

Idiom by Lon Yan

害人害己

hai4 ren2 hai4 ji3

Chinese newspapers like to call burglars Spiderman as they gain entry into homes in high rise buildings by climbing water pipes and scaffolding, like the comic book hero.

The main difference is that these midnight climbers possess neither the skills nor the special powers of the superhero. And after a fall from great height, they die, and stay dead.

That was what happened to a burglar who was first spotted scaling the scaffolding on the outer wall of a Happy Valley building under renovation, and then found lying motionless on the ground six floors below. Tragic as it was, that was rather clearly a case of “害人害己” (*hai4 ren2 hai4 ji3*).

“害” (*hai4*) is “to damage,” “to injure,” “to harm,” “to kill,” “to murder;” “人” (*ren2*) “human being,” “a person,” “people,” “others,” “other people.” “害人” (*hai4 ren2*) “to harm

others.” “己” (*ji3*) is “self,” “oneself.” “害己” (*hai4 ji3*) is “to harm oneself.”

Literally, “害人害己” (*hai4 ren2 hai4 ji3*) is “harm others, harm self.” It means “to bite off one’s own head,” “curses come home to roost.” It is an observation and a warning that those who set out to hurt others would just hurt themselves.

A slightly different and extended version of the expression is “害人終害己” (*hai4 ren2 zhong1 hai4 ji3*) which means “The one who hurt others ended up hurting himself or herself,” with “終” (*zhong1*) meaning “the end,” “finally.”

“害人害己” (*hai4 ren2 hai4 ji3*) is also being used in cases where people do things that harm themselves and others, like going wind surfing in a typhoon.

Terms containing the character “害” (*hai4*) include:

害怕 (*hai4 pa4*) – to fear; to be scared

害羞 (*hai4 xiu1*) – shy; bashful

害蟲 (*hai4 chong2*) – a pest; vermin

害病 (*hai4 bing4*) – to fall sick