

Idiom by Lon Yan

潑婦罵街

po1 fu4 ma4 jie1

Another meeting at the Legislative Council descended into a shouting match with councillors hurling insults at one another and the chairman stepping in to abort it half-way.

The latest charade took place at a Finance Committee meeting at which salary rise for top civil servants was discussed. As usual, relevant issues were rendered irrelevant as the meeting spent the bulk of its time debating, instead, a Chinese idiom, namely “潑婦罵街” (*po1 fu4 ma4 jie1*).

The squabbles started when Democratic Party's Ted Hui Chi-yau used it on DAB's Ann Chiang Lai-wan in response to the latter hitting out at the democratic camp's filibustering.

When you insult a fellow lawmaker, you have no business staying in the meeting, or

so the chairman Chan Kin-por decided. So Hui was ousted accordingly, which, of course, sparked yet another world war between the opposing camps.

“婦” (*fu4*) is “a woman,” “a married woman,” “潑婦” (*po1 fu4*) is “a vixen,” “a shrew,” “a bad-tempered or aggressively assertive woman,” “a spiteful and quarrelsome woman,” “罵” (*ma4*) “to scold,” “to abuse,” “街” (*jie1*) “a street,” and “罵街” (*ma4 jie1*) is “to use abusive language in public,” “to shout abuses in public.” Literally, “潑婦罵街” (*po1 fu4 ma4 jie1*) is “vixen shouting abuses on the street.”

The idiom means “an aggressively assertive woman shouting abuse in the street.” It is quite clear whether it is an insult or a term of endearment, and as it is used exclusively on women, it is a sexist one too!

Terms containing the character “罵” (*ma4*) include:

罵人 (*ma4 ren2*) – to scold or yell at someone

責罵 (*ze2 ma4*) – to dress down; to scold; to rebuke

痛罵 (*tong4 ma4*) – to scold severely

罵戰 (*ma4 zhan4*) – a war or words; exchanging insults