

Idiom by Lon Yan

苦不堪言

ku3 bu4 kan1 yan2

Lan Kwai Fong (蘭桂坊) is world famous. The official local travel guide Discover Hong Kong describes it like this: "Thanks to Hong Kong's dominance in Asian cinema, this centre of late-night revelry is so renowned that its official street sign is more photographed than many of the celebrities who haunt its clubs."

The place in Central is "one of Hong Kong's most popular nightlife hot spots and home to over 90 restaurants and bars," the description continues, "Mostly, the area is crowded with people from the surrounding offices of Central, eager to shake off the working day or week."

Lan Kwai Fong and its surrounding SoHo district may be the favorite haunt of night owls and tourists who want action after night fall, but its attractive features are also the very reason residents there are "苦不堪言" (*ku3*

bu4 kan1 yan2).

"苦" (*ku3*) is "bitter," "pains," "sufferings," "painful," "不堪" (*bu4 kan1*) "can't bear," "can't stand," "utterly," "extremely," and "言" (*yan2*) "speech," "words." Literally, "苦不堪言" (*ku3 bu4 kan1 yan2*) is "pain that one can't bear to talk about." The idiom means "to suffer untold misery and hardship," "to be indescribably painful."

The residents are "苦不堪言" (*ku3 bu4 kan1 yan2*) because the streets below never go to sleep, so people who live there can't get proper sleep even with the help of sleeping pills.

The idiom describes the plight of having to go through hardship of any kind. If your boss makes you take a double-shift, work on weekends, and cut your salary too, you can lament: "It's really 苦不堪言 (*ku3 bu4 kan1 yan2*)!"

Terms containing the character "苦" (*ku3*) include:

苦惱 (*ku3 nao3*) – vexed; distressed

苦難 (*ku3 nan4*) – sufferings; miseries; hardship

苦心 (*ku3 xin1*) – painstaking effort

苦瓜 (*ku3 gua1*) – bitter melon