

Idiom by Lon Yan

望而生畏

wang4 er2 sheng1 wei4

What could reduce a grown man to crawling on all fours?

Millions of viewers who have watched a viral video of a Chinese tour guide recently would say it is seeing the glass floor cracking under your feet when you are on a walkway thousands of feet above ground.

The tour guide fell to his knees as the walkway started to “crack” under his feet at East Taihang in Hebei. It turned out that the “cracks” were just virtual ones - special effects built into the glass panels. But they certainly looked real, spreading with each step the visitor takes. The man was heard shouting: “I’m scared to death!” in the 10-second video.

Some people criticized the tourist spot for not giving enough warning to visitors. The cracks may be virtual, but they could give a

visitor a real heart attack! A Chinese media report used the idiom “望而生畏” (wang4 er2 sheng1 wei4) to describe the midair glass walkway with cracks.

“望” (wang4) is “to look,” “而” (er2) “and,” “and then,” “生” (sheng1) “to produce,” “to give birth to,” “to grow,” and “畏” (wei4) “to fear,” “to respect.” Literally, “望而生畏” (wang4 er2 sheng1 wei4) is “take one look and fear arises,” “intimidated at the first glance.” The idiom means “awe-inspiring,” “terrifying,” “overwhelming.”

Peasants in the old days found policemen “望而生畏” (wang4 er2 sheng1 wei4), as these law officers were often corrupted and bullied people. Many students would get the same feeling when they look at their disciplinary master.

Terms containing the character “畏” (wei4) include:

畏懼 (wei4 ju4) – to dread; to fear; to awe

畏縮 (wei4 suo1) – to flinch; to cower

畏罪 (wei4 zui4) – to dread punishment for one’s crime; to be afraid of punishment

不畏 (bu2 wei4) – unafraid; to defy