

家賊難防

jia1 ze1 nan2 fang2

A bank machine in Yau Tong was broken into and HK\$1.6 million in cash was stolen.

Strictly speaking, it was not a “break-in” as the machine was not forced open. Reports said it was apparently opened by someone with a key and the security code. Also the alarm system was circumvented (繞過) and the cash was taken just 30 minutes after it was put in, showing that the thief knew the cash-replenishing schedule.

The bank naturally refused to comment, but media reports said all signs pointed to an inside job. If that is the case, it is a case of “家賊難防” (*jia1 ze1 nan2 fang2*)

“家” (*jia1*) is “home,” “family,” “賊” (*ze1*) “a thief,” “難” (*nan2*) difficult and “防” (*fang2*) “to guard against.” Literally, “家賊難防” (*jia1 ze1 nan2 fang2*) is “home thief hard to guard against.”

It means “a thief in the family is difficult to detect,” “it's difficult to guard against traitors”

Idiom by Lon Yan

or “thieves within a household are difficult to guard against.”

The “賊” (*ze1*) in the idiom may also refer to people who conduct sabotage from within, especially those who steal and leak crucial information about an organization. Such a person is called a mole (內奸). These include people who conduct industrial espionage.

Being a “家賊” (*jia1 ze1*) is one of the worst forms of betrayal, and breach of trust. If it involves national security, the mole is called not only a “家賊” (*jia1 ze1*) but also a traitor (賣國賊). Traitors are often dealt with in the most severe manner possible – execution.

Terms containing the character “防” (*fang2*) include:

防止 (*fang2 zhi3*) – to prevent, to avert

防火 (*fang2 huo3*) – fire prevention, fireproof

消防員 (*xiao1 fang2 yuan2*) – a fireman

預防 (*yu4 fang2*) – to prevent, to take precautions