

自毀長城

zi4 hui3 chang2 cheng2

Some Hong Kong people have been complaining about mainland visitors. Those who do not like to see them coming in great numbers staged protests and took action that made the visitors feel very unwelcome (不受歡迎).

And, as they had hoped, the number of mainland visitors dropped, and the local retail and tourist industries suffered.

Hang Lung Properties chairman Ronnie Chan Chi-chung recently said the retail market was healthy. But he was quick to add that it would have performed better had local people been more hospitable (友好的, 好客的), not hostile, toward mainland visitors.

Many countries are trying hard to woo (爭取) mainland tourists but we are turning them away. Action described above will damage or even destroy the advantage we enjoy, and can be described as “自毀長城” (*zi4 hui3 chang2 cheng2*).

“自” (*zi4*) is “self,” “毀” (*hui3*) means “to damage,” “長” is “long” and “城” (*cheng2*) is “city wall.” Literally, “自毀長城” (*zi4 hui3 chang2 cheng2*) is “self damage long city wall.”

Idiom by Lon Yan

The characters “長城” (*chang2 cheng2*) form the Great Wall of China. The Great Wall was a mammoth project completed painstakingly over many years. It formed an impregnable (攻不破的) bulwark (保障) to protect China against invasion by its enemies.

It is unwise, to say the least, for someone living within the safety provided by the Great Wall to damage it. The idiom, therefore, means a self-destructive (自毀的) act, or action that weakens one's position or is contrary to one's interest.

A similar idiom is “自毀前程” (*zi4 hui3 qian2 cheng2*), meaning to ruin one's career by one's own hand. For example, when someone commits a crime or a serious mistake and ruins his or her career, we can say the person has 自毀前程.

Terms containing the character “毀” (*hui3*) include:

毀壞 (*hui3 huai4*) - destroy

詆毀 (*di3 hui3*) - to slander, discredit

毀容 (*hui3 rong2*) - to disfigure one's face

毀滅 (*hui3 mie4*) - to completely destroy