

Chinese

Definition

半桶水 (Boon Tong Sui)

One day, my friend, Timmy, and I wanted to buy some equipment for the coming skiing trip in the mall, and he decided to drive his private car to there; therefore, he brought the car's key and went to the parking lot to get his car; however, the engine didn't work. As a result, he started to check the engine, yet he couldn't fix the problem. Although he had already spent almost an hour examining the car without any luck, he didn't want to give up because he thought the car could be fixed if he insisted; consequently, he spent one more hour finding out the problem. However, his effort was all in vain, for the car still went on strike. At that moment, I could say he was *Boon Tong Sui* because he wasn't good at fixing a car, but it seems too harsh to use these words; thus, I picked up a positive and encouraging phrase to cheer him up, "practice makes perfect."

Many foreign language words consist of unique characteristics which cannot be translated thoroughly into English. Hence, a clarification of the word *Boon Tong Sui* is needed so that non-native Chinese speakers can understand.

The first time I heard *Boon Tong Sui*, I was nine years old, which was my third year in primary school. I enjoyed my childhood because I spent a lot of time with my

friends and my favorite sport – soccer. After school, I always played soccer with my schoolmates on the sports ground. At that age, I didn't have any big pressure from the classes or parents. However, I did have one mission from my dad, for he always told me, "Try your best in everything and learn from that, find something that you are interested in and be a top boy in that field. Remember don't be a boy with *Boon Tong Sui*." Actually, I didn't know what it meant, so I asked my dad. He said, "*Boon Tong Sui* means that someone is not the best, or he is not good at something." In other words, it describes someone who doesn't have enough abilities to be perfect.

Actually, *Boon Tong Sui* can be translated into English directly by each term, and the phrase will be "Half Bucket of Water." In fact, the main point of this phrase is not focusing on "Bucket" or "Water", yet it describes someone, for example, Jack, who likes drawing but didn't have good skills or talent to draw, which means that he always creates some terrible artworks. In this example, drawing is like a "bucket", and his drawing skill is "Water"; Jack has bad skills in this art form, which means that his "Water" is less. In other words, if someone, like Jack, has "less Water", he could be described as "Half Bucket of Water"; namely, he is bad at something. However, one would definitely feel bewildered if he was called "Half Bucket of Water" especially for someone who is non-native Chinese. To understand *Boon Tong Sui* to the fullest extent, it may help by looking at an example of me.

Last month, I was talking with my girlfriend through Tango, which is a popular software for one to have video call with another. While chatting, we talked about many

things, and it included a topic which I was interested in – music. Because I had been practicing a song with a guitar for a while, I wanted to perform it in front of her. When she knew I was going to play the guitar for her, she looked surprised and doubted because I hadn't done anything like that before. Therefore, she kept quiet and listened to my performance until I finished the song. I felt tense and rusty during performance and made some unnecessary noise and strange rhythm. It was such as a terrifying thing for me because I was supposed to make an impeccable show, but I ruined it. I can say the show to be a *Boon Tong Sui* one in this situation; however, my girlfriend said some positive words to cheer me up instead of pointing out my defects, and I felt so warm at that moment.

Maybe someone will assume that *Boon Tong Sui* is equal to "amateur", for both of them are describing someone who is not professional yet. In some conditions, this assumption might be true since both have similar description; however, there are some differences between them. For instance, Peter likes basketball, and he has played it for more than 15 years; however, he doesn't participate in any formal training from any coach, which means that he practices his basketball skills by himself or with his teammates, and he is not a professional player, yet he still is a good player who is better than some normal players. Another example, Charlie, who also likes basketball, doesn't spend much time on it, and he only plays it once a month; as a result, his basketball skills is not good enough to defeat others. As we can see from these examples, Peter is like an amateur because he is worse than professional players but better than normal players.

On the other hand, Charlie is not an amateur but a *Boon Tong Sui* basketball player since he is worse than normal players.

Therefore, *Boon Tong Sui* can be used under these following conditions. Firstly, someone doesn't have enough abilities to be perfect. Secondly, when someone is bad at doing something and always worse than amateurs, he can be classified as *Boon Tong Sui*.

Finally, Timmy and I didn't go to the mall on that day because he almost used whole day to analyze his car, and after that day, Timmy became "an expert", for he learned how to fix a car by himself. I also learned one thing from him and that is *Boon Tong Sui* is not fearful if one has a strong and positive attitude to overcome the difficult situation even though he is a "Tyro".