



## *Woman Duties toward Husband* in Ban Zhao (5–ca. 116 CE)

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The first sentence in Chapter *Two Husband and Wife* of *Lessons for Women* places the mode for living a fulfilling life in marriage as being the Daoist “Way.” The “Way of husband and wife” relates individuals to “gods and ancestors” and is “intimately concerned with *Yin* and *Yang*,” interdependent forces of the cosmos. Since the basis of human relationship arises from the “principle of Heaven and Earth,” marriage means both metaphysical and physical relationship. The importance of marriage, Ban Zhao asserts, is proved by the classics: “Rites” which honors the union of man and woman and the “first Ode” in the *Book of Poetry* which offers “the principle of marriage.” A *Yin-Yang* relationship means mutuality and difference. In marriage difference lies in duties: the husband is to “control” the wife, and the wife is to “serve” the husband, and mutuality lies in singleness of purpose.

If the husband does not control his wife, he loses authority, and if she is not allowed to serve her husband, she cannot carry out her duties, for the “rules of conduct” are broken and the “proper relationship” and the “natural order of things” destroyed. For mutuality, both husband and wife must have oneness in being “worthy” of each other. Critiquing the reality of *Yin-Yang* relationship in marriage, Ban Zhao observes that being taught and understood only that “wives must be controlled,” off balances the teaching and understanding that the husbands must be served. If the *Yin* or “yielding” meaning “liberal and generous,” is not balanced with the *Yang* or “rigidity,” meaning holding on to what is “permanent,” then neither a woman’s duties toward her husband nor the “Rites” can be carried out. Consequently, neither husband nor wife can live the Way nor become “worthy.” In all, marriage requires whole-hearted devotion, balance, and harmony.

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