

來勢洶洶

lai2 shi4 xiong1 xiong1

Hong Kong came to standstill last Tuesday as Typhoon Nida swept through the territory, packing gale-force winds and gusts of more than 100 km an hour with torrential rain.

Thousands of passengers were stranded as over 300 flights were rescheduled. Schools and businesses were closed. Nida also battered other areas in southern China, putting cities including Guangzhou, Zhuhai and Shanwei on emergency alert.

As the powerful typhoon was approaching Hong Kong, the media described it as “來勢洶洶” (*lai2 shi4 xiong1 xiong1*).

“來” (*lai2*) is “to come,” “to arrive,” “勢” (*shi4*) “power,” “strength,” “來勢,” as a term, means “oncoming force.” “洶” (*xiong1*) is “the sound of rushing water,” “torrential rush” and “洶洶” (*xiong1 xiong1*) means “violent,” “turbulent”. Literally, “來勢洶洶” (*lai2 shi4 xiong1 xiong1*) is “oncoming force violent.”

The idiom means “to break out in full fury,” “to bear

Idiom by Lon Yan

down menacingly.” Forces of nature like typhoons, tsunamis, floods or landslides are deadly and unstoppable, so when they are coming, they are menacing, hence “來勢洶洶” (*lai2 shi4 xiong1 xiong1*). “來勢洶洶” (*lai2 shi4 xiong1 xiong1*) can also be used to describe dangerous situations that threaten to cause severe and widespread damage, like the Asian financial turmoil in 1997 and the financial tsunami in 2008. As these crises were “來勢洶洶” (*lai2 shi4 xiong1 xiong1*), everyone took cover.

The idiom can also describe people. When angry employees charge into the manager’s office, they can be said to be “來勢洶洶” (*lai2 shi4 xiong1 xiong1*).

Terms containing the character “勢” (*shi4*) include:

勢力 (*shi4 li4*) – power; influence

趨勢 (*qu1 shi4*) – a trend; a tendency

大勢所趨 (*da4 shi4 suo3 qu1*) – an irresistible general trend

失勢 (*shi1 shi4*) – to lose power and influence