

# 袖手旁觀

*xiu4 shou3 pang2 guan1*

A woman was robbed on a Sham Shui Po street in the wee hours of the morning by three people who were pretending to ask for directions. As the Good Samaritan was answering their questions, they snatched her handbag and ran.

The victim shouted for help as she gave chase, but had to give up after 100 meters because the robbers were apparently in better physical condition.

The woman sustained minor injuries and as she was wheeled onto an ambulance on a gurney, she complained that other people on the street just “袖手旁觀” (*xiu4 shou3 pang2 guan1*).

“袖” (*xiu4*) is “sleeve,” “to tuck inside one’s sleeve,” “手” (*shou2*) “a hand,” “旁” (*pang2*) “by the side” and “觀” (*guan1*) is “to observe,” “to watch.” Literally, “袖手旁觀” “hand in sleeve on the side watch,” “to watch on the side with hands tucked in sleeves.”

## Idiom by Lon Yan

It means “to watch with folded arms,” “to look on unconcerned”, “not willing to help.” This incident appears to show that people in Hong Kong, like in some other big cities, are apathetic to the suffering of others, as they watched and did not help.

“旁觀” (*pang2 guan1*) is to watch from the side. Another kind of “旁觀” (*pang2 guan1*) is “冷眼旁觀” (*leng3 yan3 pang2 guan1*), which is, literally, “watch on the side with cold eyes.”

But this idiom has nothing to do with indifference. It means to observe with a cool head, and not getting emotionally involved, “the cool eye of a bystander,” “a detached point of view.”

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**Terms containing the character “觀” (*guan1*) include:**

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觀察 (*guan1 cha2*) – to observe

觀眾 (*guan1 zhong4*) – spectators

觀點 (*guan1 dian3*) – a point of view

觀塘 (*guan1 tang2*) – Kwun Tong