

Idiom by Lon Yan

人強馬壯

ren2 qiang2 ma3 zhuang4

The Hong Kong Jockey Club's equestrian team is taking part in this year's National Games in Tianjin, and the headline of an article about them used the idiom “人強馬壯” (*ren2 qiang2 ma3 zhuang4*).

“人” (*ren2*) is “a person,” “people,” “man,” “強” (*qiang2*) “strong,” “馬” (*ma3*) “horse,” and “壯” (*zhuang4*) “strong,” “to strengthen.” The characters “強” (*qiang2*) and “壯” (*zhuang4*) have similar meaning, and the term “強壯” (*qiang2 zhuang4*) means “strong,” “sturdy,” “vigorous.”

Literally, “人強馬壯” (*ren2 qiang2 ma3 zhuang4*) is “men strong, horses strong,” “strong soldiers and sturdy horses.” The idiom means a “well-equipped and well-trained troops with high morale.”

The idiom can, of course, be used to describe the excellent state of an army, but

its use is not limited to that.

Using it to describe the Jockey Club equestrian team is befitting, both literally and figuratively, as real horses and riders are involved and the team is a strong one, having won many medals in previous National Games for Hong Kong.

But the idiom applies more often to situations where no horses are involved. “人強馬壯” (*ren2 qiang2 ma3 zhuang4*) can be used to describe any group or team that is strong, such as a company that has an excellent staff, or a star-studded sports team.

Another idiom about “人” (*ren2*) and “馬” (*ma3*) is “人仰馬翻” (*ren2 yang3 ma3 fan1*), which is definitely not a situation you want to be in, as it means “to be thrown off balance,” “to be in total disarray,” “to suffer a crushing defeat.”

Terms containing the character “馬” (*ma3*) include:

賽馬 (*sai4 ma3*) – horse racing

馬術 (*ma3 shu4*) – horsemanship; equestrianism

墮馬 (*duo4 ma3*) – fall off a horse

馬路 (*ma3 lu4*) – a road; a street