

Idiom by Lon Yan

舉步維艱

ju3 bu4 wei2 jian1

It has been suggested that quality people are reluctant to join the government these days as officials are subject to harsh and unfair criticisms on a daily basis. Even their families and friends are sometimes harassed.

Also some politicians have made it quite impossible for officials to do their job, with incessant filibustering and opposition every step of the way. The situation has been described as “舉步維艱” (*ju3 bu4 wei2 jian1*).

“舉” (*ju3*) means “to raise,” “to lift,” “步” (*bu4*) “a step,” “a pace.” “舉步” (*ju3 bu4*) means “to step forward,” “to stride forward.” “維” (*wei2*) means “to hold together,” “to maintain,” but in this context, it is used interchangeably with “是” (*shi4*) – “is,” “to be,” and “艱” (*jian1*) “difficult,” “hard.”

Literally, “舉步維艱” (*ju3 bu4 wei2 jian1*) is “hard to take a step forward”. When it is hard to even take one step forward, the situation must be very bad. So the idiom means, figuratively, “a difficult situation,” “difficult circumstances.”

The idiom is used mostly in relation to work. When you are asked to do a project which requires substantial manpower and money, but you’ve been given none, the situation is “舉步維艱” (*ju3 bu4 wei2 jian1*).

There are other idioms that contain “維艱” (*wei2 jian1*) – “is hard.” “生活維艱” (*sheng1 huo2 wei2 jian1*) means “it is hard making a living”, and “時運維艱” (*shi2 yun4 wei2 jian1*) means “the times are difficult.”

Terms containing the character “維” (*wei2*) include:

維持 (*wei2 chi2*) – to keep; to maintain; to preserve

維護 (*wei2 hu4*) – to conserve; to safeguard; to defend

維繫 (*wei2 ji4*) – to hold together; to maintain; to keep up

維他命 (*wei2 ta1 ming4*) – vitamins