

Idiom by Lon Yan

處變不驚

chu4 bian4 bu4 jing1

A middle-age man in a Spiderman T-shirt came up with a get rich real quick idea. He walked into a bank in Tsim Sha Tsui, approached a woman teller, declared robbery and handed over a note bearing the words "Want HK\$2 million in 2 minutes".

The teller calmly acknowledged the robber's demand but secretly triggered the alarm while signaling to her colleague that something was wrong.

She then acted like she was complying, told the robber to wait, and managed to stall long enough for the police to come and take the man away. The Chinese media said the teller has "處變不驚" (*chu4 bian4 bu4 jing1*).

"處" (*chu4*) is "be located at," "變" (*bian4*) "to change," "changes," "transform," "不" (*bu4*) "no," "not" and "驚" (*jing1*) "to frighten," "be frightened." Literally, "處變不驚" (*chu4 bian4*

bu4 jing1) "located in change not frightened," "not frightened despite being in the middle of changes."

In the idiom, "變" (*bian4*) denotes sudden changes, a crisis, unexpected developments. These are situations that can easily trigger panic. And if one suddenly find oneself in the middle of such a situation and is not frightened, it shows "presence of mind despite a calamity," "the ability to keep calm in the face of a crisis," which is what the idiom means.

"處變不驚" (*chu4 bian4 bu4 jing1*) is the quality of good leaders, especially in lines of work that are dangerous, such as emergency workers and the military.

The idiom "臨危不亂" (*lin2 wei1 bu2 luan4*) has a similar meaning – not panicky when face to face with danger.

Terms containing the character "變" (*bian4*) include:

變化 (*bian4 hua4*) – a change; to vary

變數 (*bian4 shu4*) – variable; a factor of uncertainty

變成 (*bian4 cheng2*) – to become; to change into

變戲法 (*bian4 xi4 fa3*) – to perform magical tricks