all over the world.

However, it is important to note that many commanders did not deem the examinations good preparation for actual combat. Its ground and horseback archery contests used only light bows, so accuracy on these parts would not necessarily mean the contestant would be accurate with a heavier bow, even though he could pull the heavy strength-testing bow. Still, the feats shown by the examination results below show how even in the late Qing dynasty these men still had considerable skill. Especially the combination of strength in pulling, as well as accuracy from both foot and horseback, are rare feats to see combined in traditional archers today.

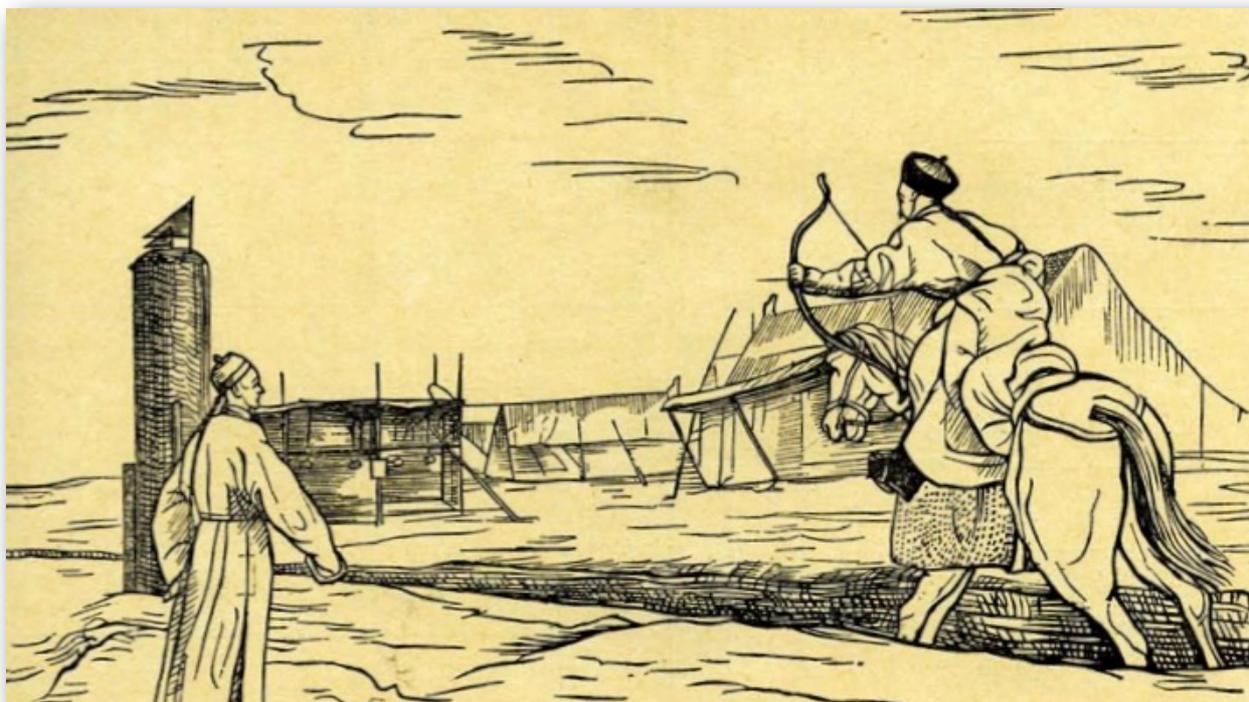


A participant pulls the heavy bow. The strength bow can be pulled with the whole hand and is to be pulled three times in succession. Examiners note whether the participant has his technique under control and doesn't shake.

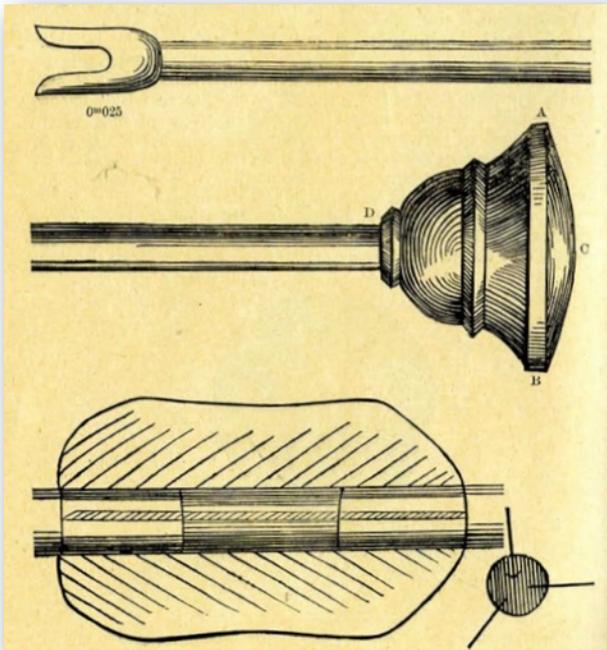
¹ P. Etienne Zi (Siu), S.J., *Pratique des examens militaires en Chine, Variétés sinologiques*, 9, Shanghai, 1896.



