

飢不擇食

ji1 bu4 ze2 shi2

Two masked men who robbed a Yuen Long petrol station were dubbed “vacuum cleaner weirdos” by the local media as besides taking some cash they grabbed a vacuum cleaner on the way out.

Those who saw the security footage were baffled as to what use the robbers could put such a cheap appliance, and wondered if they were expecting guests and their home needed a quick cleanup.

A day later in Sham Shui Po, another “weirdo” robbed two convenience stores within six minutes, grabbing an HK\$8 bottle of juice from the first one, and some money and a pack of cigarettes from the other.

Perhaps these robbers were just desperate, so they took whatever they could lay their hands on, which can be described by the idiom “飢不擇食” (*ji1 bu4 ze2 shi2*).

“飢” (*ji1*) is “hunger,” “hungry,” “不” (*bu4*) “no,”

Idiom by Lon Yan

“not,” “擇” (*ze2*) “to select,” “to choose,” and “食” (*shi2*) “to eat.” Literally, “飢不擇食” (*ji1 bu4 ze2 shi2*) is “hungry no choosing what to eat.” The idiom means “a hungry person is not choosy about his food,” “all food is delicious to those who are starving” or “beggars can’t be choosers.”

When a person has been out of employment for too long, he or she will jump at any job offer, however meager the pay. That is “飢不擇食.” A company that has been in the red will take whatever business that comes its way. This is also “飢不擇食.” Some would even use the idiom to describe those who are desperate to find a girlfriend or boyfriend!

Terms containing the character “擇” (*ze2*) include:

選擇 (*xuan3 ze2*) – to select; to choose

擇要 (*ze2 yao4*) – to summarize; a synopsis

擇偶 (*ze2 ou3*) – to choose a spouse

擇吉 (*ze2 ji2*) – to select an auspicious day for marriage etc.