

Idiom by Lon Yan

欺善怕惡

qi1 shan4 pa4 e4

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department came under fire when one of its officers issued a HK\$1,500 littering penalty ticket to an elderly woman for pouring a bucket of water on the streets.

The woman was doing cleaning work for a contractor of another government department. She told the officer the water was clean and pleaded with him not to give her the ticket but the officer refused to listen. She was distraught and started to cry.

The scene was captured on video by a passerby, uploaded onto social media and triggered a public uproar. Some called the department merciless. Others said officers “enforced the law selectively,” habitually targeting the old and weak but do not issue tickets to mean-looking men with body art.

This is what we called “欺善怕惡” (*qi1 shan4 pa4 e4*). “欺” (*qi1*) is “欺負” (*qi1 fu4*),

meaning “to bully,” “善” (*shan4*) is “善良” (*shan4 liang2*), “kind-hearted,” “gentle,” “怕” (*pa4*) “to fear” and “惡” (*e4*) “evil,” “wicked,” “wickedness”. Literally, “欺善怕惡” (*qi1 shan4 pa4 e4*) is “bully kind people and fear the wicked ones”.

The idiom means “to impose oneself upon those who are kind and fear those who are severe,” “to bully the faint-hearted and fear the stout-hearted,” “to bully the good people and be scared of the evil ones.”

Another version of the idiom is “欺軟怕硬” (*qi1 ruan3 pa4 ying4*), literally “bully the soft and fear the tough,” meaning “to bully the weak and fear the strong,” “to be meek toward the brutes and brutal toward those who are meek.”

Terms containing the character “惡” (*e4*) include:

惡霸 (*e4 ba4*) – a bully

惡意 (*e4 yi4*) – a bad intention; malice

惡化 (*e4 hua4*) – to deteriorate; to worsen

兇惡 (*xiong1 e4*) – fierce; ferocious