

Idiom by Lon Yan

一鳴驚人

yi4 ming2 jing1 ren2

Lawmaker Yau Wai-ching provided everyone in town with food for talk when she used the Cantonese slang *pok ye* –literally striking something, not so literally banging, shagging – to lament the misery that unaffordable housing is inflicting on the younger generation, who, according to her, “can’t even find a room to *pok ye*.”

Some say lawmakers, as role models, should not use such coarse language. Others said the term is not strictly foul language so it’s no big deal. Yau said she was merely stating a fact.

In any event, the 25-year-old politician has become a sensation overnight, not only locally but internationally. *Time* magazine quickly ran a piece under the headline “A 25-Year-Old Hong Kong Lawmaker Wants More Space for Sex”. In a way, Yau can be

described with the idiom “一鳴驚人” (*yi4 ming2 jing1 ren2*).

“一” (*yi4*) is “one,” “once,” “鳴” (*ming2*) “the cry of a bird,” “to sound,” “to ring,” “驚” (*jing1*) is “to startle,” “be startled,” “to frighten,” “be frightened,” and “人” (*ren2*) “people.” Literally, “一鳴驚人” (*yi4 ming2 jing1 ren2*) is “one cry frightens people.”

Frightening people is not good. But “驚人” (*jing1 ren2*), when used as a term, can also mean “astonishing,” “amazing.” So “一鳴驚人” (*yi4 ming2 jing1 ren2*) means “to amaze the world with a single brilliant feat,” “to become famous overnight,” “to set the world on fire.”

But of course, some would not consider Yau’s choice of words “amazing” in any positive sense of the word, but literally “驚人” (*jing1 ren2*) – frightening, horrifying.

Terms containing the character “驚” (*jing1*) include:

驚魂 (*jing1 hun2*) – to be scared out of one’s wits; state of being frightened

驚慌 (*jing1 huang1*) – panic-stricken

驚奇 (*jing1 qi2*) – to be amazed; to be surprised

驚喜 (*jing1 xi3*) – pleasantly surprised