

# Lessons from Chinese Idioms: "Suffer from Cold and Hunger"

November 28, 2005 | By Yi Dou

**(Clearwisdom.net)** At the end of the Sui Dynasty and the beginning of the Tang Dynasty, bandits roamed all over China as a result of the wars that lasted for many years.

Emperor Gaozu (or Li Yuan) once attended a trial against a bandit. He asked the bandit, "Why did you become a bandit?" "I was suffering from cold and hunger," he replied. "I had no choice but to become a bandit to stay alive." Emperor Gaozu sighed and said, "As your ruler, it is my fault that you suffer from poverty!" Then he released the bandit.

Emperor Taizong (Emperor Gaozu's son) once had a meeting with his cabinet to develop a national policy to prevent theft and robbery. A cabinet member suggested imposing tough criminal laws to discourage thefts. Emperor Taizong said, "It is because of heavy taxes and the government corruption that the people are forced to become thieves and bandits. They have no choice but to forfeit their dignity in order to survive. In order to improve the people's lives, my administration will cut down spending, reduce taxes and recruit and promote honest government officials. Once their lives have improved, they will stop their stealing and robbery. There is no need for tougher laws."

After a few years under Emperor Taizong's rule, peace was restored in China. If people dropped their belongings on the road, no one would steal them. Before people went to bed, they did not need to lock their doors because there was no theft or robbery. Traveling businessmen could spend the night on the roads safely. Du Fu, a famous poet of the Tang Dynasty, wrote in one of his poems, "There are no bandits throughout China. People no longer need to go to fortune teller to find a lucky day for traveling."