

Confucianism Tool for Moral Reasoning

For the Confucianism Tool for Moral Reasoning, we read “The Year of the Rat,” by Chen Quifan. This story follows recent college graduates who now find themselves as members of the Rodent-Control Force where they are tasked with killing rats for their country. In this story, we can see the examples and impact of Confucianism, while specifically focusing on the Drill Instructor.

As this story progresses, we do see a large change in the behavior of the Drill Instructor. I do not believe that this change necessarily occurred with a change in his role, as I feel like he always had the same role - Drill Instructor. I do think that the way that he looked at the responsibilities of his role did change though.

Instead, I believe that the gradual change that we see in the behavior of the Drill Instructor over the course of this story occurred as a result of the new members of the Rodent-Control Force that were now a constant in his everyday life. Towards the end of the story, we get to hear about the Drill Instructor’s past and home. We learn that he grew up in a poor village where all of them “born there are stupid” (Qiufan, pg. 46) and there is not much in the way of schooling. He signed up for the military, working and training hard, volunteering for dangerous tasks, all in the hopes of becoming a hero. I think his initial behavior was due to the fact that he didn’t have the same opportunities that the new members of the unit did. He was poor and chose his path wanting to gain honor and glory in his life. He sees these individuals as lazy and skill less, because despite going to college and graduating, they couldn’t use the privilege that he felt they had to find a job. Instead, they ended up there with him, having to kill rats.

I would say that the Drill Instructor always acted in the best way possible to accomplish the main goal which was to reach the quota of rat killings. By reaching this goal, the soldiers would be able to be honorably discharged and have the ability to go out and get the jobs they desired.

In the beginning, no, I do not believe that the Drill Instructor always did the right thing for a Confucian. In the beginning of this story, we see this individual that seems to always be angry at everyone else. He constantly belittled those that were now a part of his community. He told the recent college graduates the reason they were there in the Rodent-Control Force was because they were “failures” who couldn’t get a job, even going as far as calling them “lower than rats” (Qiu fan, pg. 28). Though I do believe that once he did start down that path, he did always try to do the right thing for a Confucian.

In my eyes, the change in the Drill Instructor’s behavior and his way of doing things began after it became a tradition after each battle to give the tails of the dead rats to the Drill Instructor. For the Drill Instructor and all of the members of the unit, this tradition is tangible evidence that they are all working towards the same goal – reaching the quota in order to go back home. Obviously they’re working together since they are all in the same platoon, but being able to visually see and keep a tally of the evidence of those efforts helps build on their camaraderie. In this story, we see the Drill Instructor start to behave differently to those in his unit. First, he consults Black Cannon on if he thinks it would be possible for them to have the subsequent battle be contained within their district, as regulations don’t allow them to go into other districts for kills (Qiu fan, pg. 38,39). Later in the story, the main character vocalizes that he believes that the platoon should stay together in the mission, instead of splitting in half as Black Cannon suggested, and the Drill Instructor agreed with him. These instances show that the Drill

Instructor values the opinions of the unit members (Qiu fan, pg. 43). This relates to Confucianism as in both occasions he considered the situations and everyone involved, and subsequently made the decision in his role.

The Drill Instructor's change in behavior throughout this story follows him on a path of Confucianism. After being with the members of the platoon, he begins to look at his role and mission in a way that is not just about personal glory anymore, but also doing what is best for everyone around him.

References

Qiufan, C. (n.d.). The Year of the Rat (pp. 23–49). essay.