

## CHAPTER 14

# The Social Formation of Man and Woman

"So God created man in his own image ... male and female He created them."

— Genesis 1:27

We are born as either a man or a woman. The difference is not only in the structure of our physical body. In the previous chapter we discussed masculinity and femininity in terms of ancient Chinese philosophy. Now we will look at some other factors that impact our distinct social identity and character.

The development of each of us, whether man or woman, is a long process. We are not yet complete as persons at the age of 18. Many more years of experience are needed for a person to understand what being a man or a woman means.

For example, a man is not only a person capable of work. A woman is more than just an object of attraction. Let us ask ourselves several questions. What is a genuine man or woman really like? Are some occupations more appropriate for men and others for women? Here are some general characterizations that are often attributed to each gender:

*Woman:* kind, feminine, tender, caring, honest, hard-working. Raises children. Makes dinners and breakfasts. Takes care of her husband. Her priority is the well-being of her family.

*Man:* brave, clever, strong-willed, courageous, masculine, noble. Is able to provide for the family. Protects his wife and children. He can withstand a difficult situation. He can fix fuses and hang bookshelves.

Many of these definitions may seem old-fashioned and stereotypical, in view of the many changes that have taken place in recent decades. Nevertheless, even very young children have concepts about the social differences between men and women. Here is an amusing case: Researchers asked some kindergarteners to put pictures in two piles: "father's things" and "mother's things." The result was striking. Practically all the children, no matter whether their father was an idler or not, put into the "father's" pile: the pictures of the TV set, newspapers, fishing rods, armchair, etc. The washing machine, the broom, the vacuum cleaner and the shopping bag were all in the "mother's" pile.

Such distribution can hardly be considered ideal (at least, women are not likely to agree with it). But this little experiment makes us think about the ideas we have held unconsciously since our early childhood. Do they reflect a reasonable distribution of roles between men and women, or are they simply stereotypes and prejudices?

Everyone has an image of the ideal man and woman. But how much do we correspond to these ideals ourselves? Why should we strive to achieve them at all; why do we need those qualities? Men and women were created for another, to experi-



ence the joy of love, to love one another as husband and wife, and eventually love our own children. That is why we are not only different but also fundamentally dual parts of a harmonious design. This is the very reason why it is so important to develop our innate qualities.

Let us turn to femininity. In recent years the strong, independent type of woman has become more valued by society. Many girls nowadays feel embarrassed to appear old-fashioned, unattractive or even feminine in a traditional sense. They want to be seen as buddies in the company of their friends, and begin to act more like boys, smoking cigarettes and using rough language. In this way they are trying to prove to themselves and others that they are no different from boys.

But such behavior may reflect only a desire to gain in social status with men and have nothing to do with expressions of true masculinity or femininity. Often women with an unhappy family life are those who seem to deliberately conceal their femininity through a sharp voice, a free, roughish manner of conduct, intolerance, a constant desire to prove they are right. By contrast, expressions of femininity in marriage affect husbands in two ways. On the one hand they become more masculine due to feeling the need to support and protect the family. On the other hand the hard features of their character soften and gradually they become more tender and kind—and wives feel more loved and happy.

Female “weakness” contains a great strength. Girls who reject it, consciously or unconsciously, deny themselves the chance to have a specifically feminine influence on men. You may not be thinking about marriage now, but it is important to gradually prepare for marriage by developing real masculinity or real femininity in yourself.

How can we understand the features of real masculinity and real femininity? Are there any universal criteria? Features that are considered masculine in the East may be thought feminine in the West, and vice versa. In Western societies a well-bred man lets a woman go first, opens doors for her, and does not allow her to carry heavy bags. But in many Eastern countries such conduct is considered unmanly.

Each culture has its own notions of the ideals of men and women. No matter how these ideals may appear, they usually are divided into different, complementary social roles. Besides, such qualities as responsibility and reliability always characterize a genuine man, and tenderness and compassion are features of a good woman. These features are not given to us at birth, but rather are acquired as a result of a constant effort to overcome struggles

All of us strive to be happy. Some of us are waiting for the beautiful princess to walk into our life, and other are waiting for the knight in shining armor who will sweep us off our feet. Most of us dream about finding the love of our life. But do we have the ability to really see other people's uniqueness? What do we see as we look at our classmates? Boring girls who do nothing but study? Awkward, smelly boys? Or are you gradually beginning to see something new in your classmates? Suddenly the girl whom you teased so frequently turns out to be an attractive young lady, and the boy you never looked at twice has turned into a handsome young man.

The cultivation of a good balance of masculinity and femininity within oneself requires an active participation and communication in many kinds of relationships. For a man, it is vital to communicate with female relatives, such as his mother and sisters, as well as female classmates. Similarly, for a woman it is important to communicate with the men in her life in order to develop her femininity.

It would be wrong to think that simply because we are not in love with one of our classmates we are missing out on something. On the contrary, adolescence is a time when we can develop brotherly and sisterly attitudes toward one another and feel like members of one family. This means respect and genuine love for one another.

Many girls feel they are grown-up and expect others, particularly their classmates, to treat them as such. Sometimes they may feel annoyed because of the seemingly childish behavior of the boys they know. But if a person wants to be respected, it is necessary to treat others with respect first. If you treat the boys in your school as immature and not worthy of your respect, don't be surprised if they treat you as a conceited bore.

Boys are often annoyed by girls who don't take them seriously or who try to control them. With their male friends boys can have "adult" talks, but when talking with female classmates, all "adulthood" vanishes into thin air.

It is difficult to find a simple and natural communication style—warm and friendly but without the flirting and games that so often lead to genuine suffering. The only way to achieve this is to treat each other with sincere respect and to appreciate the best qualities of your classmates. Be attentive to each other. Manifest genuine

male or female qualities yourself. Then you will have fewer problems.

Only a true masculine man and a true feminine woman are able to find each other and create a good family. A genuine man is emotionally stable, keeps his word and speaks with deeds, not hollow phrases. He has a strong character, is reliable, modest and persevering. He is resolute, active, independent, steady in adversity and enterprising. Reliable—"He is like a stone wall!" Real masculinity implies orderliness and logical thinking.





Genuine femininity means subtlety of feeling, tenderness, flexibility, emotional richness, sharp perception of beauty, sympathy, ability to understand others, compassion, selflessness and capacity to change and adapt. Since ancient times women have been apprehensive about change and uncertainty. Women are characterized by loyalty, patience and steadiness in daily routine.

All this is eternal and permanent. Fashions come and go, but when it is time to create a family, boys dream of a feminine wife, and girls of a masculine husband. We must prepare ourselves for our future mate on a daily basis.

### Something to think about



- Do you and your classmates generally agree on the different social roles of men and women?
- Are there any social roles that overlap?
- Do you think that social roles are the same now as they were 5, 10 or 20 years ago? Are social roles changing? If so, how?
- Have you ever spent time in another culture or country? How were the social roles of men and women the same as in your country? How were they different?

### For Your Journal



Although still uncommon, there are some families in which the man chooses to stay home with his children and take care of the house and general affairs while his wife works and is the breadwinner. Usually this kind of arrangement is agreed upon by the husband and the wife and considered desirable by both. If you are a boy, would you like such an arrangement? If you are a girl, what is your point of view about such an arrangement?