

EXCERPTS FROM ANALECTS FOR WOMEN
By Song Ruozhao

Introduction

Confucius had very little to say about the roles and expectations of women in the family or in society. Thus it was left for Confucian scholars to apply the principles enunciated by Confucius and Mencius to the task of prescribing expectations and behavioral norms for women in a Confucian family and a Confucian society. To these scholars also fell the task of justifying the education of women and the task of laying forth the parameters and techniques for the education of girls and women. Two of the most influential scholars in this area were women of the Tang dynasty: Song Ruohua and her sister, Song Ruozhao. Both were daughters of a high-ranking Tang official, Song Fen. Ruohua wrote the text below, while her sister, Ruozhao, propagated it. Ruozhao did not marry, but dedicated her life to the instruction of women, being invited to the court of the Tang Dezong Emperor in the late eighth century to serve as instructor of the royal princesses. The "Analects for Women" was one of the most popular texts for women's education in pre-modern China.

Document Excerpts with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)

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Excerpts from Analects for Women
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When walking, don't turn your head; when talking, don't open your mouth wide; when sitting, don't move your knees; when standing, don't rustle your skirts; when happy, don't exult with loud laughter; when angry, don't raise your voice. The inner and outer quarters are distinct; the sexes should be segregated. Don't peer over the outer wall or go beyond the outer courtyard. If you have to go outside, cover your face; if you peep outside, conceal yourself as much as possible. Do not be on familiar terms with men outside the family; have nothing to do with women of bad character. Establish your proper self so as to become a [true] human being.

...

Your father-in-law and mother-in-law are the heads of your husband's family. ... You must care for them as your own mother and father. Respectfully serve your father-in-law. Do not look at him directly [when he speaks to you], do not follow him around, and do not engage him in conversation. If he has an order for you, listen and obey.

...

Listen carefully to and obey whatever your husband tells you.

Questions:

1. As you read these selections, what do they tell you about a woman's position in the family?
2. To what extent do you think that these prescriptions for women's behavior could be carried out in an upper-class household? In a poor farmer's household?
3. What might be the purpose of the rules concerning a daughter-in-law's behavior toward her father-in-law?
4. Why would an aristocratic woman teach other women these rules of behavior?



If he [your husband] does something wrong, gently correct him. Don't be like those women who not only do not correct their husbands, but actually lead them into indecent ways. ... Don't imitate those shrewish wives who love to clash head with their husbands all the time.

...

A woman who manages the household should be thrifty and diligent. If she is diligent, the household thrives; if lazy, it declines. If she is thrifty, the household becomes enriched; if extravagant, it becomes impoverished. ... If your husband has money and rice, store and conserve them. If he has wine or foodstuffs, save and keep them for use of guests when they come; do not take any to indulge your own desires.

Questions:

5. What do these two passages suggest about the roles of women in the family?
6. What do these two passages indicate about women's roles which might lead you to revise conclusions drawn solely on the passages concerning proper comportment and obedience to husband and parents-in-law?
7. How do gender relations and women's roles as described in all of the above passages compare to those in your own, contemporary society? How do they compare to gender relations and women's roles in your society's past?

Longer Selection

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Establishing Oneself as a Person

To be a woman, you must first learn how to establish yourself as a person. The way to do this is simply by working hard to establish one's purity and chastity. By purity, one keeps one's self undefiled; by chastity, one preserves one's honor.

When walking, don't turn your head; when talking, don't open your mouth wide; when sitting, don't move your knees; when standing, don't rustle your skirts; when happy, don't exult with loud laughter; when angry, don't raise your voice. The inner and outer quarters are each distinct; the sexes should be segregated. Don't peer over the outer wall or go beyond the outer courtyard. If you have to go outside, cover your face; if you peep outside, conceal yourself as much as possible. Do not be on familiar terms with men outside the family; have nothing to do with women of bad character. Establish your proper self so as to become a [true] human being.

Learning How to Work

To be a woman one must learn the details of women's work. Learn how to weave with hemp and ramie; don't mix fine and rough fibers. Don't run the shuttle of the loom so quickly that you make a mess. When you see the silkworms spinning their cocoons, you must attend to them day and night, picking mulberry leaves to feed them. ... Learn how to cut out shoes and make socks. Learn how to cut fabric and sew it into garments. Learn how to embroider, mend, and darn. ...

Do not learn the ways of lazy women who from an early age are silly and shiftless and who have a distaste for women's work. They don't plan ahead in making clothes to fit the needs of each season and hardly ever pick up a needle to sew. ... Married, they bring shame upon their new family, who go around in ill-fitted, patched, and ragged clothing, so that meeting others they are pointed to as the laughingstock of the neighborhood. ...

Ritual Decorum: Learning Proper Etiquette

To be a woman one must learn the rules of ritual decorum. When you expect a female guest, carefully clean and arrange the furniture and tea implements. When she arrives, take time to adjust your clothing, and then, with light steps and your hands drawn up in your sleeves, walk slowly to the door and with lowered voice, invite her in. Ask after her health and how her family is doing. Be attentive to what she says. After chatting in a leisurely way, serve the tea. When she leaves, send her off in a proper manner. ...

