

# 進退兩難

*jin4 tui4 liang3 nan2*

Some mainland women who flocked to Hong Kong to give birth a few years ago are now regretting their decision. As their children are reaching school age, they have discovered some very real problems.

Being Hong Kong born, these children are not accepted by the mainstream school system in the mainland, and expensive private and international schools are their only option.

The children are of course entitled to attend school here, but the trip back and forth takes five hours a day, which is hardship. Parents and children are, therefore, “進退兩難” (*jin4 tui4 liang3 nan2*).

“進” (*jin4*) is “to go forward,” “退” (*tui4*) “to retreat,” “to move back,” “兩” (*liang3*) “two,” “both” and “難” (*nan2*) “difficult.” Literally “進退兩難” (*jin4 tui4 liang3 nan2*) is “go forward, go back, both difficult.”

The idiom means “to find oneself in a dilemma,”

## Idiom by Lon Yan

“between the devil and the deep sea,” “to be stuck between a rock and a hard place.”

A slightly different version of the idiom is “進退維谷” (*jin4 tui4 wei2 gu3*) – which ever way you turn, there are only ravines, meaning “difficult to proceed or retreat,” “trapped.”

A shorter way to express the same meaning is “兩難” (*liang3 nan2*), which means “to face a difficult choice,” “to be in a dilemma.”

If all tens of thousands of children in the same situation come to schools in Hong Kong, it will be “兩難” (*liang3 nan2*) for us too – we can't refuse to let them come, but we do not have enough school places.

**Terms containing the character “難” (*nan2*) include:**

難題 (*nan2 ti2*) – a difficult problem

難免 (*nan2 mian3*) – hard to avoid

難忘 (*nan2 wang4*) – unforgettable

難民 (*nan4 min2*) – refugee