

# Idiom by Lon Yan

## 雞毛蒜皮

*ji1 mao2 suan4 pi2*

Lawmakers have been keeping police busy with their antics, including hurling deadly objects like glasses, pelting each other with less deadly objects like luncheon meat, and snatching folders containing confidential documents.

These conducts are certainly uncivilized and unbecoming of members of a law-making body, but whether they are serious enough to warrant police intervention was controversial.

Glass-throwing apparently is, as the lawmaker involved was actually given prison time for it. But some said these were just “雞毛蒜皮” (*ji1 mao2 suan4 pi2*) matters on which police resources should not be wasted.

“雞” (*ji1*) is “chicken,” “毛” (*mao2*) “feather,” “hair,” “蒜” (*suan2*) “garlic” and “皮” (*pi2*) “skin,” “peel.” “雞毛” (*ji1 mao2*) is “chicken feather” and “蒜皮” (*suan2 pi2*) is “garlic skin.” Literally, “雞毛蒜皮” (*ji1 mao2 suan4 pi2*) is “chicken feathers and garlic skins”.

Chicken feathers can be used to make duster, but they are rather worthless.

Though garlic skin was found to contain “six separate antioxidant compounds which help fight the ageing process and protect the heart” and you can actually eat it, this is not widely known and people just throw them away as organic waste.

As both chicken feather and garlic skins are considered of little value or importance, “雞毛蒜皮” (*ji1 mao2 suan4 pi2*) means, figuratively, “petty or trifling things,” “triviality;” “a matter of very small importance.”

Another expression Hong Kong people use to describe trivialities is “芝麻綠豆” (*zhi1 ma lu4 dou4*). “芝麻” (*zhi1 ma*) is “sesame” and “綠豆” (*lu4 dou4*) “mung beans,” both of which are very small, hence mean “insignificant.”

### Terms containing the character “皮” (*pi2*) include:

皮膚 (*pi2 fu1*) – skin

皮帶 (*pi2 dai4*) – a leather belt

皮鞋 (*pi2 xie2*) – leather shoes

皮蛋 (*pi2 dan4*) – hundred-year egg