

Idiom by Lon Yan

毛遂自薦

mao2 sui4 zi4 jian4

Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-Ngor unveiled a new arrangement for the appointment of members to public affairs and advisory bodies in her government.

Instead of relying on Central Policy Unit recommendations, policy secretaries may find suitable candidates. Citizens interested in serving the community may also recommend themselves.

Asking people to volunteer to sit on boards and committees is a novel idea, but people have long been volunteering for public service, as is evidenced by the idiom – “毛遂自薦” (*mao2 sui4 zi4 jian4*).

“毛” (*mao2*) is “hair,” “feather,” “遂” (*sui4*) “to satisfy,” “to fulfill” “to succeed,” “then,” “自” (*zi4*) “self,” and “薦” (*jian4*) “to recommend” “to offer.”

But in this idiom “毛” (*mao2*) and “遂” (*sui4*) have nothing to do with hair, feature

or success. It refers to Mao Sui (毛遂) of the State of Zhao (趙國) during the Warring States Period in ancient China who offered his services and helped to negotiate a successful alliance with the State of Chu (楚國) to fight the common enemy Qin (秦國).

Literally, “毛遂自薦” (*mao2 sui4 zi4 jian4*) is “Mao Sui recommends himself”. It means “to volunteer for a task,” “to recommend oneself.”

Application for jobs usually require recommendations and references from your former bosses. Self-recommendations, in most cases, wouldn't do. But as “毛遂” (*mao2 sui4*) has demonstrated, such a proactive move could elevate one from obscurity to idiom-inspiring fame.

So people may consider following in the footsteps of Mr Mao.

Terms containing the character “毛” (*mao2*) include:

毛巾 (*mao2 jin1*) – a towel

毛衣 (*mao2 yi1*) – a woolen sweater

毛筆 (*mao2 bi3*) – a Chinese writing brush

毛病 (*mao2 bing4*) – a defect; a shortcoming; a fault