

Women in the classical era

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China, India, and Rome all had different views on women's roles in society. Each society placed them as second class citizens but as you read in each document in "Considering the Evidence" they are each treated a little better. At the bottom is the Chinese culture, they treat their women as objects, like things you should own such as servants. The Indians are who the text explains next.

They treat their women a little better; the women are not anywhere treated as equals but had the option of going off on their own and being priestess or beggars. The last of the documents are the Roman culture. The Roman women are not equal either but they are the closest to it. In public, they are not to question men but they rule the house at home. In the document on the Romans, they protest in the street the law against having jewelry because of the needs of the Empire to fund the war. "How sad it is to be a woman! Nothing on earth is held so cheaply.

Boys stand leaning at the door Like God's fallen out of Heaven." (Fu Xuan, 263) The Chinese culture held women in the lowest regards while placing all men above them. But in the text "A Chinese Woman's Instructions to Her Daughters" Ban Zhao was able to have a life of her own without a husband. She was married had children, but then widowed. Even though this she was able to be successful, and become an author to help other women. "Ban Zhao had a significant career as a court historian and as an adviser to the empress-dowager (the widow of a deceased emperor).

Her most famous work, *Lessons for Women*, was an effort to apply the principles of Confucianism to the lives and behavior of women. " (Waley, 264) Ban Zhao was the few exceptions to this most women were expected to do chores and housework without complaint and complete obedience. " Let a woman retire late to bed, but rise early to duties; let her not dread tasks by day or by night. . . . When a woman follows such rules as these, then she may be said to be industrious. " " unquestionably the daughter-in-law obeys. "(Ban, 264) The life of a Chinese woman was very hard and one of unsung hardship.

Around this same time there was a woman in India who was subject to very similar social standings. She could not do anything without a man and was subject to man's rule. *An Alternative to Patriarchy in India* states the limited power of women. " In childhood, a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent. "(Psalms of the Early Buddhists, translated by Mrs. Rhys Davids, 266) The only way around such treatment was to be a Buddhist nun or a street beggar.

Even though women in the Chinese culture do not complain the Indian women did. They wrote poems about their hardships. " Me stained and squalid ' mong my cooking-pots My brutal husband ranked as even less Than the sunshades he sits and weaves always. "(Psalms of the Early Buddhists, translated by Mrs. Rhys Davids, 267) The three lives that these women could live is under the control of a man, as a nun or as a street walker. The last choice of a street walker may sound like a horrible choice but it is the only way for these women to be free. Today with a shaven head,

wrapt in my robe, I go forth on my daily round for food; . . . Now all the evil bonds that fetter gods And men are wholly rent and cut away. . . . Calm and content I know Nibbana's Peace. ". "(Psalms of the Early Buddhists, translated by Mrs. Rhys Davids, 267) The women of the highest standing were the women of Rome. They could go out in public without men, even talk to other men, even though this was frowned upon. " Had no respect for the dignity and modesty of certain ones (not them all! restrained me. . . . I should have said, ' What kind of behavior is this? Running around in public, blocking streets, and speaking to other women's husbands! Could you not have asked your own husbands the same thing at home? Are you more charming in public with others' husbands than at home with your own? And yet, it is not fitting even at home... for you to concern yourselves with what laws are passed or repealed here. "(Livy, 269) This tells us that women were able to go out in public, socialize, and even gossip.

This document shows that though not in public these women have somewhat of a voice in the home. These women have gone so far as to protest in the streets to get their right to buy jewelry back. " even now let them snatch at the government and meddle in the Forum and our assemblies. What are they doing now on the streets and crossroads, if they are not persuading the tribunes to vote for repeal? "(Livy, 269) These women have had the freedom to protest in the street over JEWELRY! These women are truly treated the best out of the cultures of this time.