

The Emperor's Greed Destroys His Country; An Official's Greed Destroys His Body

December 21, 2005 | By Qing Yan

(minghui.org)

"The Emperor's greed destroys his country while an official's greed destroys his body." This was what Emperor Taizong, the second emperor of the Tang Dynasty, used to exhort his government officials not to take bribes or practice graft, and to caution himself. Emperor Taizong and his officials managed to rule the country by virtue and, through this, bring peace and stability. Together they made the Great Tang Dynasty one of the most prosperous in China's history.

As a matter of fact, not only should government officials refrain from practicing graft, but also ordinary people must be content with what they have and let things happen naturally in order to maintain long-lasting peace, especially in the face of endless, selfish, material desires.

The following conversations between Emperor Taizong and his officials are recounted here:

In the first year of Zhen-guan, Emperor Taizong told his officials:

"Bright pearls are precious to everyone. But when used for shooting birds, they are certainly wasteful. People's lives are even more precious than jewels. If a man is not afraid of how the law will punish him and instead takes bribes when he is offered money and silk, is he treasuring his life at all? As a material thing, bright pearls shouldn't be used to shoot birds. By the same token, how could you trade your precious life for material things? If you strive to be honest and loyal, you will be a benefit to the country and the people, and promotion will naturally follow. On the contrary, if you pursue rank and wealth by taking bribes, your life is doomed once your crime is exposed. It would be very foolish to do so. If an emperor is obsessed with lust and luxury, forces people to do extremely hard labor, believes and harbors villains, and stays away from those who are honest and loyal, how can the country not collapse? In history, Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty considered himself a sage while pursuing a life of luxury. In the end, he died at the hands of an ordinary person. He has been ridiculed as a result."

In the second year of Zhen-guan, Emperor Taizong again cautioned his aides:

"I once said that money-grabbers don't truly understand how to treasure money. For example, with a decent salary,

the central and local government officials at the fifth rank and above are highly compensated. If they still take other peoples' bribes, which are usually not as good as their legal compensation, both their official rank and excellent salary will be taken away once their crimes are exposed. If so, how can they be regarded as treasuring money? This is truly a big loss for the sake of a small gain. There was once a prime minister whose name was Gong Yixiu. He loved to eat fish but he never took fish from anybody else. Because of that, he was able to stay in his position and to eat fish for a long time.

"If an emperor is greedy for money, he will surely lose his empire; if an official takes bribes, he will perish.

"Once upon a time, King Hui of the State of Qin was battling the State of Shu. As he did not know the road to the capital of Shu, he ordered his subordinates to carve five cows out of rock and put a lot of gold behind each cow. When the people of Shu saw the cows with the gold on the ground behind them, they thought that they were able to excrete gold. Learning of this, the King of Shu dispatched five strong men to pull the five rock cattle "that were full of gold" into the State of Shu. Following the road made by these five men and the stone cows, the troops of Qin were able to enter the capital and defeat the State of Shu, which collapsed quickly.

"As another example, Tian Yan-nian, the agricultural minister of the Han Dynasty, took bribes that were worth 30 million silver coins, but he committed suicide by cutting his throat. There have been numerous such examples in history. While I caution myself with the example of the King of Shu, you should learn from the story of Minister Tian Yan-nian."

In the fifth year of Zhen-guan, Taizong told his *Kugyo* (highest court officials):

"I never dare to be sluggish. Not only do I constantly think of how to love my people, but also I strive to make sure that you can all maintain your rank and wealth. I have been careful to worship heaven and earth. If you can closely follow the laws just as I worship heaven and earth, not only will the ordinary people have peace and prosperity, but you also will be happy. As the ancient people said, "Too much wealth will weaken the will of sages, while ignorant people will cause troubles with excessive wealth." We can certainly learn from this saying. Embezzlement damages the laws of the state and harms ordinary people. Furthermore, the one who has been cheated will live in fear even if the crime is not exposed. Great fear can result in death. How can a real man, simply for the sake of money and material things, damage his body and even destroy his life and make his

descendants ashamed of him? As high officials, you must think about this deeply."

In the sixteenth year of Zhen-guan, Taizong taught his officials:

"As the ancient people said, 'To live in the woods, birds like the tall trees and build their nests in the tops of them. To live in water, fish like to stay in deep water. Those who get caught are the ones who are greedy for the bait.' As high officials, you have rank and wealth so you must be loyal and honest, and you must be selfless and incorruptible. This way you can be free from calamity and able to keep your rank and wealth for a long time. As stated in an ancient saying, 'Calamity and luck have no door; you have to find your own way into or out of it.' Those who commit crimes are greedy for money, as the fish that are greedy for the bait. You must learn from the saying and constantly caution yourselves."