

拔刀相助

ba2 dao1 xiang1 zhu4

Hong Kong is not such a heartless city after all.

After a street robbery in which the victim lamented about people ignoring her cries for help, the public reacted to a second robbery involving her in a completely different manner.

The victim, "Sleeping Granny," is a 74-year-old who mans her Mong Kok newspaper kiosk around the clock and sleeps there too.

She was injured when she tussled in vain with the robber to defend her hard-earned money. A passerby intervened by yelling at the robber though he still got away.

The next day two professional medical caregivers came to clean and dress the woman's wound, others brought food. A little girl gave up her *laissez* money. A customer asked for a newspaper, handed over a HK\$1,000 banknote and said "keep the change." In two days, HK\$100,000 was raised.

The action of everyone who had helped is called "拔刀相助" (*ba2 dao1 xiang1 zhu4*).

Idiom by Lon Yan

"拔" (*ba2*) is "to pull out," "刀" (*dao1*) "a knife," "a sword with a curving edge," "相" (*xiang1*) is "each other" and "助" (*zhu4*) "to help." "相助" (*xiang1 zhu4*) is "to come to somebody's help." Literally "拔刀相助" (*ba2 dao1 xiang1 zhu4*) is "pull out a sword to help another." The idiom means "to defend the weak against the strong."

To help someone fight off armed bandits, you must have the ability to do so or you will just become one more victim, hence the "pulling out sword" reference. But this is not ancient China, and people do not need to whip out a weapon to help. The idiom is used generally to describe people who offer help, especially assisting someone who is facing a stronger party.

Terms containing the character "助" (*zhu4*) include:

幫助 (*bang1 zhu4*) – to help; to assist

助手 (*zhu4 shou3*) – an assistant; an aide

無助 (*wu2 zhu4*) – helpless; unaided

援助 (*yuan2 zhu4*) – to support