A 44-year-old man talked excitedly with the lady cashier at a restaurant at Mei King Street, To Kwa Wan. Another customer, aged 53, thought the cashier was being bullied.

Apparently seeing himself as a hero coming to the rescue of a damsel in distress, he went over wielding a weapon – a beer bottle. In a dramatic intervention, he duly smashed the glass container on the head of the “bully.”

Wounded, the 44-year-old was not down, and he punched the attacker. In the ensuing melee, both were injured and arrested. The way the 53-year-old handled the situation can be described with the idiom “不由分說” (bu4 you2 fen1 shuo1).

“不” (bu4) is “no,” “not,” “由” (you2) “to follow the wishes of,” “to allow or entrust someone to do,” “分說” (fen1 shuo1) means “to defend oneself (against a charge);” “to explain matters.”

Literally, “不由分說” (bu4 you2 fen1 shuo1) is “not allow to explain,” which is what the idiom means – “allowing no explanation,” “giving no chance to explain,” “not allowing one to speak,” “without giving sb. the opportunity to explain,” “without listening to sb.’s protests.”

“不由分說” (bu4 you2 fen1 shuo1) is never a good policy. Even if you feel aggrieved, you should at least let the other party explain. Usually, the dispute would turn out to be just misunderstanding.

“不由分說” (bu4 you2 fen1 shuo1) is not reasonable behavior. But that seems to be exactly how some of the critics have been acting. Habitually, they would “不由分說” (bu4 you2 fen1 shuo1) and launch scathing attacks at officials.

Terms containing the character “分” (fen1) include:

分析 (fen1 xi1) – to analyze; an analysis
分店 (fen1 dian4) – a branch store
分配 (fen1 pei4) – to allot; to distribute
分手 (fen1 shou3) – to part company; to separate