



A Long Name

Traditions

Simpler solutions can be much more effective.

An old Chinese superstition says that the longer a name, the longer lived and happier a person will be.



⌚ 8 min

😊 5+

There is a very ancient and very old legend in one Chinese village that people with long names would live long and happy lives. Every villager, when they had a child, would spend a lot of time coming up with the longest names they could think of, so that their children would prosper. It was like a competition between families, each trying to out-luck the others.

One day, one of the women in the village had a strong and healthy son. She decided she would give him the longest name anyone had ever given a child. She puzzled over what to call him for three days and three nights, thinking of nothing else, not even sleeping!

She just thought and worried and thought some more. Exhausted, she finally came up with a truly long name, and with the last remains of her strength, she called for all her family to come over so she could tell them.

“His name shall be Zhong...” she began in a whisper, and then she passed out from exhaustion, never to wake up again. **Everyone wailed and wept for her.** Unfortunately, they’d never found out what the name was the boy should have had. After a long talk, the family decided that they would keep the name his mother gave him, and so from that moment on his name was Zhong.

A few years later, Zhong’s widowed father **married again** and soon enough they were expecting another baby. This mother, too, believed a long name would bring a long and happy life to her child. Following in the steps of Zhong’s mother, when the boy was born, she didn’t eat or sleep for three days and three nights. She was completely exhausted, just like Zhong’s mum, but this woman lived.

She called for the whole family and when they came, she said: "His name will be 'Di-Zi-Ru-Ze-Xiao-Chu-Ze-Di-Jin-Er-Xin-Fan-Ai-Zhong-Er-Qing-Ren.'"

They all nodded and **wrote it down**, because no one could remember such a long name. They were very impressed at her creativity and everyone agreed the boy's long name would indeed make him fortunate.

As the boys grew up, the younger son with the long name always seemed to fare better than his short-named older brother. There was a simple reason for it. Because whenever anybody needed anything, they only called the older son. It was so much easier for them to call out "Zhong!" and Zhong would immediately come and do what they asked.

"Zhong, go get **some water from the well!**"

"Zhong, feed the oxen their breakfast!"

"Zhong, **bring some wood!**"

"Zhong, pick up a basket of tea leaves from the hill!"

"Zhong, **tidy up a bit!**"

It was always Zhong, Zhong, Zhong.

Nobody wanted to call the younger child because his name was too long. Which meant that when the two got into trouble, Zhong was the one who got punished. It was far too exhausting to scold Di-Zi-Ru-Ze-Xiao-Chu-Ze-Di-Jin-Er-Xin-Fan-Ai-Zhong-Er-Qing-Ren!

One day, Zhong and his brother were playing with their friends in front of the house. They were running around in the yard and coming up with all sorts of games. They crawled playing Hide n' Seek; climbed tall trees, racing to the top; and had a Leapfrog competition.

After a run and an uncoordinated leap, Zhong **fell down the well**. Everyone ran towards the house, screaming for Zhong's father.

“Zhong fell down the well! Zhong fell down the well!” they **cried in panic**.

Zhong’s dad jumped up and ran to help his son. As he was pulling him out, he thought to himself about how children with short names really got the short end of the stick. But even short names had their lucky moments.

Zhong wasn’t hurt, luckily. He had some scratches and bruises, and he was soaking wet, but he was okay. A few days later, the kids were playing in the yard again. This time Zhong’s younger brother climbed up to the ledge of the well, thinking nothing bad could ever happen to him.

“Look at me!” he called. “I’m king of the well!” He began **playing a flute**, dancing and mocking his brother. He sang: “Zhong fell down the well playing a game, ‘cause he’s got a short-short-short name! It can’t happen to me, since I’ve got a loong...” Suddenly, his foot slipped and he found himself tumbling-tumbling into the cold water at the bottom **of the well**.

All of the kids came running towards the house to get help from his parents.

“Help! Quickly! Di-Zi-Ru-Ze-Xiao-Chu-Ze-Di-Ji...”

But oh no! They realized they’d made a mistake at this part and started over.

“Your son Di-Zi-Ru-Ze-Xiao-Chu-Ze-Di-Jin-E...”

But they had to stop because they’d forgot the rest of his name!

Thank goodness, one of them remembered and tried again: “Di-Zi-Ru-Ze-Xiao-Chu-Ze-Di-Jin-Er-Xin-Fan...” He paused, **took a deep breath**, and finished. “...Ai-Zhong-Er-Qing-Ren fell down the well, please come help him!”

Immediately the parents sprang to their feet and ran to the well, but a lot of time had passed because of the children’s troubles with saying his long name. They only just managed to save the boy before he drowned.

From that day forward, they called the younger brother Di for short, so there would never be another such incident. And from that moment on, both boys

lived together happily. There were no more differences between them. Whenever there was work that needed to be done or an errand that needed to be run or a scolding to be had, the brothers **would take turns**.