

**Yanshi jiaxun** 顏氏家訓 (The Family Counsels of Mr. Yan) by Yan Zhitui 顏之推  
(531-591+)

## 1. Content

The *Yanshi jiaxun* is a remarkable work in that it contains many observations about the social conventions of the time of its compilation by a keen observer such that it moved Étienne Balazs to say it was an “ouvrage précieux pour ses nombreux renseignements sur les moeurs et la civilisation du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle.” (*Le traité économique*, p. 211, note 110). Its author, Yan Zhitui, was of the eighth generation of a distinguished family line originally from Linyi 臨沂, Shandong, that had moved to the south in the face of the collapse of the Western Jin. Yan served the Liang dynasty in a number of official capacities, was brought north after the capture of Jiangling by the Western Wei in 554, escaped to the Northern Qi in 556 in a futile attempt to return to the south, served that state from 556-577 as an official, and was again brought back to Chang’an when the Northern Qi was conquered by the Northern Zhou where he lived out his life, dying some time during the Sui. These experiences gave Yan a broad range of experiences and the opportunity to make astute remarks about and comparisons between the cultures of the north and south.

The tradition of presenting one’s offspring with some well-chosen words is an old one in China; Confucius urging his son to study the Odes is one example. By the Han there are many works of this nature, usually termed *jie* 戒, telling the younger progeny how to behave. Early in the Six Dynasties period, the terms *jia jie* 家戒 and *jiaxun* 家訓 came to be used interchangeably as the genre broadened to instruct as well as to admonish the youths. The need to pass on the family traditions in those troubled times is often mentioned as the motivation for such instructional manuals. The continuing significance of the text is indicated by the 298 citations of the work in a data base covering books published in the PRC since 1949.

The *Yanshi jiaxun* is divided into twenty sections:

1. Xuzhi 序致 Prefatory Remarks on the Scope
2. Jiaozhi 教子 Teaching Children
3. Xiongdi 兄弟 Brothers
4. Houqu 後娶 Re-marriage
5. Zhijia 治家 Regulating the Family
6. Fengcao 風操 Manners and Tenets
7. Muxian 慕賢 Emulating the Steadfast
8. Quanxue 勉學 Diligent Study
9. Wenzhang 文章 Literature
10. Mingshi 名實 Reputation and Reality

11. Shewu 賈務 Meeting Responsibilities
12. Shengshi 省事 Reducing [Extraneous] Matters
13. Zhizu 止足 Knowing when to Stop
14. Jiebing 誡兵 Warning about Military Involvement
15. Yangsheng 養生 Nourishing Life
16. Guixin 歸心 Turning one's Heart [to Buddhism]
17. Shuzheng 書證 Literary Verification
18. Yinci 音辭 Pronunciation
19. Zayi 雜藝 Miscellaneous Arts
20. Zhongzhi 終制 Final Arrangements

Each section deals with a different general topic but running through the whole is an emphasis on personal responsibility, circumspection in conduct, correct usage in language and dislike of ostentation and deception. The general discussion is peppered with anecdotes and personal observations making the work a fascinating read.

### 3. Authenticity and Transmission of the Text

From internal evidence the *Yanshi jiaxun* was written during the Sui dynasty after Yan's sixtieth year (591+). It is entered in the *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 47.2025 and *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 59.2b as having seven *juan*. A family epitaph written by the famous calligrapher Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (708-84), and dated 780, includes it among Yan Zhitui's works, in twenty sections. The *Yanshi jiaxun* is cited in a number of commentaries during the Tang, such as that by Li Shan 李善 (d. 689) in his commentary to the *Wenxuan* 文選 38.26b, citing *Yanshi jiaxun* 6.14a-b. Section 16, which concerns Buddhism, was included in the *Guang hongmingji* 廣弘明集, dated 664; *Taisho Daizôkyô* 52.107-108 and 294.

The *Yanshi jiaxun* continued to be cited in the Song, and is listed in *Chongwen zongmu* 崇文總目 3.27a-b (dated between 1034-38), *Junzhai dushuzhi* 郡齋讀書志 10.17b-18a (dated 1151), and *Zhizhai shulu jieti* 直齋書錄解題 10.11a (13th century), all in seven *juan*.

### 4. Principal Editions

Modern editions derive from the Song. Shen Kui 沈揆 (*jinshi* 1160) and associates produced a version by collating two earlier texts, referred to as Shu 蜀 and Min 閩, along with a chapter of commentary. The result, dated 1183, was in the Taizhou 台州 library (modern Linhai 臨海, Zhejiang), and that edition has been copied into the *Zhibuzuzhai congshu* 知不足齋叢書.

A Ming edition included in the *Han Wei congshu* 漢魏叢書 of Cheng Rong 程榮, preface dated 1592, was prepared by a members of a Yan 顏 family in Suzhou, based on a Song edition and one in the family's possession, and printed in 1575. Still in twenty sections, it is in two rather than seven *juan*.

A second Ming edition, also in two *juan*, was copied out of one in the imperial archives in 1524 and given to Fu Taiping 傅太平 of Liaoyang to print. This is known as the Fu edition, and was reproduced in the *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊, with some additional collation by Leng Zongyuan 冷宗元.

Lu Wenchao 盧文弨 (1717-96) and associates produced an edition, preface dated 1789, that was meant to be definitive. The major part of the collational effort was by Zhao Ximing 趙曦明 (1705-87), with notes by Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735-1815) and other eminent scholars. This edition is included as a part of the *Baojingtang congshu* 抱經堂叢書 in 1792. The *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 version is a virtual copy of that in the *Baojingtang congshu*. Despite the reputation for careful textual analysis by the Qing scholars, a careful comparison of this edition with others would seem to indicate that textual changes were too often made on the basis of what read well, allowing subjective judgments to tamper with the received text.

Critical notes continued to be written over the years. The last major edition was that compiled by Zhou Fagao 周法高 in his *Yanshi jiaxun huizhu* 顏氏家訓彙注. *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo zhuankan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所專刊, no. 41.

Taipei, 1960. 4 vols. This is a work of grand proportions, including most of the commentarial scholarship that had preceded it. Zhao also included Yan's biography from *Bei Qishu*, a *nianpu* or chronology of Yan's life, a bibliography, prefaces and postfaces from earlier editions and commentaries, quotations from bibliographical works that cite the *Yanshi jiaxun*,

a concordance, an index to works cited, and a final section of additional commentary.

## 7. Texts with commentaries and notes

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Zhou Fagao 周法高, ed. *Yanshi jiaxun huizhu* 顏氏家訓彙注. *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo zhuankan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所專刊, no. 41. Taipei, 1960. 4 vols.

## 8. Commentaries and notes without the complete text

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Liu Pansui 劉盼遂, "Yanshi jiaxun jiaojian 顏氏家訓校澆[<sup>9a</sup>]," [*Nüshida*] *xueshu jikan* [女師大] 學術季刊 1:2 (1930), pp. 1-21.

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## 9. Translations

English:

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