

Idiom by Lon Yan

蕭規曹隨

xiao1 gui1 cao2 sui2

Critics called financial secretary Paul Chan Mo-po's maiden budget “蕭規曹隨” (*xiao1 gui1 cao2 sui2*).

“蕭” (*xiao1*) is the surname “Xiao,” “規” (*gui1*) “a rule,” “a regulation,” “曹” (*cao2*) is the surname “Cao” and “隨” (*sui2*) “to follow,” “to comply with.” Literally, “蕭規曹隨” (*xiao1 gui1 cao2 sui2*) is “Xiao’s rules, Cao follows.”

Xiao in the idiom refers to Xiao He (蕭何), a minister in the Han Dynasty in China, and Cao refers to Cao Shen (曹參), Xiao’s successor. After taking up as minister, Cao simply followed rules and regulations set up by Xiao and did not change them.

When the emperor questioned him, Cao said since Xiao was cleverer and the rules were good, there was really no need to change them. The idiom means “merely followed rules set up by one’s predecessor.”

Critics used “蕭規曹隨” (*xiao1 gui1 cao2 sui2*) to criticize Chan for simply following what his predecessor John Tsang Chun-wah has done – giving little of the humongous surplus back to the people.

There are, of course, different views as to how public money should be spent. But following the route of one’s predecessor isn’t necessarily bad if the previous way of running things is good.

But of course, taxpayers would want more than just “sweeteners,” seeing that the surplus has bloated to a staggering HK\$92.8 billion, with fiscal reserves at a new high of HK\$935.7 billion.

They wanted Chan not to “蕭規曹隨” (*xiao1 gui1 cao2 sui2*) and be more generous and give back more.

Terms containing the character “規” (*gui1*) include:

規則 (*gui1 ze2*) – rules, regulations; dos and don’ts

規劃 (*gui1 hua4*) – to plan; to map out

規模 (*gui1 mo2*) – scale; scope

違規 (*wei2 gui1*) – to violate rules