

Idiom by Lon Yan

以柔制剛

yi3 rou2 zhi4 gang1

A video online showed a rather dramatic scene on an MTR train in which a man shouted abuses at a younger man and hit the seat next to him hard repeatedly with a portable shopping cart.

The older man was obviously very agitated. He was heard accusing the young man of having bumped into him deliberately. But even if that was true, it certainly did not justify such nasty behavior.

What was amazing was that the younger man was totally unperturbed, continuing to look at his smartphone leisurely as if nothing was happening.

His calm way of responding, or more accurately, not responding to the other person's aggressive behavior has apparently kept the situation from escalating and getting out of hand. So he won praises from

netizens, and people said a lot of the society's problems would have been solved if everyone acts like the young man.

His way of dealing with the older man's tantrum was “以柔制剛” (yi3 rou2 zhi4 gang1).

“以” (yi3) means “to use as,” “to use,” “柔” (rou2) “soft,” “gentle,” “mild,” “制” (zhi4) “to control,” “to prevail,” and “剛” (gang1) “hard,” “solid,” “unyielding.” It means “剛強” (剛強), which is “firm,” “staunch,” “tough.” Literally, “以柔制剛” (yi3 rou2 zhi4 gang1) is “use gentleness to control hardness.” The idiom means “to use gentle and subtle ways to counter brute force.”

“以柔制剛” (yi3 rou2 zhi4 gang1) is often the better way of dealing with a difficult situation. Facing opposition, persuasion is always better than fighting. That is an example of “以柔制剛” (yi3 rou2 zhi4 gang1).

Terms containing the character “柔” (rou2) include:

溫柔 (wen1 rou2) – gentle and soft; sweet-natured; mild

柔和 (rou2 he2) – subdued; tender; soft

柔軟 (rou2 ruan3) – tender; delicate; supple

柔順 (rou2 shun4) – gentle and agreeable; yielding; submissive