

Idiom by Lon Yan

冥頑不靈

ming2 wan2 bu4 ling2

A woman was prosecuted by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department for illegal hawking and obstruction of public place. She was 75-year-old, and was at the time selling cardboards for HK\$1 a piece to domestic helpers. The incident sparked public outrage and protests.

The charges were subsequently dropped after the department sought Department of Justice advice, and "having considered the background of the accused." Meanwhile, the related staff association expressed concerned that frontline officers have been "demonized" by the public.

The department stressed the importance of enforcing the law to keep the streets unobstructed, which is, of course, its duty. But it is not the first time hygiene officers were said to have picked on the old and feeble. And despite repeated public criticisms, such

controversies just kept coming.

The idiom to describe people who refuse to mend their way despite repeated advices is "冥頑不靈" (*ming2 wan2 bu4 ling2*).

"冥" (*ming2*) is "dark," "obscure," "頑" (*wan2*) "stubborn," "obstinate," "冥頑" (*ming2 wan2*) means "thickhead," "stupid," "不" (*bu4*) is "no," "not," "靈" (*ling2*) "clever," "quick," "alert."

Literally, "冥頑不靈" (*ming2 wan2 bu4 ling2*) is "thickhead and not clever."

"冥頑不靈" (*ming2 wan2 bu4 ling2*) means "slow-witted," "silly and clumsy," "impenetrably thickheaded," "impervious to reason or advice," "insensitive," "inanimate," "stupid," "dull."

"冥頑不靈" (*ming2 wan2 bu4 ling2*) is an expression teachers in the old days often used to shame students who they saw as incorrigible (屢教不改的; 不可救藥的).

Terms containing the character "靈" (*ling2*) include:

靈活 (*ling2 huo2*) – agile; with good flexibility

靈感 (*ling2 gan3*) – inspiration

失靈 (*shi1 ling2*) – to fail; to malfunction; to break down

不靈 (*bu4 ling2*) – to be ineffective