

Idiom by Lon Yan

回頭是岸

hui2 tou2 shi4 an4

A prominent local family is locked in a high-profile feud, with brothers airing their side of the story separately to the press. Protracted litigation appears unavoidable, and one member of the family made an emotional appeal for everyone to stop the dispute, using the idiom “回頭是岸” (*hui2 tou2 shi4 an4*).

“回” (*hui1*) is “to go back to,” “to go back,” “頭” (*tou2*) “the head.” “回頭” (*hui2 tou2*) is “to turn one’s head,” “to turn round,” “to repent,” “to come to one’s senses.” “是” (*shi4*) means “is,” “are,” and “岸” (*an4*) “a coast,” “a shore.”

Literally, “回頭是岸” (*hui2 tou2 shi4 an4*) is “turn back and there is shore,” “turn your head to see the shore.” The idiom is part of the Buddhism teaching “苦海無邊，回頭

是岸” (*ku3 hai3 wu2 bian1, hui2 tou2 shi4 an4*), meaning “The sea of bitterness has no bounds, turn your head to see the shore.”

“回頭是岸” (*hui2 tou2 shi4 an4*) means “repent and be saved”, “repentance is salvation.”

The idiom is often usually used as an advice to someone who has gone astray. It is a wake-up call to turn back from a wrong path that leads to grave consequences.

It can be said used to advice a young person who is using drugs, or a friend who is gambling away everything. “回頭是岸” (*hui2 tou2 shi4 an4*) is full of wisdom: you keeps swimming out to the open sea, you will definitely get drowned!

Terms containing the character “岸” (*an4*) include:

岸邊 (*an4 bian1*) – shore; shore-side

海岸 (*hai3 an4*) – a sea front; a coast

對岸 (*dui4 an4*) - the other side of the harbor (river, lake)

上岸 (*shang4 an4*) – to go ashore; to go on shore (from a ship)