

千瘡百孔

qian1 chuang1 bai3 kong3

A group of parents are campaigning for the scrapping of the Primary Three TSA, or Territory-wide System Assessment tests. They say schools give extra work to students to prepare for it, putting unnecessary pressure on children.

The TSA is not the local education system's only problem. Many other issues have been raised over the years. Over-emphasizing rote learning, under-emphasizing English training, an ill-conceived examination in liberal studies and making children compete too hard at too young an age are just a few of them.

Something that is plagued with problems, whether it is an education system, an organization, or even a country, may be described by the idiom “千瘡百孔” (*qian1 chuang1 bai3 kong3*).

“千” (*qian1*) is “a thousand,” “瘡” (*chuang1*) is “a sore,” “a skin ulcer,” “a wound,” “百” (*bai3*) is “a hundred” and “孔” (*kong3*) is “a hole,” “an

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opening.” Literally, “千瘡百孔” (*qian1 chuang1 bai3 kong3*) is “a thousand sores, a hundred holes.”

Anything that is riddled with holes, sores and wounds, cannot be healthy or good. So “千瘡百孔” means “full of ills and troubles,” “in a disastrous state.” Another version “百孔千瘡” (*bai3 kong3 qian1 chuang1*) means the same.

The idiom may even be used to describe the world's most famous clock, Big Ben. The 156-year-old monument is “so dilapidated (破舊) its giant hands could fall off any minute.” The clock is so “千瘡百孔” (*qian1 chuang1 bai3 kong3*) that it would take HK\$349.4 million and a year to fix it.

Terms containing the character “瘡” (*chuang1*) include:

惡瘡 (*e4 chuang1*) – malignant sores, ulcer

瘡疤 (*chuang1 bai*) – a scab, wound scars

凍瘡 (*dong4 chuang1*) – frostbite

痔瘡 (*zhi4 chuang1*) – hemorrhoids