

Permissions of the Song Women

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As a woman, I have questioned many of History's laws and stories about women of the past. Today, I hear many reasons and opinions in explanation to the existence of gender roles, for example, the rise of agriculture, and sacred texts creating division between the two sexes. Over many centuries, we have uncovered beliefs of many cultures around the world discovering one common belief that men and women are different. Over time, we have advanced enough to obtain scientific knowledge and proof of no significant differences between men and women.

Yet, the belief is still well and alive, even throughout the history of some of the world's considerably advanced countries today. One in specific is China, although china was the last to open its doors to the surrounding societies, it did not separate them from others when it came to similar beliefs. Focusing on a specific dynasty, China had broken up into many different kingdoms and dynasties until it was reunited underneath one control, known as the Song Dynasty. The Song Dynasty was a considerably small dynasty yet was capable to invent woodblock printing in response to a high demand of books for the trending scholarly and influential lifestyles. The Song also made huge advances in art with landscape art, trade, markets, and even created paper money. With such great economic standing, the dynasty began to grow in population, which allowed the dynasty to open up more land and the introduction to agriculture (O'Brien, Patrick. *Atlas of World History*. 2010).

Regardless of the inspiring advances China has made through history, they still have trends of their historic beliefs that have not diminished today, such as gender differences. The song dynasty increased in many areas, yet the roles and freedoms of women decreased largely, including the leading women of China. A scholarly author known as Yuan Cai wrote a book about "The Problems of Women" written far back in the twelfth century, during the Song Dynasty where China experienced vast economic and social advances. Cai wrote such readings

to explain scholarly behaviors one should follow within family settings as such influential writings were worthy in China throughout majority of its centuries. Cai discusses the statuses of different women under the man as the head of household, and privileges woman do and do not possess. I am aware that China's beliefs have adjusted over time as each dynasty chose different laws, and some gave women more rights than others. Which is why after reading Yuan Cai's piece, I want to analyze and question under what circumstances would create women to make their own choices in China, and what effect these trends have on women's life's within society?

According to Yuan Cai's "The Problems of Women," married women were not permitted to do many things such as, not participate in anything outside of home because that is the responsibility of men of the family, and it was a way for men to do as they desire without their wife's knowledge. Men were in control of the bills and business, not the woman. A woman would only be permitted to handle such tasks if her husband was dead, incapable, and her sons are too young. Although women were admired if they were capable of being successful after fulfilling such tasks, it was not recommended because men of the Song Dynasty did not believe a woman was capable of being successful and suggested that she allow an honest family member to do the work for her (*Worlds Together, Worlds Apart*. 2011).

However, a man can make any decisions he desires, society recommended men to consider a woman's heart when making such choices, as women did not have the opportunities to make choices outside of matters of the heart. Yet, a woman's heart was only considered to a certain extent, as young daughters had absolutely no say. For example, women whom remarried were to give their daughter from the previous marriage to be raised by her daughter's future in laws because it would be an embarrassment for her to be raise in her stepfather's home. In society, marriage was arranged, and not an item of love, but an item of security for the families.

This has also been a similar trend around Asia, especially in Japan. For many centuries, arranged marriage is important, and sadly, love is rarely spoken of between the spouses. Yet the marriages are continuously arranged century after century. It is obvious that the marriages are for survival, society, or benefit of the families. Statistics today discuss the rapid increase of divorce around the world with the exception of Japan with only 1.1 percent of births belonging to single mothers, which this has been the same for over 25 years (“*That is the Question*”. 2009). However, the statistics may reveal strong marriage values, many of the spouses within the marriages are not happy. For example, within the documentary reading, “For Better or Worse; Who Needs Love! In Japan, Many Couples Don’t.” by Nicholas D. Kristof, who interviews a few couples. A 72-year-old woman named Yuri Uemura discusses how she and her arranged husband of 40 abusive years do not love one another but survive for their children and society. Another man named Osamu Torida was interviewed and asked if he loved his wife of 33 years, and he responded, “She’s like air or water. You couldn’t live without it, but most of the time, you’re not conscious of its existence.” (“*That is the Question*” 2009).

Nevertheless, women were pitied and allowed permissions through a man who was sympathetic, which was obviously rare. It is apparent that Yuan Cai’s book only suggested behaviors of how a scholarly man should deal with women and his family, but if the man had no sympathy, the woman would have no rights until her husband was dead. In the song dynasty, this was the only circumstance a woman could make choices for herself and her family. Such lifestyle isolated women and affected their lives because they were unable to make choices for themselves and their happiness such as marriage to someone of their choice. They were also unaware of all important business of their families, and if the arranged husband was irresponsible, the family could lose their property and homes. Surprisingly, this trend of

women's rights and arranged marriage has been strong enough to last centuries, and is still alive in societies around the world today.

Works Cited

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