

Lessons from Chinese Idioms: "Irrigating the Neighboring State's Melon Fields"

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(Clearwisdom.net) Song Jiu was a magistrate of Bian County near the border of the Liang State before he became a high-ranking official. On the other side of the border was the Chu State. Both states sow melons at the border and would check out each other's melon harvests. The Liang State's people were very diligent in farming and irrigated the melon fields frequently, therefore the melons were growing well. The Chu State's people often dodged work and neglected the irrigation. Consequently, their melons were growing badly.

The magistrate of the border county in the Chu State became jealous and irritated when he saw the disparity between the two states' melons. Influenced by the magistrate, people in his county became jealous and angry with the people of the Liang State. One night they sneaked into the Liang State's melon fields and ruined some of their melons. The next day when the Liang people found out about the mayhem, they reported it to the master of arms and expressed their wish to retaliate. The master of arms reported to Song Jiu and asked for his approval to reciprocate. Song Jiu replied, "Evil will only beget evil. If you should retaliate against their crimes, you would only make things worse. If my son had a melon field, I'd ask him to irrigate the Chu people's melon fields at night and keep his good deed in secret."

From then on the Liang people irrigated the Chu people's melon fields secretly at night. Sometimes the Chu people would irrigate their melon fields during the day as well. As a result, the Chu people's melons started to grow better. The Chu people were very confused as to why their melons would grow well despite their lack of work. They began to investigate the issue secretly and discovered it was because the Liang people had been

secretly irrigating their melon fields for them. When the magistrate of the Chu State heard the truth, he was very pleased with the result and reported it to the King of the Chu State. The King of Chu felt ashamed for his people and told the magistrate, "How could you allow your people to destroy the Liang State's melon fields? It is obvious that the Liang people have bigger hearts than the Chu people." The King of Chu sent a lot of money to the Liang State to thank them for their gracious help and to express his wish to establish friendship between the two states. The two states thus formed a friendly alliance because of Song Jiu.

This story spawned the idiom, "irrigating the neighboring state's melon fields," which means it is not worth fighting over trivial matters.

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