

SELECTIONS FROM MERITORIOUS DEEDS AT NO COST

Introduction

The Confucian classics provide the sophisticated reader with a wealth of moral teachings and examples. However, they are not well adapted to telling ordinary people how to put those abstract moral principles into practice in their daily lives. With the advent of printing in the Song dynasty (960-1276), writers had an opportunity to rectify this by composing books of moral instruction meant for a mass audience. How is one to achieve merit in this life and (if one holds such beliefs) lay the foundation for a better life next time around?

The following document from the seventeenth century offers advice targeted specifically to various classes of people..

Document Excerpts with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)

From *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, compiled by Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 911-916. © 1999 Columbia University Press. Reproduced with the permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

Selections from Meritorious Deeds at No Cost

2. Scholars

Be loyal to the emperor and filial to your parents.

Honor your elder brothers and be faithful to your friends.

Establish yourself in life by cleaving to honor and fidelity.

Instruct the common people in the virtues of loyalty and filial piety.

Respect the writings of sages and worthies.

Be wholehearted in inspiring your students to study.

Show respect to paper on which characters are written.

Try to improve your speech and behavior.

Teach your students also to be mindful of their speech and behavior.

Do not neglect your studies without reason.

Do not despise others or regard them as unworthy of your instruction.

Be patient in educating the younger members of poor families.

If you find yourself with smart boys, teach them sincerity, and with children of the rich and noble, teach them decorum and duty.

Exhort and admonish the ignorant by lecturing to them on the provisions of the community compact and the public laws.

Do not speak or write thoughtlessly of what concerns the women's quarters.

Primary Source Document, with Questions (DBQ) on

SELECTIONS FROM MERITORIOUS DEEDS AT NO COST

Do not expose the private affairs of others or harbor evil suspicions about them.

Do not write or post notices that defame other people.

Do not write petitions or accusations to higher authorities.

Do not write bills of divorce or separation.

Do not let your feelings blind you in defending your friends and relatives.

Do not incite gangs (*bang*) to raid others' homes and knock them down.

Do not encourage the spread of immoral and lewd novels [by writing, reprinting, expanding, and so on]. ...

Questions:

1. How does this advice imagine the scholar's role in the community?
2. What are the core values for scholars, as revealed in this advice?

Longer Selection

From *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, compiled by Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 911-916. © 1999 Columbia University Press. Reproduced with the permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

Selections from Meritorious Deeds at No Cost

1. *Local Gentry*

Take the lead in charitable donations.

Rectify your own conduct and transform the common people.

Make a sincere effort to inform the authorities of what would be beneficial to the people of your locality.

Make every effort to dissuade the local authorities from doing what would be detrimental to the people of your locality.

If people have suffered a grave injustice, expose and correct it.

Settle disputes among your neighbors fairly.

When villagers commit misdeeds, admonish them boldly and persuade them to desist.

Do not let yourself be blinded by emotion and personal prejudice.

Be tolerant of the mistakes of others.

Be willing to listen to that which is displeasing to your ears.

Do not make remarks about women's sexiness.

Do not harbor resentment when you are censured.

Protect virtuous people.

Hold up for public admiration women who are faithful to their husbands and children who are obedient to their parents.

Restrain those who are stubborn and unfilial.

Prevent plotting and intrigue.

Endeavor to improve manners and customs.

Encourage fair and open discussion.

Prevent your household slaves and servants from causing trouble by relying on your influence.

Try not to arouse the resentment of others by showing partiality to the younger members of your own family.

Do not provoke incidents that result in harm or loss to others.

Do not be arrogant, on account of your own power and wealth, toward relatives who are poor or of low status.

Persuade others not to seek gain through oppression or honors through intrigue.

Do not encroach on others' lands and dispossess them.

Do not scheme to buy up others' property.

Do not mix debased silver with good.

Do not ignore your own relatives and treat others as if they were your kin.

Influence other families to cherish good deeds.

Do not officiously take charge of the affairs of those outside your own household.

Do not disport yourself with lewd friends.

Do not look for pretexts to injure others.

Do not allow yourself to be overcome by personal feelings and therefore treat others unjustly.

Do not let your feelings of pleasure and displeasure influence others or suggest to them how they can benefit themselves.

Restrain others from arranging lewd theater performances.

Do not scheme to seize geomantic advantages (*fengshui*) for yourself or deceitfully deprive others of them.

Instruct your children, grandchildren, and nephews to be humane and compassionate toward all and to avoid anger and self-indulgence.

Do not deceive or oppress younger brothers or cousins.

Do not force others off the road by dropping stones in dangerous places.

Do not scheme to deprive others of some advantage in order to suit your own convenience.

Encourage others to read and study without minding the difficulties.

Urge others to esteem charity and disdain personal gain.

Do not underestimate the value of others [or underpay them].

Do not let what you hear from servants and slaves cause you to turn against relatives and friends.

Persuade others to settle lawsuits through conciliation.

Try to settle complaints and grievances among others.

Do not force others to lend you their property.

