

Ponder Thoroughly

Study extensively, inquire carefully, ponder thoroughly, sift clearly, and practice earnestly. --Zhu Xi

If ever there were a missing link between the effort to obtain objective knowledge and draw rational conclusions, it is the lack of thorough cogitation.

Even if we were to study extensively and inquire carefully in order to be more knowledgeable about our studies, we have to reflect on what we have learned within some sort of structure. If you take a fact and draw an instant conclusion from it, you might as well read statistics (as you know, statistics can be arranged and “sifted carefully” to “prove” anything). But to ponder thoroughly one must have the skills of rationality and the desire to find objective truth (to whatever extent possible) rather than a prejudiced opinion supported by just enough evidence to sound objective.

Lenny Bruce used to ask at the end of his comedy set, “Are there any groups I *haven't* offended?” When pondering, one cannot concern oneself with conclusions that find disfavor with a group, cause, or position—even if you may have endorsed it. In this regard, one has to be scientific (despite the fact that scientists themselves are not always objective) in the sense of going where the evidence leads.

To quote George Bernard Shaw: “Two percent of the people think. Three percent of the people think they think. Ninety-five percent would rather die than think.” That leaves 95 to 98% of the people dependent on 2%. Whether or not you agree with Ayn Rand’s philosophy in *Atlas Shrugged*, if Shaw was right, there are only 2% of the people who are the thinking Atlases that hold up the world. Rather than defining that two percent on one side of the political aisle (Shaw was a socialist, Rand a capitalist), I would urge that students of any discipline (and intelligent people in general) try to increase the percentage of people who think from 2% to at least 10% by their taking time to ponder and trying to be impersonal, unbiased, and as objective as humanly possible.

In the martial arts, we create an automatic bias because students, ignorant as babes when they start, cannot possibly study even a representative sample of all the other martial arts, let alone thoroughly know their own. Like students everywhere, they are malleable and at the disposal of their teacher’s prejudices. Few teachers of Kyokushinkai will train the student to appreciate the positive aspects of Wing-chun. Few teachers of Wing-chun will train the student to appreciate the positive aspects of Aikido. And so it goes. To study one art, it seems, is to be poorly informed. That is why in college we usually study general education requirements before declaring a major and why we get a degree in our major before settling on a concentration in graduate school. That is also why we study one martial art *but research others* (“Study extensively, inquire carefully,” as Zhu Xi wrote). We must rise above our overexposure to our first art in order to think objectively about the martial arts in general (or any martial art in particular). In other words, we need to give ourselves a general education before we can rationally choose a concentration.

How thorough “Thorough Pondering” need be is another problem. I suggest that we can, like good objective scientists, know only what we know until we discover what we didn’t know, in which case we will have to re-evaluate (and perhaps even challenge) the current paradigm. In short, even intelligent, well-informed people can disagree, but at least in doing so, they will further inform their intellectual opponents so that, eventually, a consensus can be reached. Only by pondering thoroughly can one come to conclusions based on careful inquiry and extensive study, as Zhu Xi advocates, but opinions are next to useless if they are ill informed or not rolled over in one’s mind enough to make obvious their implications.

Having come to personal conclusions, one is ready to influence others, but that contains its own problems.