

Idiom by Lon Yan

虎口餘生

hu3 kou3 yu2 sheng1

A Hong Kong diver who cheated death by “jaws” has become an Internet sensation as a video of his hair-raising experience got over 18 million hits.

The diver was in a protective cage underwater during a shark-watching trip off Mexico when a great white, lured by bait, smashed through the metal bars into the cage. Only when a crew member opened the top door of the cage did the shark escape through it. The diver was unhurt but clearly shaken.

When someone has a narrow escape, we call it “虎口餘生” (*hu3 kou3 yu2 sheng1*).

“虎” (*hu3*) is “a tiger,” “口” (*kou3*) “mouth,” “餘” (*yu2*) “spare,” “remaining” and “生” (*sheng1*) “to live,” “living,” “life.” “餘生” (*yu2*

sheng1), as a term, means survival. Literally, “虎口餘生” (*hu3 kou3 yu2 sheng1*) is “life spared from a tiger’s mouth,” “to escape from the mouth of a tiger.”

If one manages to escape from a tiger, it is a close call, a lucky escape. So “虎口餘生” (*hu3 kou3 yu2 sheng1*), figuratively, means to have a narrow escape.

For the diver, the mouth he has escaped from was that of a shark, so strictly speaking, his was a case of “鯊口餘生” (*sha1 kou3 yu2 sheng1*), “鯊” (*sha1*) being a shark.

But using the idiom “虎口餘生” (*hu3 kou3 yu2 sheng1*) is appropriate, as the mouth of a tiger is an analogy for any deadly situation and the idiom refers to narrow escapes in general.

Terms containing the character “生” (*sheng1*) include:

生活 (*sheng1 huo2*) – life; existence; livelihood

生存 (*sheng1 cun2*) – to exist; to subsist

生產 (*sheng1 chan3*) – to produce; to breed

生日 (*sheng1 ri4*) – a birthday; a date of birth