If you are invited to someone's house, understand your female duties and help with the preparation of the tea. After having talked for a time, rise to leave. Don't overstay your welcome. If your hostess presses you to stay longer to share a meal, conduct yourself with propriety. Don't drink so much that your face turns red and you get sloppy in the handling of your chopsticks. Take your leave before all the food is gone and before you forget your manners. ...

Rising Early [to Begin Household Work]

To be a woman one must learn to make it a regular practice, at the fifth watch when the cock crows, to rise and dress. After cleaning your face and teeth, fix your hair and makeup simply. Then go to the kitchen, light the fire, and start the morning meal. Scrub the pots and wash the pans; boil the tea water and cook the gruel. Plan your meals according to the resources of the family and the seasons of the year, making sure that they are fragrant and tasty, served in the appropriate dishes and in the proper manner at the table. If you start early, there is nothing you can't get done in a day!

Do not learn the ways of those lazy women who are thoughtless and do not plan ahead. The sun is already high in the sky before they manage to get themselves out of bed. Then they stagger to the kitchen, disheveled and unwashed, and throw a meal together, long past the hour. What is more, they are overly fond of eating and compete to get the tastiest morsels at each meal. If there is not enough of the best to go around, they steal some to eat later on the sly. Their inconsiderate manners are displayed to all their neighbors, to the humiliation of their parents-in-law. Talked about by everyone, how can they not be overcome with shame!

Serving One's Parents-in-Law

Your father-in-law and mother-in-law are the heads of your husband's family. ... You must care for them as your own father and mother. Respectfully serve your father-in-law. Do not look at him directly [when he speaks to you], do not follow him around, and do not engage him in conversation. If he has an order for you, listen and obey.

When your mother-in-law is sitting, you should stand. When she gives an order, you should carry it out right away. Rise early in the morning and open up the household, but don't make any noise that would disturb your mother-in-law's sleep. Sweep and mop the floors, wash and rinse the clothes. When your mother-in-law wakes up, present her with her toiletry articles, withdraw while she bathes until she beckons you. Greet her and then withdraw. Prepare tea and broth; set out spoons and chopsticks. As long known, the aged have poor teeth, so you should be especially careful in the preparation of food for them, so that they might enjoy their old age with all sorts of delicacies, cooked in a manner that allows them to be easily chewed and swallowed. At night before retiring, check to see if they are comfortably settled for the night. Bid them good night and then go to bed. ...

Serving a Husband

Women leave their families to marry, and the husband is the master of the household [they marry into]. ... The husband is to be firm, the wife soft; conjugal affections follow from this. While at home, the two of you should treat each other with the formality and reserve of a guest. Listen carefully to and obey whatever your husband tells you. If he does something wrong, gently correct him. Don't be like those women who not only do not correct their husbands but actually lead them into indecent ways. ... Don't imitate those shrewish wives who love to clash head on with their husbands all the time. Take care of your husband's clothing so that he is never cold in winter, and of his meals so that he never gets thin and sickly from not being fed enough. As a couple, you and your husband share the bitter and the sweet, poverty and riches. In life you share the same bed; in death the same grave. ...

Instructing Sons and Daughters

Most all families have sons and daughters. As they grow and develop, there should be a definite sequence and order in their education. But the authority/responsibility to instruct them rests solely with the mother. When the sons go out to school, they seek instruction from a teacher who teaches them proper [ritual] form and etiquette, how to chant poetry, how to write essays. ...

Daughters remain behind in the women's quarters and should not be allowed to go out very often. ... Teach them sewing, cooking, and etiquette. ... Don't allow them to be indulged, lest they throw tantrums to get their own way; don't allow them to defy authority, lest they become rude and haughty; don't allow them to sing songs, lest they become dissolute; and don't allow them to go on outings, lest some scandal spoil their good names.

Worthy of derision are those who don't take charge of their responsibility [in this area]. The sons of such women remain illiterate, they poke fun at their elders, they get into fights and drink too much, and they become addicted to singing and dancing. ... The daughters of such women know nothing about ritual decorum, speak in an overbearing manner, can't distinguish between the honorable and the mean, and don't know how to serve or sew. They bring shame on their honorable relatives and disgrace on their father and mother. Mothers who fail to raise their children correctly are as if they had raised pigs and rats!

Managing the Household

A woman who manages the household should be thrifty and diligent. If she is diligent, the household thrives; if lazy, it declines. If she is thrifty, the household becomes enriched; if extravagant, it becomes impoverished. ... If your husband has money and rice, store and conserve them. If he has wine or foodstuffs, save and keep them for the use of guests when they come; do not take any to indulge your own desires. Great wealth is a matter of fate and fortune; a little wealth comes from persistent thrift. ... Thus a couple may be blessed with riches and enjoy life.

Entertaining Guests

Most families have guests. You should have hot water and clean bottles, and keep the table clean and neat, ready for guests. When a guest arrives, serve him tea and then retire to the rear of the hall and await your husband's orders about the meal. ...

Don't learn the ways of the lazy woman who doesn't attend to household matters anyway, so that when a guest arrives, the place is in a mess and she is unprepared to offer him tea right away. She is so flustered that she loses her head. If her husband asks the guest to stay for a meal, she is annoyed and loses her temper. She has chopsticks but no soup spoons, soy sauce but no vinegar. She scolds and slaps the servants around, to her husband's great chagrin and the guest's embarrassment.