

# 让他三尺又何妨 ：和解的学问

Take Three Feet Back,  
or the Real Great Wall of China



安徽桐城“六尺巷”

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defend. Zhang's wall humbles and harmonizes. Emperor Qin Shihuang's Great Wall is a symbol of power that does not last. Zhang's wall is a symbol of humility that goes beyond time. Without Zhang's wall, the controversy could also turn into a dead end of hostility or even tragedy.

As a prime minister of the time, Zhang had all the power he needed to influence such a small situation as where to have his family build the walls. As a matter of fact, he could use his power to take over the entire site of the neighbors. He could just hint at that, and I am pretty sure his subordinates would help him accomplish it, without even leaving any trace of being a bully. However, he decided to be humble and tolerant.

What Zhang did became well known in history, and his poem was often quoted as an example of humility and reconciliation in the midst of controversies. In the late 1950s, China and the Soviet Union came into a deadlock of relationships, due to border disputes and many other issues. In 1958, Chairman Mao of China met the Soviet Union ambassador to China. He quoted the poem that Zhang wrote as a suggestion that humility and reconciliation, instead of power and confrontation, was the secret sauce for peace.

In today's society, we are faced with conflicts or controversies of one kind or another almost everywhere we go. What do we do when these conflicts arise? I would advise people to learn from Zhang in the humility he showed.

Humility is a divine virtue. One can see many teachings and examples of this in the Bible. One important principle that is constantly emphasized by Jesus and His disciples is forgiveness. When we are faced with conflicts, let's learn to take three feet back, to make peace, and to forgive. You might not find yourself in a situation where you would have to decide to build a wall close to your neighbor's territory, but you might constantly find yourself confronted with your colleague, your friends, or even your family in similar situations. The Bible tells us "Be angry without doing wrong; let not the sun go down on your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26). It is easy to get angry, but we should not allow that to take control of us. Forgiveness, tempered with humility, may go a long way in our well-being and relationships.

The Bible does not limit our extension of humility and forgiveness merely to our friends and family. The Bible tells us to do this even to our enemy. Look at Jesus. As the Son of God, He is more powerful than a prime minister. When people plotted against Him, He could use all His power to destroy them. But what did He do instead? He asked His Heavenly Father to forgive those people who cursed Him, beat Him and crucified Him, because He said they did not know what they were doing. Very often, when I read Jesus' teachings and examples of forgiveness and humility, I would think of the little lane in my hometown.

My dear friends, when someone offends you or provokes you, when you find yourself in an uncomfortable controversy, would you learn to take three feet back, to create a "Six-foot Lane" in your life?

I am sure God would smile at you if you do.

安徽文化名城桐城有一小巷，宽六尺，小巷的名字就叫“六尺巷”。

这是一条平凡的小巷，却有着个不平凡的来历。

桐城县志记载：康熙年间，文华殿大学士、礼部尚书张英在京做官，在桐城的家人和邻居发生地界纠纷，互不相让。张英家人修书一封送交给张英，想借张英来“收拾”邻居。张英收到家信后回诗一首，说：

万里家书只为墙，  
让他三尺又何妨？  
长城万里今犹在，  
不见当年秦始皇。

这显然是要家人退让。家人收到来信后很是惭愧，主动退让三尺。邻居一看，也惭愧了，于是也后退三尺，所以就成了著名的“六尺巷”。

诗中所说的“万里长城”英文翻译过来，就是“伟大的墙”的意思。秦始皇修了这墙，目的是御敌，保住秦朝的万古江山，可惜的是，秦建国后不多久就终结了。不见了当年秦始皇。

在我的心目中，张英家人和邻居各退三尺的墙，也是“伟大的墙”，而且这是个很有些人文意义的墙。秦始皇修建的伟大的墙分出了敌我；张英家的伟大的墙化干戈为玉帛。如果没有他的谦让，邻居就有可能化为仇敌了。

