

# 量力而為

*liang4 li4 er2 wei4*

Should we or shouldn't we have a universal pension? This is the vexing question that divides opinions as the local community hotly debates the issue.

Critics push for a universal scheme, arguing that being taken care of in one's old age is a universal human right. The government favors one that pays only "those with financial needs," saying a universal scheme is unaffordable. Chief Secretary Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor said we should "量力而為" (*liang4 li4 er2 wei4*).

"量" (*liang4*) is "to estimate," "力" (*li4*) "strength," "power," "ability," "而" (*er2*) "and," "to," "and then," and "為" (*wei4*) "to do." Literally, "量力而為" (*liang4 li4 er2 wei4*) is "to do according to estimated strength."

It means "to do what one's strength allows," "to estimate one's ability or strength and do things accordingly."

## Idiom by Lon Yan

Another version of the idiom is "量力而行" (*liang4 li4 er2 xing2*). The opposite of "量力而為" (*liang4 li4 er2 wei4*) is "不自量力" (*bu2 zi4 liang4 li4*), literally "not self-estimate strength," meaning "to go beyond one's depth," "to overestimate one's capability."

The English expression to "bite off more than one can chew" also means "不自量力" (*bu2 zi4 liang4 li4*). Figuratively it means to take on more than one can deal with, overconfident.

"Out of one's depth" means taking up a task that is beyond one's competence. If you get into water deeper than what your aquatic (水上的) skills can handle, you drown!

### Terms containing the character "力" (*li4*) include:

力量 (*li4 liang*) - force, power, might

馬力 (*ma3 li4*) - horsepower

人力車 (*ren2 li4 che1*) - a rickshaw

無力 (*wu2 li4*) - to lack strength, to feel weak