

# 萬人空巷

wan4 ren2 kong1 xiang4

Cheung Chau held its yearly bun festival recently, and the media used the idiom “萬人空巷” (wan4 ren2 kong1 xiang4) to describe the scene.

“萬” (wan4) is “ten thousand,” “人” (ren2) “people,” “空” (kong1) means “empty,” “hollow” and “巷” (xiang4) “a lane,” “an alley.” Literally, “萬人空巷” (wan4 ren2 kong1 xiang4) is “ten thousand people empty lane.”

The lanes and alleyways were empty because everybody had gone to a big event. So “萬人空巷” (wan4 ren2 kong1 xiang4) means “everyone in the city turns out,” “the whole town turns out to see some great event.”

“萬人” (wan4 ren2) can, of course, mean more than 10,000 people. It just describes a large number of people, figuratively.

The idiom is used to describe an event that attracts a big crowd. The firework shows in Hong Kong draw hundreds of thousands of

## Idiom by Lon Yan

people to the waterfront on both sides of the harbor, and the scene is “萬人空巷” (wan4 ren2 kong1 xiang4).

Protesters turning out in force to stage a sit-in in Central should not be called “萬人空巷” (wan4 ren2 kong1 xiang4), nor should riots on the streets of Mong Kok, because the idiom is used in relation to a happy and festive event.

A more colloquial and commonly used idiom with a similar meaning is “人山人海” (ren2 shan1 ren2 hai3) - literally “people mountain people sea,” which vividly describes a very crowded scene.

### Terms containing the character “萬” (wan4) include:

萬一 (wan4 yi1) - in case of; if by any remote chance

萬分 (wan4 fen1) - extremely; uncommonly

萬全 (wan4 quan2) - sure-fire

億萬富翁 (yi4 wan4 fu4 weng1) - a billionaire