The oldest person who took part in this year’s cross-harbor race was a 73-year-old woman. She is clearly healthy and strong. We can say that she is “老當益壯” (lao3 dang1 yi4 zhuang4). “老” (lao3) is “aged,” “old,” “當” (dang1) is “should,” “益” (yi4) is “to increase,” and “壯” (zhuang4) means “strong.” Literally, “老當益壯” (lao3 dang1 yi4 zhuang4) is “old should be stronger.” It means “old but vigorous,” “to become more vigorous with age.” “老當益壯” (lao3 dang1 yi4 zhuang4) is a compliment. All elderly people should be pleased to hear this, but make sure that it is really an elderly person you are saying it to. In this day and age, anyone 65 or under would probably not consider himself or herself “old.” So it is safer if you save “老當益壯” for people over 70, or better still, 75.

The opposite of “老當益壯” is “老態龍鍾” (lao3 tai4 long2 zhong1). “老態” (lao3 tai4) is “the manners of an aged person.” “龍鍾” (long2 zhong1) is “old appearance with bent back and unsteady steps.” “老態龍鍾” (lao3 tai4 long2 zhong1) is “to look old and clumsy,” “to be old and shaky,” “to be weighed down with age.”

This is not something you want to say in front of an old person. Not that someone who is “老態龍鍾” (lao3 tai4 long2 zhong1) is likely to physically harm you. That is just mean!

Terms containing the character “壯” (zhuang4) include:

- 壯大 (zhuang4 da4) – to grow in strength
- 壯年 (zhuang4 nian2) – the prime of life
- 強壯 (qiang2 zhuang4) – strong
- 壯士 (zhuang4 shi4) – a warrior, a hero