

Idiom by Lon Yan

突如其來

tu1 ru2 qi2 lai2

Torrential rain swept Hong Kong last week as the year's first black rain warning was issued. The deluge overloaded storm drains were overloaded and caused flooding everywhere.

Streets were rendered unpassable and pedestrians ran for cover. And at Shau Kei Wan Main Street East, a taxi was caught in flooding. In the news picture, one can see that the vehicle was half submerged in water, like it had run into a small pond.

The driver said the rain was so heavy he had to stop the vehicle. Suddenly, water started to gush in left right and center. Fortunately he had the presence of mind to open the door and ran for safety. What had happened could be described as “突如其來” (*tu1 ru2 qi2 lai2*).

“突” (*tu1*) means “sudden,” “abrupt,”

“unexpected,” “unannounced,” “如” (*ru2*) is “as,” “like,” “其” (*qi2*) “that,” and “來” (*lai2*) “come,” “arrive.” Literally, “突如其來” (*tu1 ru2 qi2 lai2*) is “sudden as it comes.” The idiom means “to come all of a sudden,” “to happen unexpectedly” “to arise abruptly,” “to arrive suddenly.”

“突如其來” (*tu1 ru2 qi2 lai2*) can be used to describe many situations that happens suddenly and unexpectedly. It is similar in meaning to the English expression “out of the blue.”

The idiom is usually used to describe unpleasant happenings, like the coming of a piece of bad news. When someone won the lottery, we wouldn't usually say he or she “突如其來” (*tu1 ru2 qi2 lai2*) becomes a multi-millionaire.

Terms containing the character “突” (*tu1*) include:

突破 (*tu1 po4*) – a break through; to make a breakthrough

突出 (*tu1 chu1*) – to stand out; protruding; outstanding

突擊 (*tu1 ji1*) – a surprise attack or raid

衝突 (*chong1 tu1*) – a conflict; to clash