A group of grassroots people staged a protest at the Hong Kong Golf Club in Fan Ling and demanded that the government take back the land to build public homes. They presented many reasons for their action. One of these was stated on their placards: “The powerful have land to play ball, while the poor have no land to settle.” They pointed out the housing problem facing the poor, with more than 100,000 people living in subdivided flats while 280,000 families are waiting for public housing. We can describe their action as “據理力爭” (ju4 li3 li4 zheng1).

“據” (ju4) is “according to,” “based on,” “理” (li3) means “reason,” “logic,” “力” (li4) is “force” and “爭” (zheng1) is “to compete for,” “to struggle,” “to fight for.” Literally, “據理力爭” (ju4 li3 li4 zheng1) is “according to reason force fight.”

It means “to fight for one position forcefully on the basis of reason,” “to try to convince one’s opponent with an argument.” If the management has promised a pay rise and goes back on its words, the staff should “據理力爭” (ju4 li3 li4 zheng1). “據理力爭” (ju4 li3 li4 zheng1) is not only about fighting or arguing hard for your right, but also emphases “據理” (ju4 li3) – “according to reason.” Kicking up a fuss whimsically is not “據理力爭,” but “無理取鬧” (wu2 li3 qu3 nao4) – “to create confusion or trouble, cause disturbance and disrupt order without justification.”

Terms containing the character “理” (li3) include:

- 理由 (li3 you2) - the reason
- 推理 (tui1 li3) - to reason logically, study the reason
- 理想 (li3 xiang3) - ideal
- 物理 (wu4 li3) - physics