

Idiom by Lon Yan

行差踏錯

xing2 cha1 ta4 cuo4

Steve the security robot was found one morning lying face down in a foot of water at the Washington Harbour mall in Georgetown, US, where it was supposed to be patrolling.

Initial reports said it had died from drowning. Investigators did not suspect foul play, as the robot was not pushed. But it was baffling how a high-tech machine with sensors could have just plunged four steps into the fountain? So some suggested that Steve was "suicidal." Others set up an altar at the mall and put flowers there in mourning.

But the manufacturer later said Steve was actually still alive, though "in critical condition." The near demise of Steve showed the importance of not to "行差踏錯" (*xing2 cha1 ta4 cuo4*).

"行" (*xing2*) is "to walk," "behavior," "差" (*cha1*) "to err," "to make mistake," "踏" (*ta4*) "to tread," "to make a step," "step on" and "錯" (*cuo4*) "a mistake," "faults." Literally, "行差踏錯" (*xing2 cha1 ta4 cuo4*) is "to take the wrong road and missteps."

"行差踏錯" (*xing2 cha1 ta4 cuo4*) is a Cantonese expression, meaning to go astray, and has the same meaning as "誤入歧途" (*wu4 ru4 qi2 tu2*) – "to go on the wrong track," "to lose or miss one's way," "to go astray."

These expressions are mostly used for their figurative meaning. When young people drop out of school and mix with criminals, we say they have "誤入歧途" (*wu4 ru4 qi2 tu2*), and parents often warn their children not to "行差踏錯" (*xing2 cha1 ta4 cuo4*).

Terms containing the character "錯" (*cuo4*) include:

錯誤 (*cuo4 wu4*) – a mistake; an error

錯覺 (*cuo4 jue2*) – an illusion; a delusion

錯過 (*cuo4 guo4*) – to miss (train, opportunity etc)

錯字 (*cuo4 zi4*) – a misspelt word