

Idiom by Lon Yan

一錘定音

yi4 chui2 ding4 yin1

The way a few rebellious lawmakers took their oaths at the Legislative Council has created much trouble and debate.

Theatrics staged inside and outside the council chamber aside, there had been much argument over whether the oaths in question are valid or invalid. The question of whether the Legco president has the power to allow a second swearing-in attempt was also at issue. The matter has been taken to court.

The cacophony of bickering over legal and constitutional fine prints that lasted for weeks were finally put to rest when the NPC came out with its interpretation of the relevant provisions, and the move was called “一錘定音” (*yi4 chui2 ding4 yin1*).

“一” (*yi4*) is “one,” “錘” (*chui2*) “a hammer,” “定” (*ding4*) “to fix,” “to set” and “音” (*yin1*)

“sound,” “tone.” Literally, “一錘定音” (*yi4 chui2 ding4 yin1*) is “to fix the tone with a single hammer blow,” “to set the tune with one beat of the gong.” Figuratively, it means “to give the final word,” “to make the final decision.”

The NPC did not actually use a hammer, but it is the highest authority to decide what the Basic Law of the Hong Kong SAR means. Its decision is final, hence when it speaks, it is “一錘定音” (*yi4 chui2 ding4 yin1*).

In court, the judge’s decision is final, so is that of the auctioneer in an auction, and they both use a hammer or gavel. They strike the gavel to signify their final decision, which is actually a kind of “一錘定音” (*yi4 chui2 ding4 yin1*) too.

Terms containing the character “音” (*yin1*) include:

音樂 (*yin1 yue4*) - music

音樂家 (*yin1 yue4 jia1*) - musician

音響 (*yin1 xiang3*) – sound; acoustics

收音機 (*shou1 yin1 ji1*) – a radio set