

# Idiom by Lon Yan

## 金蟬脫殼

*jin1 chan2 tuo1 ke2*

A robber broke the show window of a Tsim Sha Tsui jewelry store with a sledgehammer in broad day light, grabbed a 6.6-carat diamond ring worth over HK\$5 million and fled.

The escape was well planned – he went into a toilet, took off his black T-shirt, black pants, black shoes, black gloves and face mask and changed into a red T-shirt, matching running shoes, grey sports pants, an army-style jacket, and emerged carrying a briefcase. The media called his tactic “金蟬脫殼” (*jin1 chan2 tuo1 ke2*).

“金” (*jin1*) is “gold,” “golden,” “蟬” (*chan2*) “cicadas,” “脫” (*tuo1*) “to shed,” “to take off” and “殼” (*ke2*) “a shell.” “脫殼” (*tuo1 ke2*) means “the shedding of shell (by insects, crabs or shrimps),” “molting.” Literally, “金蟬脫殼” (*jin1 chan2 tuo1 ke2*) is “golden cicada sloughing off its skin.”

“金蟬脫殼” (*jin1 chan2 tuo1 ke2*) is one of the tactics in the Thirty-Six Stratagems, an old Chinese essay on maneuvers in wars and politics.

It involves leaving one’s distinctive traits behind to become inconspicuous, or masquerade as something or someone else to escape from a stronger enemy.

The idiom means “to escape secretly,” “to slip away by casting off one’s cloak,” “to slip out of a predicament like a cicada sloughing its skin.”

But the tactic didn’t really work for the robber, as he had forgotten that this is the 21st century and there are things called security cameras everywhere, which caught the entire process of his “金蟬脫殼” (*jin1 chan2 tuo1 ke2*). He has been duly identified and is the subject of a manhunt.

### Terms containing the character “脫” (*tuo2*) include:

脫離 (*tuo1 li2*) – to depart from; to break away from

脫色 (*tuo1 se4*) – to fade; to decolor

脫罪 (*tuo1 zui4*) – to be exonerated

脫貧 (*tuo1 pin2*) – to cast off poverty