

有驚無險

you3 jing1 wu2 xian3

There has been a series of accidents involving escalators (扶手電梯) lately.

In Hubei, a young mother died after falling through a broken footplate of an escalator. In Shanghai, a cleaning worker got his foot trapped in the machinery (機件) of an escalator. His foot had to be amputated (截肢).

In Hong Kong, a woman was going down an escalator with a baby in a Tai Po shopping mall when two wheels of her stroller (手推嬰兒車) got stuck between moving steps.

A passerby (過路人) pressed the emergency button (緊急掣) and calmly helped the mother pull the pram free. The pram lost two wheels but the mother and baby were unharmed.

When an accident ends in serious injuries or death, it is a tragedy. When neither injury nor damage is caused, we call it “有驚無險” (*you3 jing1 wu2 xian3*).

“有” (*you3*) is “to have,” “驚” (*jing1*) means “fear,”

Idiom by Lon Yan

“fright,” “無” (*wu2*) is “without” and “險” (*xian3*) is “danger,” “risk.” Literally, “有驚無險” (*you3 jing1 wu2 xian3*) is “to have fear without danger.”

The idiom is used to describe a situation that is scary or threatening, but does not result in real harm. It means “to be more scared than hurt,” “threatening but not dangerous.”

Strictly speaking, the situations described by the idiom are usually dangerous. How can it not be dangerous when a stroller with a baby in it is trapped on a moving escalator? “險” (*xian3*) in that context, means actual harm.

English expressions with a similar meaning include “a close shave” and “a narrow escape.”

Terms containing the character “險” (*xian3*) include:

凶險 (*xiong1 xian3*) - extremely hazardous, dangerous

冒險 (*mao4 xian3*) - take risks

遇險 (*yu4 xian3*) - meet an accident

脫險 (*tu01 xian3*) - escape from crisis or