The ground archery examination grounds, from a drawing in *Pratique des examens militaires en Chine*.



The horseback archery examination grounds, from a drawing in *Pratique des examens militaires en Chine*.



Clockwise: 1) The arrow used to shoot the ground ball. It was called a "hat arrow" because of the hat shaped blunt head. 2.) A participant swinging the heavy pole arm, called *wukedao* or "examination blade". 3.) A participant showing the posture for shooting the ground ball. 4.) Lifting the heavy stone. All from *Pratique des examens militaires en Chine*.



A Qing *wukedao* completely made of iron. According to Qing regulations these went up to 120 *jin jin* in weight. Picture taken in the in the Beijing Military Museum.



A Qing *wukeshi* or "military examination stone". According to Qing regulations these went up to 300 *jin* in weight. Picture taken at the at the old military base at Laolongtou, the eastern end of the great wall.



Tip of an arrow as used for the horseback archery examinations. Author's collection.



A *maozhijian* or "hat arrow" used for shooting the "ground ball" target. Collected by Berthold Laufer in 1903, now in the Chicago Field Museum, accession number 9843.

第九十名王鳳	鎮江府武生年三十四歲	馬箭中五矢地 球 一 矢步箭中五矢
第九十一名王鎬	丹陽縣武生年二十一歲	馬箭中六矢地 球 一 矢步箭中六矢
第九十二名周登疆	泗州虹鄉武生年十八歲	馬箭中六矢地 球 無 矢步箭中六矢
第九十三名張安堂	海州武生年二十七歲	馬箭中六矢地 球 一 矢步箭中四矢
第九十四名尙德魁	安慶府武生年二十歲	馬箭中六矢地 球 一 矢步箭中六矢
第九十五名姚兆熊	無爲州武生年二十歲	馬箭中六矢地 球 一 矢步箭中六矢
第九十六名戚祥雲	丹徒縣武生年四十三歲	馬箭中六矢地 球 一 矢步箭中六矢
第九十七名周金標	合肥縣武生年二十歲	馬箭中三矢地 球 無 矢步箭中五矢
開弓十三力舞刀一百二十斤擲石三百斤		

江南武鄉試題名錄

光緒十一年乙酉正科

六

Results of the 1882 Jiangnan provincial examinations, published in *Pratique des examens militaires en Chine*.

RESULTS

The 90th name: Wang Feng, Zhenjiang [town], Fuwusheng [status], age 34:

Horseback archery 5 (of 6) hits. Hit the ground ball.

Foot archery 5 (of 6) hits.

Drew a 13 strength bow. (approx 173 pounds)

Handled a 120 jin *wukedao*. (approx 72 kg)

Lifted a 300 pound stone. (approx 181 kg)

The 91st name: Wang Gao, Danyang [town], Xianwusheng [status], age 21:

Horseback archery 6 (of 6) hits. Hit the ground ball.

Foot archery 6 (of 6) hits.

Drew a 12 strength bow. (approx 160 pounds)

Handled a 120 jin *wukedao*. (approx 72 kg)

Lifted a 300 pound stone. (approx 181 kg)

The 92nd name: Zhou Dengjiang, Qiuzhouhong [town], Xiangwusheng [status], age 18:

Horseback archery 6 (of 6) hits. Did not hit the ground ball.

Foot archery 6 (of 6) hits.

Drew a 12 strength bow. (approx 160 pounds)

Handled a 120 jin *wukedao*. (approx 72 kg)

Lifted a 300 pound stone. (approx 181 kg)

The 93rd name: Zhang Antang, Hai [town], Zhouwusheng [status], age 27:

Horseback archery 6 (of 6) hits. Hit the ground ball.

