

Idiom by Lon Yan

絕處逢生

jue2 chu4 feng2 sheng1

The Hong Kong Observation Wheel at the Central Harbourfront suddenly closed in late August due to operation problems, and it looked set to be torn down.

The community was disappointed, and lawmakers worried that the SAR's image would suffer as dismantling the wheel would give the impression that we don't know what we are doing with our tourism development.

Fortunately, the 57-metre Ferris wheel was saved from the wreckers' ball at the last-minute, when the old and new operators signed a deal to keep it turning.

It was indeed a classic case of “絕處逢生” (*jue2 chu4 feng2 sheng1*).

“絕” (*jue2*) is “to run out of,” “the end,” “處” (*chu2*) “a place,” “a point,” “逢” (*feng2*) “to come across,” “to meet by chance,” and “生” (*sheng1*) “life,” “to live.” “絕處逢生” (*jue2 chu4 feng2 sheng1*)

sheng1) means, literally, “to have the chance to survive when death seems certain,” “to come back from death's door.”

The idiom means “to get saved at a critical moment,” “to survive a crisis,” “unexpected rescue from danger,” “to recover from a seemingly impossible situation.”

Cases of “絕處逢生” (*jue2 chu4 feng2 sheng1*) happened from time to time in the commercial world. Another recent case was that of Hong Kong Cable TV, which was kept alive by new investments just as its license was about to lapse.

The idiom also applies to personal situations. When an examination for which you have failed to prepare is cancelled at the last minute, you would certainly feel “絕處逢生” (*jue2 chu4 feng2 sheng1*) too!

Terms containing the character “絕” (*jue2*) include:

絕對 (*jue2 dui4*) – absolute; absolutely

絕食 (*jue2 shi2*) – to go on a hunger strike

絕望 (*jue2 wang4*) – hopelessness; desperation

絕跡 (*jue2 ji4*) – to disappear; to vanish; to die out