Economic times are bad. Even Macau, with its lucrative gaming business, is suffering, so much so that its government had to cut planned public spending.

Over 80 percent of Macau’s tax income comes from its 36 casinos, but the revenue from this source has been falling for 15 consecutive months. The rate of the fall has also been stiff – over one third – when compared to the same time last year.

The city’s gross domestic product also shrunk 26.4 percent in the second quarter – the third quarter of double-digit decreases. One can describe such a decline in Macau’s economic performance “一落千丈” (yi2 luo4 qian1 zhang4).

“一” (yi2) is “one,” “落” (luo4) is “to fall,” “to drop,” “to decline,” “千” (qian1) is “one thousand,” and “丈” (zhang4) is “a unit of length equal to 3.33 meters.” Literally, “一落千丈” means “falling one thousand zhang in one go,” or “a fall of one thousand zhang.”

Unless you are doing parachuting, plunging 3,330 meters can’t end well. So “一落千丈” means “to suffer a disastrous decline,” “to decline drastically.” An English expression having a similar meaning is “falling off a cliff.”

In school if our grades fall badly, it is most commonly called “一落千丈”. When the business of a company decreases sharply, we can say business is “一落千丈”.

Terms containing the character “落” (luo4) include:

- 起落 (qi3 luo4) – ebb and flow (of tides)
- 落幕 (luo4 mu4) – curtain down.
- 落淚 (luo4 lei4) – shed tears
- 落雨 (luo4 yu3) – it rains