Foot archery 4 (of 6) hits.

Drew a 12 strength bow. (approx 160 pounds)

Handled a 120 jin *wukedao*. (approx 72 kg)

Lifted a 300 pound stone. (approx 181 kg)

The 94th name: Shang Deshuang, Anqing [town], Fuwusheng [status], age 20:

Horseback archery 6 (of 6) hits. Hit the ground ball.

Foot archery 6 (of 6) hits.

Drew a 12 strength bow. (approx 160 pounds)

Handled a 120 jin *wukedao*. (approx 72 kg)

Lifted a 300 pound stone. (approx 181 kg)

The 95th name: Yao Zhaoxiong, Wuwei [town], Zhouwusheng [status], age 20:

Horseback archery 6 (of 6) hits. Hit the ground ball.

Foot archery 6 (of 6) hits.

Opened a 13 strength bow. (approx 173 pounds)

Handled a 120 jin *wukedao*. (approx 72 kg)

Lifted a 300 pound stone. (approx 181 kg)

The 96th name: Qi Xiangyun, Dantu [town], Xianwusheng [status], age 43:

Horseback archery 6 (of 6) hits. Hit the ground ball.

Foot archery 6 (of 6) hits.

Opened a 12 strength bow. (approx 160 pounds)

Handled a 120 jin *wukedao*. (approx 72 kg)

Lifted a 300 pound stone. (approx 181 kg)

The 97th name: Zhou Jinpiao, Hefei [town], Xianwusheng [status], age 20:

Horseback archery 3 (of 6) hits. Did not hit the ground ball.

Foot archery 5 (of 6) hits.

Opened a 13 strength bow. (approx 173 pounds)

Handled a 120 jin *wukedao*. (approx 72 kg)

Lifted a 300 pound stone. (approx 181 kg)

By comparison, Peter Dekker, Amsterdam [town], age 32:

Horseback archery: *Not yet re-enacted*

Foot archery exam (in Bad Krozingen): 3 (of 6) hits.

Opened a 7 strength bow. (approx 93 pounds)

Unlikely to lift a 120 jin *wukedao*, let alone wield it.

Unlikely to lift a 300 pound stone.

CONCLUSION

Decline certainly is relative. The feats shown by the above results are by no means attainable without diligent training. Not even modern-day bodybuilders can pull bows of that poundage without lots of training in the proper technique. Of the three strength tests, a participant could only lower the weight of one of the three. The participants in this short list seem to have preferred to lower the bow's draw weight rather than the stone or *wukedao*, attesting for the difficulty of pulling it. The presented list of results is of course relatively short, and so we need to be careful drawing too many conclusions from it. It does add weight to the following statement: *"Bows of 150 pounds are by no means rare in China. The arrows used at the siege of the Legations in 1900 are 3 feet 5.5 inches long and 7/16 inch in diameter with heavy socketed steel heads. Some of the whistling arrows are 4 feet 2 inches long with heads four inches in diameter and six inches long. The bows that I saw in Peking that were used with such arrows were huge, about six feet long strung, with a cross section at the handle of nearly two square inches. They were said to have a pull of about 200 pounds and looked it."*² We can conclude that the use of heavy bows did not die out in the mid-Qing, but endured in military circles up to the very end of the dynasty. To get a better idea of skill in the Qing, and to find out just how common the use of such high draw weights were, we need to look for more results of examinations and contests to compare and analyze.

VOCABULARY

Chinese	Pinyin	English
武科	wǔkē	Military examinations
武科石	wǔkēshí	Stone weight used in the examinations
武科弓	wǔkēgōng	Heavy strength-testing bow used in the examinations
武科刀	wǔkēdāo	Heavy pole arm used in the examinations
馬箭中	mǎjiàn	Arrow(s) that hit from horseback
矢步箭中	shǐbùjiàn	Arrow(s) that hit from stance
地球	dìqiú	"Ground ball" horseback archery target
開弓	kāigōng	To open the bow, to draw a bow
帽子箭	màozi jiàn	"Hat arrow", a special blunt arrow used to shoot the ground ball
武生	wǔshēng	Those living a military life / who study for the military exams

² George Cameron Stone, *Glossary of the Construction, Decoration, and Use of Arms and Armor in All Countries and in All Times*, Jack Brussel, New York, 1961, p. 134.



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