

自生自滅

zi4 sheng1 zi4 mie4

Another marathon in the mainland - in Anhui province this time - has come under fire for lacking proper organization.

The 1,500 participants, including Hong Kong and international runners, discovered support along a 30-kilometer mountain track was inadequate.

Some roadside stations had no food, drinking water or medical supplies. Some offered tangerines and coke instead, but runners complained that the carbonated drinks upset their stomachs, causing them to throw up.

Hong Kong participants said signposts were confusing or absent at crossroads. Runners had the feeling that they were left to “自生自滅” (*zi4 sheng1 zi4 mie4*).

“自” (*zi4*) is “self,” “生” (*sheng1*) “to live,” “to grow,” “to be born” and “滅” (*mie*) “to die,” “to extinguish,” “to go out.” Literally, “自生自滅” (*zi4 sheng1 zi4 mie4*) is “self live, self die.” It describes the process of nature where things are

Idiom by Lon Yan

born, live and perish on their own without intervention by anyone.

But the idiom has also taken on a negative meaning of being indifferent for the welfare, or even life or death of other people. When you leave someone or something to “自生自滅” (*zi4 sheng1 zi4 mie4*) you pay no attention and will not offer help even if it is needed.

The idiom can also be applied, figuratively, to objects. Allowing a company to “自生自滅” (*zi4 sheng1 zi4 mie4*) does not mean that it has freedom to operate anyway it likes. It means no one is concerned anymore about the fate of it, and no one cares if it fails.

Terms containing the character “滅” (*mie4*) include:

消滅 (*xiao1 mie4*) - to wipe out

滅亡 (*mie4 wang2*) - to die out

滅門 (*mie4 men2*) - to exterminate an entire family

滅火器 (*mie4 huo3 qi4*) - a fire extinguisher