

晴天霹靂

qing2 tian1 pi1 li4

China devalued (貶值) the yuan by 2 percent on August 12. It was the biggest one-off devaluation of the currency in 20 years. The media used terms such as “shocking move,” “surprise decision” and “surprise policy change” to describe the event.

The yuan has been appreciating (升值) for many years, and some people actually started to think that its value would never come down. No one expected the devaluation, so stock markets fell and commodity prices plunged.

The development can be described as “晴天霹靂” (*qing2 tian1 pi1 li4*). “晴” (*qing2*) means “fine,” “clear,” “天” (*tian1*) is “the sky.” “晴天” (*qing2 tian1*) means “a sunny day,” “a clear day.” “霹靂” (*pi1 li4*) is “a thunderbolt,” “a thunderclap.” Literally, “晴天霹靂” (*qing2 tian1 pi1 li4*) is “a thunderbolt from a clear sky.”

Idiom by Lon Yan

When the weather is fine, hearing a thunderclap is a surprise. So the idiom means the happening of something unexpected.

“Out of the blue” is an English expression that has a similar meaning. Like “晴天” (*qing2 tian1*), the “blue” refers to a clear blue sky.

“晴天霹靂” (*qing2 tian1 pi1 li4*) is used in relation to the sudden occurrence of bad things.

To Hong Kong people who have yuan savings, the devaluation certainly qualified as “晴天霹靂” because they have collectively lost almost 20 billion yuan (HK\$24.22 billion) because of it!

Terms containing the character “晴” (*qing2*) include:

晴朗 (*qing2 lang3*) - sunny and clear weather
晴空萬里 (*qing2 kong1 wan4 li3*) - a vast and clear sky
放晴 (*fang4 qing2*) - the sky has cleared
乍晴乍雨 (*zha4 qing2 zha4 yu3*) - alternating between rain and shine