

**EXCERPTS FROM VILLAGE ORDINANCES: "PROHIBITION
ORDINANCE"**

Introduction

The Neo-Confucian movement, which began in the Song dynasty, urged local scholars to put the moral ideals of Confucianism into action in their own local society. From the Southern Song onward, many local literati practiced the ideal of local activism. They sponsored temples and schools, helped the poor, and in general performed social services that the government, far away and underfunded, could not. Part of this activism involved the promotion of social order through drafting and enforcing local ordinances. The "Prohibition Ordinance" below is a representative example from the late Ming dynasty (1368-1644).

Document Excerpts with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)

From *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*, edited by Patricia Buckley Ebrey, 2nd ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 211-212.
© 1993 The Free Press. Reproduced with the permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

Excerpts from Village Ordinances: "Prohibition Ordinance"

Each year we set up ordinances for our village, and yet, to our deep regret, they are denigrated by the greedy and overturned by the influential. As a result, they are rendered ineffective ...

... Recently we have followed the suggestion of the villages and grouped all households into separate districts, each with a fixed number of members. On the first and fifteenth of each month, each district will prepare wine and hold a meeting to awaken the conscience of its residents. In this manner, contact between the high and the low will be established, and a cycle will be formed. Anyone who violates our village ordinances will be sentenced in public; if he thinks the sentence is unfair, he can appeal to the village assembly.

From now on, our ordinances will be properly enforced and the morality of our people will be restored.

[Translated by Clara Yu]

Questions:

1. What problem does this "prohibition ordinance" aim to address?
2. What specific means will be used to solve the problem?

Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on

EXCERPTS FROM VILLAGE ORDINANCES: "PROHIBITION ORDINANCE"

3. Would such a system work, or even be possible, in your own society? Why or why not?
4. Do you think that this ordinance will solve the problem that it is intended to solve? Why or why not? If not, what would your solution be?

Longer Selection

From *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*, edited by Patricia Buckley Ebrey, 2nd ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 211-212. © 1993 The Free Press. Reproduced with the permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

Village Ordinances: "Prohibition Ordinance"

In the imperial court there are laws; in the village there are ordinances. Laws rule the entire nation; ordinances control only one area. Although laws and ordinances differ in scope, the matters they deal with are equally significant.

Each year we set up ordinances for our village, and yet, to our deep regret, they are denigrated by the greedy and overturned by the influential. As a result, they are rendered ineffective, customs deteriorate, and incalculable damage is done by our people and their animals.

The problem is not that ordinances cannot be enforced; rather, it is that those in charge of the ordinances are unequal to their posts, and those who design them are incompetent. Recently we have followed the suggestion of the villages and grouped all households into separate districts, each with a fixed number of members. On the first and the fifteenth of each month, each district will prepare wine and hold a meeting to awaken the conscience of its residents. In this manner, contact between the high and low will be established, and a cycle will be formed. Anyone who violates our village ordinances will be sentenced by the public; if he thinks the sentence is unfair, he can appeal to the village assembly. However, let it be known that no cover-up, bribery, blackmail, or frame-up will be tolerated; such evil doings will be exposed by Heaven and punished by thunder. We know that even in a small group there are good members as well as bad ones; how can there be a lack of honest people among our villagers?

From now on, our ordinances will be properly enforced and the morality of our people will be restored. The village as a whole as well as each individual will profit from such a situation, and there will be peace between the high and the low, their morality and custom having been unified. Thus, what is called an "ordinance" is nothing but the means to better ourselves.

[Translated by Clara Yu]