身为文华殿大学士、礼部尚书，也就是宰相了。身为宰相，却不以势欺人，反而主动和解，这种姿态殊为难得。所以

这段“六尺巷”的故事，就常常被人引用，作为“宰相肚里能撑船”的佐证。

1958年，毛主席接见前苏联驻华大使尤金时，曾引用此诗。那时候中国和苏联关系紧张，毛主席引用此诗，当然是希望双方采用和解的态度，来解决分歧、冲突。

在我们今天的生活当中，我们遇到各种各样的纠纷。我们如何来化解呢，我们不妨学习张英的谦让之道。

谦让是一种高贵的品格，几乎可以说是从神那里来的一种品格。谦让也是解决冲突的一种有效方法。如果没有了谦让，在我们和他人发生冲突的时候，大家冤冤相报，最后，仇会越结越深。总得有人迈出和解的第一步。

谦让基础乃是一种态度，就是愿意解决问题的态度，愿意谅解的态度，愿意形成和谐关系的态度。

圣经把这种谦让的作风推上了一个新的高度。圣经中有一个重要的概念，那就是宽恕。在我们遇到矛盾的时候，我们要像张英一样，大度地和我们的邻居和解。我们的亲人触动了我们的怒气，我们也要及时退让，“不可含怒到日落。”（弗4:27）。不要说亲人和邻居了，圣经甚至要我们原谅我们的仇敌。耶稣被钉十字架的时候，还为钉自己十字架的罗马士兵求情，要神原谅他们。看到圣经上大段让我们原谅的文字，我不禁回想起桐城的六尺巷来。

亲爱的朋友，当有人得罪了您的时候，或者是和您发生冲突的时候，你会不会收敛自己的怒气，主动谦让，主动原谅，创建您生活中的六尺巷呢？

Recently I read of a story of a Qinghua University doctoral student murdering a neighbor while he was on a vacation in his hometown. This tragic event was caused by a controversy over a house this student's family tried to build. The neighbor tried to prevent it, because if the wall was set up, it would block the sunlight for his house. They started to quarrel, which soon escalated into a fatal fight in which the student killed his neighbor, leaving a wife widowed, a daughter orphaned, and a family without financial support. The doctoral student himself and his three brothers were arrested. Their mother was hospitalized due to injury in the fight.

It was an ugly situation leading to a tragic end.

It could have ended differently.

The news story reminded me of a little lane in my hometown of Tongcheng, Anhui Province. This little lane is six feet wide, and the name of the lane is called "Six-Foot Lane".

This is an ordinary lane by the way it looks, but it has an extraordinary story behind it.

According to the local history, Tongcheng is the hometown of Zhang Ying, a Qing Dynasty person holding one of the highest offices under the Emperor Kang Xi. Zhang was basically the prime minister of the time – a very powerful man. While he was working in the capital city of Beijing, his family back in Tongcheng got into a controversy very similar to the one we just described. His family wanted to build a house, but the neighbor, who also wanted to build a house, protested that the wall was beyond the dividing line separating the territory of the two families. Zhang Ying's family wrote a letter to Zhang, requesting him to use his power to twist the situation.

Zhang could, given the power he had. But instead he sent a letter back home with a poem in it:

A letter from thousands of miles away

It's for a wall you say

Why not withdraw to three feet away

And thus end your controversy?

The Great Wall you can still see

Where is the Emperor who had it built in the ancient day?

Zhang's family was greatly humbled by this letter from their powerful relative. As Zhang suggested, they decided to take three feet back from the original site. Seeing Zhang's family taking this positive step (or steps), the neighbor's family was also greatly humbled. Likewise, they also took three feet back. The two walls thus form a six-foot lane.

In the letter that Zhang wrote, he mentioned the Great Wall which was originally built as a defense mechanism to protect an empire from potential invaders from neighboring states. The person who ordered the Great Wall to be built was Emperor Qin Shihuang, which literally translated into "The First Emperor of Qin". Emperor Qin Shihuang hoped that with him as the first emperor, his descendents would continue as the second, the third, ... till the end of time. However, the Great Wall failed to protect his family as the ruling family of all times. The Qin Dynasty was very short-lived. It collapsed soon after Emperor Qin Shihuang died.

In my mind, the real "Great Wall" is the one that formed the "Six-foot Lane" in my hometown. Emperor Qin Shihuang's Great Wall was meant to divide and