

# 大而無當

*da4 er2 wu2 dang1*

The government has big plans for Lantau. There will be a new metropolis with a Central-like business area and residential buildings, creating more jobs and homes. There will also be new facilities, many of which will be for recreation.

Public opinion is sought so a concerned group told the government that it hasn't really made a convincing case as to why such extensive development is necessary. It said the government might just be creating another "white elephant."

A white elephant is "a possession that is useless or troublesome, especially one that is expensive to maintain or difficult to dispose of."

The Chinese idiom that has the same meaning is "大而無當" (*da4 er2 wu2 dang1*). "大" (*da4*) means "big," "而" (*er2*) "but," "無" (*wu2*) "without," "nil" and "當" (*dang1*) "suitable." Literally, it is "big but not suitable."

Like white elephant, the idiom means "large but impractical," "big and burdensome."

## Idiom by Lon Yan

When you have a big and growing population for which you have to provide homes and jobs, pressing ahead with development is inevitable.

But it is also true that public administrators have a knack for creating things that are "大而無當" (*da4 er2 wu2 dang1*). Many would point to projects such as the West Kowloon Cultural District to say there are plenty of examples. So you can't blame people for being skeptical.

The opposite of "大而無當" (*da4 er2 wu2 dang1*) is "短小精悍" (*duan3 xiao3 jing1 han4*), which describes a person not of imposing stature but who is strong and capable. Figuratively, it means terse and forceful, like writings that are short and sharp.

### Terms containing the character "當" (*dang1*) include:

當然 (*dang1 ran2*) – naturally; as it should be

當選 (*dang1 xuan3*) – to be elected

當初 (*dang1 chu1*) – originally; at first

當局 (*dang1 ju2*) – the authorities