

# 自暴其短

zi4 bao4 qi2 duan3

The Rio Olympics was a mess. Subway extensions were not finished in time, the Olympic village had leaky pipes, diving pools turned Jell-O green due to an algae infestation, the sea where sailing and windsurfing events were held was filled with garbage, human excrement and “the occasional corpse.”

So people are laughing at the Brazilian government, saying it was simply not ready, and has “自暴其短” (*zi4 bao4 qi2 duan3*).

“自” (*zi4*) means “self;” “暴” (*bao4*) is “暴露” (*bao4 lu4*) “to expose,” “to reveal;” “其” (*qi2*) “that,” “that person’s;” and “短” (*duan3*) “short,” “a weak point,” “a flaw.” Literally, “自暴其短” (*zi4 bao4 qi2 duan3*) is “expose one’s own weak point.”

It means “to expose one’s own weakness or flaw without being asked,” “to spontaneously reveal one’s shortcomings.”

Most people would not want to flaunt a weakness. But many are not even aware of their shortcomings, like someone who sings horribly but enters a nationally televised singing contest, which is “自暴其短.”

## Idiom by Lon Yan

The idiom is used to describe people who choose to make a fool of themselves in front of everyone by attempting something beyond their capabilities.

Some, however, said no Olympics host can be said to be ready.

The 2010 Vancouver games was called a “downhill slide from disaster to calamity;” Beijing used extreme measures to hide dire air pollution; Atlanta 1996 was a “transportation nightmare.” Weren’t all host cities, then, “自暴其短” (*zi4 bao4 qi2 duan3*)?

So it made a lot of sense when a Hong Kong coach refused to jump on the bandwagon by grumbling, saying the team was there to compete, not to nit-pick!

### Terms containing the character “短” (*duan3*) include:

短褲 (*duan3 ku4*) – shorts

短期 (*duan3 qi1*) – short-term

短缺 (*duan3 que1*) – shortage

短暫 (*duan3 zan4*) – temporary