

Idiom by Lon Yan

指桑罵槐

zhi3 sang1 ma4 huai2

National People's Congress Standing Committee chairman Zhang Dejiang visited Macau and heaped praises on it. He told Macau to make sure its education policy stays on the right course so the "fine tradition" of "loving the country and loving Macau" continues.

He commended Macau for implementing national security legislation. (Hong Kong's attempt to do the same a few years back was hastily aborted when tens of thousands of angry citizens started marching on the street.)

Zhang also warned against filibustering and violence in the legislature, which, of course, is a daily affair at our Legislative Council, where bananas, luncheon meat, and other more deadly projectiles fly all the time.

So it is hardly surprising that people suspected the remarks were being directed

towards Hong Kong. If so, it was a typical case of "指桑罵槐" (*zhi3 sang1 ma4 huai2*).

"指" (*zhi3*) is "to point at," "to indicate," "桑" (*sang1*) "mulberry," "罵" (*ma4*) "to condemn," "to reprove," "to use abusive language at," and "槐" (*huai2*), "a pagoda tree." Literally, "指桑罵槐" (*zhi3 sang1 ma4 huai2*) is "to point at the mulberry and abuse the pagoda tree."

The idiom means "to point at one but abuse another," "to make oblique accusations," "to scold somebody indirectly."

But Zhang did not condemn Macau, but praised it. To praise is "讚" (*zan4*). So we can say it was actually a case of "讚桑罵槐" (*zan4 sang1 ma4 huai2*) – condemning someone indirectly by praising somebody else!

Terms containing the character "罵" (*ma4*) include:

罵人 (*ma4 ren2*) – give one a scolding; to yell at someone

罵街 (*ma4 jie1*) – to shout abuses in the street; to use abusive language in public

罵戰 (*ma4 zhan4*) – yelling at one another

破口大罵 (*po4 kou3 da4 ma4*) – to let loose a torrent of abuse