Do not force others to enter into deals on credit.

Curb the strong and protect the weak.

Show respect to the aged and compassion for the poor.

Do not keep too many concubines.

Do not keep catamites.

Do not marry off household slaves to wicked men or cripples for your own selfish gain.

Choose a favorable time for marrying off household slaves.

Do not force “good” people to become base [i.e., lose their freedom].

2. *Scholars*

Be loyal to the emperor and filial to your parents.

Honor your elder brothers and be faithful to your friends.

Establish yourself in life by cleaving to honor and fidelity.

Instruct the common people in the virtues of loyalty and filial piety.

Respect the writings of sages and worthies.

Be wholehearted in inspiring your students to study.

Show respect to paper on which characters are written.

Try to improve your speech and behavior.

Teach your students also to be mindful of their speech and behavior.

Do not neglect your studies without reason.

Do not despise others or regard them as unworthy of your instruction.

Be patient in educating the younger members of poor families.

If you find yourself with smart boys, teach them sincerity, and with children of the rich and noble, teach them decorum and duty.

Exhort and admonish the ignorant by lecturing to them on the provisions of the community compact and the public laws.

Do not speak or write thoughtlessly of what concerns the women’s quarters.

Do not expose the private affairs of others or harbor evil suspicions about them.

Do not write or post notices that defame other people.

Do not write petitions or accusations to higher authorities.

Do not write bills of divorce or separation.

Do not let your feelings blind you in defending your friends and relatives.

Do not incite gangs (*bang*) to raid others’ homes and knock them down.

Do not encourage the spread of immoral and lewd novels [by writing, reprinting, expanding, and so on].

Do not call other people names or compose songs making fun of them.

Publish morality books in which are compiled things that are useful and beneficial to all.

Do not attack or vilify commoners; do not oppress ignorant villagers.

Do not deceive the ignorant by marking texts in such a way as to overawe and mislead them.

Do not show contempt for fellow students by boasting of your own abilities.

Do not ridicule other people’s handwriting.

Do not destroy or lose to books of others. ...

To those of some understanding explain the teachings of the Cheng-Zhu school; to the uneducated give books on moral retribution.

Make others desist from unfiliality toward their parents or unkindness toward relatives and friends.

Educate the ignorant to show respect to their ancestors and live in harmony with their families.

...

3. *Agriculturalists*

Do not miss the proper times for farmwork.

Have regard for [the lives of] insects.

When fertilizing the fields, do not harm living creatures.

Do not obstruct or cut off paths. Fill up holes that might give trouble to passersby.

Do not instigate landlords to buy up lands.

Do not steal and sell your master's grain in connivance with his servants.

Do not damage crops in your neighbors' fields by leaving animals to roam at large, relying on your landlord's power and influence to protect you.

Do not encroach [on others' property] beyond the boundaries of your own fields and watercourses, thinking to ingratiate yourself with your landlord.

Do not disturb others' graves or interfere with the geomantic advantages of others.

In plowing, do not infringe on graves or make them hard to find.

Do not suggest to your master that he willfully cut off watercourses and extort payments from neighbors.

Do not take your landlord's seed crop for your own benefit.

Do not damage the crops in neighboring fields out of envy because they are so flourishing.

Do not instigate your landlord to take revenge on a neighbor on the pretext that the neighbor's animals have damaged your crops.

Do not through negligence in your work do damage to the fields of others.

Do not become lazy and cease being conscientious because you think your landlord does not provide enough food and wine or fails to pay you enough.

Fill up holes in graves.

Take good care of others' carts and tools.

Do not kill mules and cattle, pigs and sheep, even if they eat your crops.

Keep carts and cattle from trampling down others' crops.

Do not desecrate the gods of the soil by plowing or hoeing the land or irrigating or spreading manure on days of abstention [*wu*, i.e., the fifth day of each ten-day cycle, which is the first of two days identified with wood in the Five-Phases cycle].

5. *Dealers and Merchants*

Do not deceive ignorant villagers when fixing the price of goods.

Do not raise the price of fuel and rice too high.

When the poor buy rice, do not give them short measure.

Sell only genuine articles.

Do not use short measure when selling and long measure when buying.

Do not deceitfully serve unclean dishes or leftover food to customers who are unaware of the fact.

Do not dispossess or deprive others of their business by devious means.

Do not envy the prosperity of others' business and speak ill of them wherever you go.

Be fair in your dealings.

Treat the young and the aged on the same terms as the able-bodied.

When people come in the middle of the night with an urgent need to buy something, do not refuse them on the ground that it is too cold [for you to get up and serve them].

Pawnshops should lend money at low interest.

Give fair value when you exchange silver for copper coins. Especially when changing money for the poor, be generous to them.

When a debtor owes you a small sum but is short of money, have mercy and forget about the difference. Do not bring him to bankruptcy and hatred by refusing to come to terms.

When the poor want to buy such things as mosquito nets, wadded clothing, and quilts, have pity on them and reduce the price. Do not refuse to come to terms.