

Idiom by Lon Yan

無地自容

wu2 di4 zi4 rong2

A large scale rescue operation involving over 100 firemen was staged when two hikers were reported missing after going hiking at Fei Ngo Shan in the middle of a typhoon. The couple from the mainland were eventually found and rescued after a search of many hours, and they were severely criticized for being irresponsible.

Subsequently, a long letter, believed to be written by the rescued man, was posted on Facebook.

Addressed to the "Hong Kong Fire Services and related department," the writer apologized to the emergency workers and the people of Hong Kong, admitting that "continuing to hike after a typhoon signal was hoisted was a mistake, and choosing to go on an unfamiliar trail was plain stupid."

The writer went on to say that he felt

"無地自容" (wu2 di4 zi4 rong2) for having to trouble the firemen and put them in danger.

"無" (wu2) is "without," "nil," "nothing," "地" (di4) "land," the ground," a place," "自" (zi4) "self," and "容" (rong2) "to contain," "to hold." "無地自容" (wu2 di4 zi4 rong2), literally, is "can find no place to hide oneself," "to look for a hole to crawl into."

It means "to feel too ashamed to show one's face," "to be extremely embarrassed (or ashamed)." Another version of the idiom is "無以自容" (wu2 yi3 zi4 rong2) – to be ashamed of oneself.

Apart from remorse, the letter writer expressed gratitude to the firemen for saving their lives, and for that he would "永誌不忘" (yong3 zhi4 bu2 wang4) – "to bear in mind forever," "to remember forever."

Terms containing the character "容" (yong3) include:

容易 (rong2 yi4) – easy; simple

容納 (rong2 na4) – to hold; to accommodate

容許 (rong2 xu3) – to permit; to tolerate

容忍 (rong2 ren3) – to endure; to forebear