

# 後悔不及

*hou4 hui3 bu4 ji2*

The temptation (誘惑) to grab heaps of banknotes lying unattended on the street may be too great for many to resist. But if you actually take them home, you will be making a colossal (巨大的) mistake.

This is the case of an engineer who admitted pocketing HK\$500,000 during the Christmas Eve cash-grab frenzy (瘋狂) in Wan Chai.

He had returned all the money and was seen crying and bowing repeatedly in the courtroom. The magistrate accepted the defense account that the defendant was “wracked with guilt” (後悔不堪) but nonetheless said a custodial (監禁的) sentence instead of community service appeared appropriate.

We all have done things that we wish we had not. But often, regrets come too late, and it certainly looks so for the defendant in this case. The Chinese idiom for such a scenario is “後悔不及” (*hou4 hui3 bu4 ji2*).

## Idiom by Lon Yan

“後” (*hou4*) is “after,” “悔” (*hui3*) means “regret, repent,” “不” (*bu4*) is “no” or “not,” and “及” (*ji2*) means “reach.” Literally, and taking the characters individually, “後悔不及” (*hou4 hui3 bu4 ji2*) means “after regret not reach.”

Regret is, by definition, a feeling that comes after the fact. The idiom should actually be broken up into two parts – the term “後悔” (*hou4 hui3*), which means “to regret” “to repent” and “不及” (*bu4 ji2*), “too late.”

Read this way, the meaning of “後悔不及” (*hou4 hui3 bu4 ji2*) is clear – too late to regret or repent. “後悔莫及” (*hou4 hui3 mo4 ji2*) and 悔之晚矣 (*hui3 zhi1 wan3 yi3*) are variations of the idiom which means the same as “後悔不及.”

**Terms containing the character “悔” (*hui3*) include:**

- 懺悔 (*chan4 hui3*) - to repent
- 追悔 (*zhui1 hui3*) - regret the past
- 懊悔 (*ao4 hui3*) - to regret, blame oneself
- 悔改 (*hui3 gai3*) - to repent and reform