

Idiom by Lon Yan

墨守成規

ren2 shen2 gong4 fen4

When a 91-year-old lady is walking down slippery stairs, do you let her risk falling, or do you hold her to make sure she's safe?

That was a question Governor General of Canada David Johnston had to struggle with recently as he accompanied Queen Elizabeth II while she walked down red-carpeted stairs outside London's Canada House following an event to celebrate 150 years of Canadian independence.

Johnson opted for safety and took the Queen's elbow, but the British media took issue with him "breaking protocol", saying no one is supposed to touch the Queen.

Anyone with an iota of good sense would do the same as Johnson. And to say protocol trumps safety in this situation was typical "墨守成規" (*mo4 shou3 cheng2 gui1*).

"墨" (*mo4*) is "ink," "black," and "守" (*shou3*) "to guard," "to defend." "墨守" (*mo4 shou3*) means "to guard (tradition) vigilantly," "resist

change." "成規" (*cheng2 gui1*) is "established rules," "set rules," "a rut." Literally, "墨守成規" (*mo4 shou3 cheng2 gui1*) is "vigilantly guarding established rules."

The idiom means "to stick to established practice," "hidebound by convention," "stick to precedents," "to follow stereotype routine." The idiom has a negative connotation of refusing to change with the times, being obstinate.

It was not the first time foreign political figures have come under fire from the British press for breaching the "成規" (*cheng2 gui1*) of "no touching the monarch."

But it really depend how the Queen felt. When Michelle Obama hugged her, Buckingham Palace said there has been no breach of protocol and called the hug a "mutual and spontaneous display of affection and appreciation."

Terms containing the character "規" (*gui1*) include:

規劃 (*gui1 hua4*) – to plan; a scheme

規則 (*gui1 fan4*) – rules; regulations

規定 (*gui1 ding4*) – to stipulate; to specify; a rule

規模 (*gui1 mo2*) – scale; scope