

# Idiom by Lon Yan

## 針鋒相對

*zhen1 feng1 xiang1 dui4*

US president Donald Trump may not really want to start World War III, but he has certainly started many wars of words. Ever since he took office, not a day goes by without him quarreling with someone, some agencies, or some nations.

These days, his arch-rival is Kim Jong-un, whom he called “rocket man.” The North Korean leader retaliated by calling Trump a “mentally deranged US dotard.” Trump then said he would blow Kim’s country to smithereens. Kim, in turn, retorted that he would shoot US planes out of the sky. Such exchanges are called “針鋒相對” (*zhen1 feng1 xiang1 dui4*).

“針” (*zhen1*) is “a needle,” “鋒” (*feng1*) “the cutting edge of a sword,” “the sharp point of a spear.” “針鋒” (*zhen1 feng1*) is “the point of a

needle, and “相對” (*xiang1 dui4*) means “face to face,” “opposite,” “in opposition.” Literally, “針鋒相對” (*zhen1 feng1 xiang1 dui4*) is “needles pointing at each other.”

“針鋒相對” (*zhen1 feng1 xiang1 dui4*) means “to give tit for tat,” “to be diametrically opposed to,” “to oppose each other with equal harshness.” When people are in a heated argument, they will “針鋒相對” (*zhen1 feng1 xiang1 dui4*).

“針鋒相對” (*zhen1 feng1 xiang1 dui4*) is also what political groups often do, like the democratic and pro-establishment camps in Hong Kong, who just can’t bring themselves to agree on anything.

“針鋒相對” (*zhen1 feng1 xiang1 dui4*) is usually not helpful, as you would easily fall into the trap of arguing for the sake of arguing, overlooking common good.

### Terms containing the character “針” (*zhen1*) include:

針對 (*zhen1 dui4*) – to be directed against

針孔 (*zhen1 kong3*) – pinhole

針線 (*zhen1 xian4*) – needle and thread; needlework

針灸 (*zhen1 zhi4*) – acupuncture