

Idiom by Lon Yan

出師不利

chu1 shi1 bu2 li4

An elevated platform in the middle of the stage gave way during the rehearsal of the 25th anniversary concert of artiste, lyricist and composer Andrew Lam Man-chung.

Dancers and guest singers Calvin Choy Yat-chi and brother Remus Choy Yat-kit of the Grasshopper group suffered injuries. The incident delayed the start of the concert that evening, and the media used the idiom “出師不利” (*chu1 shi1 bu2 li4*) to describe the setback.

“出” (*chu1*) is “to exit,” “to produce,” “to go out,” “師” (*shi1*) “a teacher,” “master,” “a skilled or qualified practitioner of certain professions,” “a military division,” “不” (*bu2*) “no,” “not” and “利” (*li4*) “advantageous,” “advantage,” “benefit,” “smooth-sailing,” “smooth-going.”

“出師” (*chu1 shi1*) means “to dispatch troops to fight,” “to send out an army,” and “不利” (*bu2 li4*) is “unfavorable,”

“disadvantageous,” “adverse,” “unsuccessful.” “出師不利” (*chu1 shi1 bu2 li4*), literally, is “troops encounter problems the moment they are dispatched.”

Figuratively, the idiom means “a bad start,” “an unsuccessful beginning,” “running into problems at the start.” As the concert encountered trouble even before it started, it was a case of “出師不利” (*chu1 shi1 bu2 li4*).

Accidents happen. What counts is how you deal with them. In this case, the team revised the rundown in the short time before the show to avoid the problematic platform, and the performance on both evenings of the show went smoothly.

Clearly, “出師不利” (*chu1 shi1 bu2 li4*) doesn't have to spell disaster if you are capable of effectively handling contingencies!

Terms containing the character “利” (*li4*) include:

利益 (*li4 yi4*) – benefits; gain; advantage

利率 (*li4 lü4*) – interest rate

利潤 (*li4 run4*) – profits; returns

利器 (*li4 qi4*) – a sharp weapon; an edged tool