**Document 10.10**

Excerpts from *Family Instructions of Mr. Yan (Yanshi Jiaxun)*, by Yan Zhitui (颜之推), 6th century

Yan Zhitui (531–591) came from a respected family of scholar officials. His *Family Instructions* were popular well into the 1800s. The book covered many topics, including social customs, dedication to high standards, and correct behavior, as well as family relations.

Instructing Children

As soon as a baby can recognize facial expressions and understand approval and disapproval, training should be begun so that he will do what he is told to do and stop when so ordered. After a few years of this, punishment with the bamboo can be minimized, as parental strictness and dignity mingled with parental love will lead the boys and girls to a feeling of respect and caution and give rise to filial piety. I have noticed about me that where there is merely love without training this result is never achieved. Children eat, drink, speak, and act as they please. . . .

As for maintaining proper respect between father and son, one cannot allow too much familiarity; in the love among kin, one cannot tolerate impoliteness. . . . [I]f there is too much familiarity, it gives rise to indifference and rudeness. . . .

If rod and wrath are not used in family discipline, the faults of the son will immediately appear. If punishments are not properly awarded, the people will not know how to act. The use of clemency and severity in governing a family is the same as in a state. . . .

Just as in the state, where women are not allowed to participate in setting policies, so in the family, they should not be permitted to assume responsibility for affairs. If they are wise, talented, and versed in the ancient and modern writings, they ought to help their husbands by supplementing the latter’s deficiency. No hen should herald the dawn lest misfortune follow. . . .

The burden of daughters on the family is heavy indeed. Yet how else can Heaven give life to the teeming people and ancestors pass on their bodily existence to posterity? Many people today dislike having daughters and mistreat their own flesh and blood. How can they be like this and still hope for Heaven’s blessing?