



## *Education of Women in Ban Zhao (5-ca. 116 CE)*

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That women should be educated as well as men, is the most revolutionary argument in *Lessons for Women*. Writing to “benefit” her daughters, Ban Zhao first teaches women how to live an honorable life, then teaches women how to live interdependently as husband and wife. This, however, cannot happen in reality when only men are educated in the “rules of conduct” and know only that their “authority must be established,” not understanding that they must also be “served,” necessary for the “rites” to be fulfilled. This problem proves that unequal education produces an unbalanced society. Further, such a situation ignores both the “essential relation between” men and women and the rules from classical writings.

The principle from the “Rites,” is “to begin to teach children to read at the age of eight years,” so to be “ready for cultural training” by age fifteen. “Children” she interprets as meaning girls and boys. Because the Confucian Analects argues only for education needed to become a gentleman, the imbalance ensures that ignorance prevails for both men and women. To attain balance and harmony requires knowing how to maneuver human relations and family life, and obliges education for both men and women. The author (Née Zheng) of *The Book of Filial Piety for Women* (ca. 730) “cast Ban Zhao as the female equivalent to Confucius” when she defined yin and yang as interdependent, deducing as so defined its importance in human relations (cf. Mann & Cheng 2001: 49-50). The *Lessons for Women* is China’s “earliest extant woman-authored moral text for women”, Idema & Grant 2004: 13. Despite Ban Zhao’s argument for education (published with three others in *Four Books for Women*, 1624), eighteen centuries pass before ordinary women in China receive education.

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