

自不量力

zi4 bu2 liang4 li4

A man grabbed a knapsack containing more than HK\$10,000 in cash from a fruit stall in Shanghai Street, Yau Ma Tei, as it was closing for the day at about 2am.

The stall owner and his wife gave chase. After dashing 250 meters, the suspect apparently became tired and dropped the bag before continuing to flee “in slow mo.”

The stall owner caught up and subdued him only a short distance away with the help of passersby.

Any attempt at theft is ill-conceived, but this one is particularly foolish, considering the age of the suspect and his physical condition. He was described as a 60-year-old man with a conspicuously bulging midsection. For him to think that he could outrun his pursuers is what we call “自不量力” (*zi4 bu2 liang4 li4*).

“自” (*zi4*) is “self,” “不” (*bu2*) “not,” “no,” “量”

Idiom by Lon Yan

(*liang4*) “estimate,” and “力” (*li4*) “power,” “strength,” “force,” “ability.” Literally, “自不量力” (*zi4 bu2 liang4 li4*) is “self not estimate ability.”

If you dive headlong into a situation without first considering whether you are capable of handling it, it is “自不量力” (*zi4 bu2 liang4 li4*). The idiom means “to overestimate one’s strength or oneself,” “not to know one’s own limitations.”

“You “自不量力” (*zi4 bu2 liang4 li4*)!” means you are “out of your depth.” You are telling the person he or she does “not have the knowledge, experience or skills to deal with a particular subject or situation.”

Terms containing the character “量” (*liang4*) include:

力量 (*li4 liang4*) – physical strength; force

量度 (*liang2 du4*) – measurement; to measure

思量 (*si1 liang4*) – to consider

份量 (*fen4 liang4*) – a quantity of