

Idiom by Lon Yan

火花四濺

huo3 hua1 si4 jian4

A presidential race is not an exercise where you show mercy to your opponent. So when US presidential candidates Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton faced off at their first television debate, the two went at each other's throats.

They called into question each other's capability and character, practically calling each other a liar, a cheat and an imbecile. The media described the process of the debate as “火花四濺” (*huo3 hua1 si4 jian4*).

“火” (*huo3*) is “fire,” “flame,” “花” (*hua1*) “flower,” “四” (*si4*) “four” and “濺” (*jian4*) “to splash,” “to sprinkle,” “to spray,” “to spill.” A direct translation of “火花四濺” (*huo3 hua1 si4 jian4*) is “fire flower four spray,” which does not make much sense.

In fact, “火花” (*huo3 hua1*) is used as a

term to mean “a spark,” “a light,” “a sparkle.” The “四” (*si4*) “four” in the idiom refers to the four directions, and “四濺” (*si4 jian4*) is used as a term, meaning to spray in all directions.

So “火花四濺” (*huo3 hua1 si4 jian4*), literally, is “sparks flying in all directions.” When one says sparks fly one means to argue angrily, so when sparks fly everywhere it means “a heated argument.”

When two of your friends often argue, you can say “whenever you two get together, it would 火花四濺 (*huo3 hua1 si4 jian4*).

A slight variant of the idiom is “水花四濺” (*shui3 hua1 si4 jian4*), meaning “water spraying in every direction.” This can happen in a water park, Thailand's Songkran Festival, and your home too when a pipe breaks.

Terms containing the character “火” (*huo3*) include:

火山 (*huo3 shan1*) – a volcano

火化 (*huo3 hua4*) - cremation

火災 (*huo3 zai1*) – a fire (accident)

火藥 (*huo3 yao4*) – gunpowder; dynamite