

嚴刑峻法

yan2 xing2 jun4 fa3

Few dispute that murder or kidnapping should be dealt with severely. But jaywalking is a law that many just can't stop griping about.

When Los Angeles started to fine people US\$250 (HK\$1,950) for the offense, residents staged a civil disobedience "jaydancing" protest downtown. The city is now considering whether the penalty is too high.

But those in the City of the Angels should consider themselves lucky when compared to counterparts in Nova Scotia, Canada, who face a C\$700 (HK\$3,906) fine for jaywalking.

A bill to raise the penalty has recently passed third reading. It feels especially harsh as the fine in one Canadian province is only C\$30. Those in Nova Scotia and Los Angeles must feel the penalty for what they see as a rather minor offense is "嚴刑峻法" (yan2 xing2 jun4 fa3).

"嚴" (yan2) is "strict," "stern," "刑" (xing2) is "punish-

Idiom by Lon Yan

ment," "峻" (jun4) means "high," "harsh," "severe," and "法" (fa3) is the law. Literally "嚴刑峻法" (yan2 xing2 jun4 fa3) is "stern punishment, severe law."

嚴刑 (yan2 xing2) mean "harsh punishments," "tortures," "inflexible administration of justice," and 峻法 (jun4 fa3) is harsh and rigid laws. The idiom means "severe law," "draconian law."

"嚴刑峻法" is not necessarily bad. It really depends on the kind of law and order problem that you are dealing with. In a place overrunning with criminals, "嚴刑峻法" (yan2 xing2 jun4 fa3) is the only way to go.

In Hong Kong, jaywalking carries a maximum fine of HK\$2,000. So we can't really say it is "嚴刑峻法."

Terms containing the character "嚴" (yan2) include:

嚴禁 (yan2 jin4) – strictly forbidden

莊嚴 (zhuang1 yan2) – solemn

嚴父 (yan2 fu4) – stern father

嚴重 (yan2 zhong4) – grave, serious