

Kindness and Virtue Bring Prosperity to Descendents

August 10, 2005

In the late Ming Dynasty, an elderly dignitary surnamed Zhang lived in Tongcheng, Anhui Province. Zhang was kind towards others and generous in giving to the poor.

One year, crops had low yields and a famine was imminent. The price of rice was high. Some cunning merchants took advantage of the situation and stopped supplying rice to the market, creating chaos and causing the price of rice to skyrocket. The government did not have any immediate solution.

Mr. Zhang saw the crisis and was very concerned. His family had stored tens of thousands of *dan* (an ancient Chinese unit of measurement for grains, equaling 100 *sheng*) of rice. He decided to open his barn to sell rice to the people at a reduced price, so that nobody would starve. To prevent scalpers from profiting, he limited the sale to one *sheng* (approximately one liter) of rice a day per person. The locals were delighted to hear the news.

Mr. Zhang also thought of the poor who could not afford to buy rice, even at the reduced price. He opened a rice congee kitchen to give away congee and pickled vegetable three times a day. Many people came hungry and left full. They all praised Mr. Zhang for acting with such compassion, but Zhang said humbly, "This year the price of rice is quite high. Even the discounted price is no less than the market price in ordinary years. I have not really lost money. As for giving away congee, it didn't cost a lot. I feel comforted just knowing that everyone has food."

Mr. Zhang spent almost all his money assisting others, but the grain shortage was not yet relieved. He worried that if he stopped giving, some poor people might starve to death. Zhang thought of selling his family's property and assets. He went to discuss the situation with his wife.

His wife was also a person with great virtue. She agreed with Zhang completely and said, "We can leave our properties to our children and grandchildren, but if we didn't have virtue, our children and grandchildren will not be accomplished. No matter how much money we leave for them, they will use it all up. If we accumulate virtue for them, although we did not give them property, our children and grandchildren will still be kind-hearted and prosperous. Dear husband, you can decide the sale of our land and houses. I also have many pieces of jewelry you can sell." The couple sold their land and personal belongings to continue the generous giving. They didn't stop until the famine was completely over.

Zhang's fifth-generation grandson Zhang Ying was very accomplished and promoted to the position of prime minister. Zhang Ying's son Zhang Tingyu was also a prime minister. Their families were all prominent and prosperous. The locals said that this was a result of the virtue Mr. Zhang accumulated by helping the villagers.