

**EXCERPTS FROM ARTICLES OF ADMONITION BY IMAGAWA RYŌSHUN
TO HIS SON NAKAAKI**

Introduction

Imagawa Sadayo (1325-1420), also known as Imagawa Ryōshun, was a noted poet, literary critic, and military leader. The son of a *shugo* (military governor) of two provinces on Japan's eastern seaboard, Ryōshun distinguished himself for his learning as well as his exploits on the battlefield. Following a series of intrigues involving the Ashikaga shogunate, Ryōshun was stripped of his military office and retired to Kyoto to write and reflect. This letter was written in 1412 by the elderly Ryōshun to his brother, Imagawa Nakaaki, who served as *shugo* of the province of Tōtōmi and who failed to live up to Ryōshun's high standards.

Ryōshun's letter was widely admired and was used as a primer for young retainers in the Imagawa and other clans during the Muromachi and *senjoku* periods. Under the Tokugawa shogunate, the letter was used extensively as a textbook of morals (as well as fine writing) in schools for samurai as well as commoners.

Selected Document Excerpts with Questions

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*Excerpts from Articles of Admonition by Imagawa Ryōshun
to His Son¹ Nakaaki*

I

As you do not understand the Arts of Peace, your skill in the Arts of War will not, in the end, achieve victory.

II

You like to roam about, hawking and cormorant-fishing, relishing the purposeless taking of life.

III

You have minor offenders put to death without trial.

IV

But out of favoritism you pardon grave offenders.

¹ Nakaaki was Ryōshun's younger brother, but Ryōshun had adopted him. This is why Nakaaki is called 'son.'

V

You live in luxury by fleecing the people and plundering the shrines.

VI

In your actions you disregard the moral law by evading your public duties and considering your private benefit first.

...

VIII

You do not discriminate between good and bad behavior of your retainers, but reward or punish them without justice.

IX

You permit yourself to forget the kindness that our lord and father showed us; thus you destroy the principles of loyalty and filial piety.

...

XI

You do not understand the difference in status between yourself and others; sometimes you make too much of other people, sometimes too little.

XII

You disregard other people's viewpoints; you bully them and rely on force.

...

XVI

Deluded by belief in your own sagacity, you scoff at others' advice in any matter.

...

XXIII

A lord should scrutinize his own conduct as critically as that of his retainers.

The above articles should be kept constantly in mind.

(a) Expertise in archery, horsemanship and strategy is the warrior's routine. What first of all makes him distinguished is his capacity for management.

(b) It appears clearly from the Four Books, the Five Classics, and the Military Literature that he who can only defend his territory but has no learning, cannot govern well.

(c) Therefore, from childhood you should associate with upright companions, and not for a moment submit to the influence of bad friends.

...

(p) Just as the Buddhist scriptures tell us that the Buddha incessantly strives to save mankind, in the same way you should exert your mind to the utmost in all your activities, be they civil or military, and never fall into negligence.

(q) It should be regarded as dangerous if the ruler of the people in a province is deficient even in a single of the cardinal virtues of human-heartedness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and good faith.

...

(y) You were born to be a warrior, but you mismanage your territory, do not maintain the army, and are not ashamed although people laugh at you. It is, indeed, a mortifying situation for you and our whole clan.

(z) This is my letter of instruction.

Questions:

1. What are the qualities in a warrior and a leader that Ryōshun values most highly? What flaws of character does he most despise?
2. How would you have responded to this letter, as Ryōshun's brother Nakaaki?
3. What philosophical or religious influences can you find in this text? Does Ryōshun draw on Confucian or Buddhist thought?