

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH

In the aristocratic society that developed in both the northern and the southern capitals, manners and deportment were very much stressed. Somewhat different manners and customs developed in each region, and in both places there were tendencies to label the customs of the other unrefined. The two pieces below show something of these feelings. The first is from a description of the northern capital of Luoyang, written in 547–50 by Yang Xuanzhi, a northerner. The second is from a book of advice addressed to his sons by Yan Zhitui (531–591+). Yan's ancestors had lived in the South during the fourth and fifth centuries, and he himself served at the Liang court, but in 556 when that dynasty was falling to the Chen, he fled to the North, where he served at the Northern Qi court in the city of Ye. Among the many topics Yan advised his son about was the differences in the customs between polite society in the two regions.

A NORTHERNER'S DEFENSE OF NORTHERN CULTURE

In 529 [the southern ruler] Xiao Yan sent his scribe Chen Qingzhi to escort the Prince of Beihai to Luoyang and illegitimately set him on the throne. Qingzhi was made the prince's chancellor. Zhang Jingren, who had known Qingzhi while both were in the South, then invited Qingzhi to his house for a banquet. Two southerners, Xiao Biao, the minister of agriculture, and Zhang Sung, a deputy in the department of state affairs, were also there, and Biao himself was a southerner. The only representatives of the eminent families of the northern plain were Yang Yuan-

shen, the palace master, and Wang Xuan, the grand secretary.

Drunk, Qingzhi said to [his fellow] southerners, "The Wei dynasty is at its height, but it is still one of the five barbarians. The legitimate imperial succession is in the South. The seals of the Qin emperors are now at the Liang court."

Yuanshen, with a solemn expression, responded, "The South enjoys a respite of peace in their remote corner, where it is hot and humid, crawling with insects, and infected with malaria. Like frogs and toads sharing the same hole, people live together with the birds. Your rulers wear their hair short and never have long heads. The people decorate their bodies. You float on the

three rivers or row in the five lakes, but have never been steeped in rites or music or reformed by laws. Even though some Qin and Han convicts brought the true Chinese pronunciation, the unpleasant tongues of Min and Chu have not been transformed. You may have a ruler and a court, but the ruler is overbearing and his subordinates violent. For instance, first Liu Shao murdered his father, then Xiulong committed incest with his mother. To commit such breaches of morality makes you no better than birds and beasts. On top of this, the princess of Shanyin asked to buy husbands to commit debauchery, caring nothing about how people ridiculed her. You, sirs, are still soaked in the old customs and have not yet been transformed by ritual. You can be compared to the people of Yangdi who did not realize that goiters were ugly. Our Wei dynasty has received the imperial regalia and set up its court in the region of Mount Sung and Luoyang. It controls the area of the five sacred mountains and makes its home in the area within the four seas. Our laws on reforming customs are comparable to those of the five ancient sage rulers. Ritual, music, and laws flourish to an extent not even matched by the hundred kings. You gentlemen, companions of fish and turtles, how can you be so disrespectful when you come to pay homage at our court, drink water from our ponds, and eat our rice and millet?"

When Shenzhi and the others heard how elegantly Yuanshen spoke, they were at a loss for how to respond. They broke into sweat and could utter no sound.

YAN ZHITUP'S ADVICE TO HIS SONS ON DIFFERENCES IN CUSTOMS

Southerners do not go out to greet a guest. When they meet, they clasp their hands but do not salute. When parting, they merely get down from their seat. Northerners, by contrast, greet their guests at the gate and also accompany them to that point on leaving. When they meet they salute. These are ancient ways, and I approve of them. . . .

Discussions of ancestors should be based on feelings of respect, something the ancients found easy but people today find hard. When Southerners cannot avoid discussing family affairs, they do it in writing, rarely in face-to-face discussions. Northerners would immediately get into such discussions and even ask each other questions about it. Do not inflict such matters on others. If someone else asks you such questions, give evasive answers. . . .

Parting is easy but meeting is difficult; the ancients stressed both. In the South, when parting, people shed tears when saying goodbye. There was a prince, a younger cousin of Emperor Wu of Liang, who before going to Dongjun took leave of Emperor Wu. The emperor said, "I am getting old and am desolate at parting from you." Tears streamed down his cheeks. The prince left looking sad but with dry cheeks, for which he was criticized. Although his boat drifted about by the pier for over a hundred days, he was never allowed to leave. The northern custom is not like this; they say goodbye at the crossroads with a happy expression. . . .

In the South, those wailing at a funeral sometimes express their grief in words addressed to the dead. In the North, at the death of a parent or husband, the mourners will call on Heaven. For the death of a brother or similar relative, they cry out that their suffering is deep. Thus they shout but do not wail.

In the South, when someone has lost a parent, he will sever his friendship with any of his acquaintances from the same city who do not come to condole within three days. After he is out of mourning, he will still avoid them when they meet, so bitter will he be about the lack of sympathy. Those who cannot call for a good reason like living far away are expected to send a letter. If they do not send a letter, they are treated the same way. The custom in the North is not like this.

In the South, those who come to condole do not grasp the hands of anyone they do not know, other than the chief mourner. Those who were acquainted with more distant relatives but not the chief mourner do not need to come to condole but

can send a note to the family on another day. . . .

In the South, when people write essays, they like to get others' criticisms so that they can learn their failings and make improvements. Chen Wang received such advice from Ding Yi. The custom in the North is to avoid direct criticisms. When I first entered Ye, I once offended someone this way and still regret it. You boys should be careful not to give your opinions too freely.

Women in the South do not go out calling. Decades may go by without relatives through marriage seeing each other, keeping up their relations only through letters and gifts. By contrast, in the northern capital of Ye, women take charge of family affairs, entering into lawsuits, straightening out disagreements, and paying calls to seek favor. The streets are filled with their carriages, the government offices are filled with their fancy

silks. They ask for offices for their sons and complain of injustices done their husbands. This may be the remnants of the customs of the Tuoba when they were in Heng and Dai. In the South, even the poor concentrated on external appearance; their clothes and carriages had to be expensive and smart even if that meant their wives and children suffered hunger and cold. Those in the North often let their wives manage the family; for them fine silks and jewels were essential but thin horses and decrepit manservants were satisfactory. Husbands and wives sometimes even addressed each other as "you." Women in the North are much better than those in the South with regard to weaving and sewing and all sorts of needlework. . . .

Translated by Patricia Ebrey