The death of a runner who collapsed during the Xiamen International Half-Marathon has exposed rampant cheating in such events.

The deceased was found to be a “proxy runner” who was running in the name of someone else. Further investigation discovered 30 other proxy runners in the race.

The proxies get a fee of 200 to 300 yuan per race, and are said to be in great demand, as people hire them to get “national-class” results, which help with their application for a university place.

Those who use proxy runners can be said to be “假手於人” (jia3 shou3 yu2 ren2).

“假” (jia3) is “fake,” “false,” “手” (shou3) “a hand,” “假手” (jia3 shou3) can mean “a prosthetic hand,” but is in the idiom, it means “to do something through somebody else.” “於” (yu2) “in,” “at,” “by” and “人” (ren2) “people,” “others,” “other people.”

“假手於人” (jia3 shou3 yu2 ren2) means “to do something by means of an agent,” “by proxy,” “acting via somebody else.”

“假手於人” (jia3 shou3 yu2 ren2) is not necessary wrong. Shareholders of a company who are unable to attend a general meeting may “假手於人” (jia3 shou3 yu2 ren2) to vote – vote by proxy.

Running a marathon does not involve the hands - “手” (shou3) – but the legs – “脚” (jiao3), but having someone run for you is still “假手於人” (jia3 shou3 yu2 ren2) and not “假脚於人” (jia3 jiao3 yu2 ren2) as there is no such idiom.

Terms containing the character “假” (jia3) include:

假設 (jia3 she4) – to suppose; to assume; to presume
假裝 (jia3 zhuang1) – to feign; to pretend
假髮 (jia3 fa4) – a wig
假期 (jia4 qi1) – a holiday; a vacation