

無 關 痛 癢

wu2 guan1 tong4 yang3

Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying suggested building facilities off Central so office workers may swim in the harbor during lunch hour. He also talked about building shelters and seats for the same office workers to fish there.

Leung brought up those ideas only briefly in his blog but, him being who he is, the reaction was quite predictable.

Some said water in Victoria Harbour is so filthy it will make you sick. Others said maybe Leung doesn't know that lining up for a lunch box probably takes 45 minutes. Yet others said it is just common sense that you shouldn't exercise on a full stomach.

Luckily this time, the controversy will not kill a rail project midway, scuttle an important piece of legislation, or stop public administration in its tracks. Fishing and swimming in the harbor are just matters that are “無關痛癢” (wu2 guan1 tong4 yang3).

“無” (wu2) is “without,” “nil,” “關” (guan1) “關係,”

Idiom by Lon Yan

“關連” meaning “relate to,” “connect,” “involve,” “痛” (tong4) “pain” and “癢” (yang3) “itch.” “痛癢” (tong4 yang3) means “pain and itch” or metaphorically, “sufferings,” “difficulties,” “consequence,” “importance.”

Literally, “無關痛癢” (wu2 guan1 tong4 yang3) is “nil relation to pain or itch.” Feelings of pain or an itch must be dealt with as they make you suffer. If something is neither pain nor an itch, you can probably just ignore it.

So the idiom means “unimportant,” “inconsequential.” Something “無關痛癢” (wu2 guan1 tong4 yang3) is trivial, just like whether office workers would or would not get to swim or fish in the harbor.

Terms containing the character “痛” (tong4) include:

痛苦 (tong4 ku3) – pain, misery, suffering

痛恨 (tong4 hen4) – to hate bitterly, to detest

頭痛 (tou2 tong4) – a headache

腳痛 (jiao3 tong4) – foot or leg pain