

Idiom by Lon Yan

時移勢易

shi2 yi2 shi4 yi4

Dozens of state secondary and primary schools in the UK are allowing boys to wear skirts, and a private school that charges £6,790 a term (HK\$68,860) is planning to follow suit.

More schools in western countries are also adopting gender-neutral toilets, and some are advocating to allow parents not to specify their babies' gender on birth certificates. These changes are meant to promote diversity, and to show more sensitivity to transgender people.

They were quite inconceivable just a few decades ago, and they are the natural result of “時移勢易” (*shi2 yi2 shi4 yi4*).

“時” (*shi2*) is “time,” “times,” “移” (*yi2*) “to move,” “to shift,” “to change,” “勢” (*shi4*) “power,” “influence,” “a trend,” and “易” (*yi4*) “to change,”

“to alter,” “to shift.” Literally, “時移勢易” (*shi2 yi2 shi4 yi4*) is “times shift, trends change.”

“勢” (*shi4*) is “形勢” (*xing2 shi4*), meaning “the situation,” “the status of affairs,” “the trend of events.” “時移勢易” (*shi2 yi2 shi4 yi4*) means “the times have changed and the situation have shifted.”

Another version of the idiom is “時移世易” (*shi2 yi2 shi4 yi4*) with “勢” (*shi4*), trend, being replaced with “世” (*shi4*), meaning “世界” (*shi4 jie4*), the world. “時移世易” (*shi2 yi2 shi4 yi4*) means “the times have changed and the world has changed” which is essentially the same.

Yet another version of the idiom is “時移俗易” (*shi2 yi2 su2 yi4*) – customs change with the times.

Terms containing the character “移” (*yi2*) include:

移動 (*yi2 dong4*) – to move; to shift; to change

移交 (*yi2 jiao1*) – to transfer; to turn over; to hand over to one's successor

轉移 (*zhuan3 yi2*) – to shift; to transfer; to pass on

移民 (*yi2 min2*) – an immigrant; to immigrate