A new glass-bottom walkway at Yuntai Mountain (雲台山) in Henan province (河南省) started to crack, and terrified tourists rushed to get to the other side of the bridge.

A tourist said on the social media “A lot of people started to scream — and then I pushed the people in front of me so that we could run out of the way.” The scary scene can be described by the idiom “險象環生” (xian3 xiang4 huan2 sheng1).

“險” (xian3) means “danger,” “risk,” “象” (xiang4) is “an image,” “a scene,” “appearance,” “環” (huan2) is “環繞,” meaning “a chain,” “a series,” “生” (sheng1) is “to produce.” Literally, “險象環生” (xian3 xiang4 huan2 sheng1) is “dangerous scenes keep coming.”

“險象環生” (xian3 xiang4 huan2 sheng1) describes a situation in which there are a series of dangerous things happening. It means “signs of danger appearing everywhere,” “dangers lurking on all sides.”

When someone is stranded on a narrow ledge on the 20th floor of a building and almost slipped and fell to the street a few times, we can say it is “險象環生” (xian3 xiang4 huan2 sheng1).

The media used this idiom in reporting a recent incident in which objects including a wooden door flew out from the uncovered cargo hold of a truck on the Tolo Highway, narrowly missing vehicles behind. The sight of people scrambling to reach safety as the glass panes under their feet cracked certainly qualified as “險象環生” (xian3 xiang4 huan2 sheng1), considering the straight drop of thousands of feet below should the glass give way.

Terms containing the character “險” (xian3) include:

危険 (wei1 xian3) – danger
險境 (xian3 jing4) – a dangerous situation;
探險 (tan4 xian3) – adventure, explore
保険 (bao3 xian3) – insurance