

大義滅親

da4 yi4 mie4 qin1

An angry father disciplined his 11-year-old son by hitting him with a rattan stick. The boy's 16-year-old sister tried to intervene without success, so she called the police, who came and took the father away for suspected child abuse.

The decision for the sister must have been a difficult one - protecting her little brother at the risk of sending their father to jail. Her act was called “大義滅親” (*da4 yi4 mie4 qin1*).

“大” (*da4*) is “big,” “huge,” “義” (*yi4*) means “justice or righteousness” and “大義” (*da4 yi4*) means “major principles of righteousness.” “滅” (*mie4*) is “to extinguish,” “to exterminate” and “親” (*qin1*) is “blood relation,” “parent,” “one's own flesh and blood.” Literally “大義滅親” (*da4 yi4 mie4 qin1*) is “to exterminate blood relations for major principles of righteousness.”

It means “to forsake family loyalty for righteousness,” “to punish own relations in the cause of justice.” In the original story from which the idi-

Idiom by Lon Yan

om was born, a former high official actually arranged to have his evil son killed for the good of the country. In modern day usage, the idiom is applicable generally to any situations in which a person turns in, or refuses to protect, a family member or relative who has done something wrong.

In China, spouses, parents and children used to be compellable witnesses against each other. This law had been dubbed the law of “大義滅親,” for obvious reasons. But the country's criminal procedures law was amended a few years ago. Now, husbands and wives, parents and children are no longer forced to “大義滅親” (*da4 yi4 mie4 qin1*) in court.

Terms containing the character “親” (*qin1*) include:

親友 (*qin1 you3*) - relatives and friends

親身 (*qin1 shen1*) - personally

雙親 (*shuang1 qin1*) - parents

親切 (*qin1 qie4*) - cordial, kind