

爭風吃醋

zheng1 feng1 chi1 cu4

A woman, bearing flowers and chocolate, gained entry to the government headquarters and threw foul-smelling liquid on a female employee inside.

Police tracked down the assailant the same evening. The liquid was believed to be dirty water and the victim suffered no injury, but a photocopier suffered collateral damage. Media reports suggested “爭風吃醋” (*zheng1 feng1 chi1 cu4*) to be the cause of the attack.

“爭” (*zheng1*) is “to compete for,” “風” (*feng1*) is “wind,” “吃” (*chi1*) is “to eat,” “to consume,” and “醋” (*cu4*) is “vinegar.” Literally, it is “fight for wind and consumer vinegar,” which is rather unintelligible.

In this idiom, “風” (*feng1*) refers to “風韻” (*feng1 yun4*), which is “charm,” and “爭風” (*zheng1 feng1*) means to compete to be more charming. “吃醋” (*chi1 cu4*) means feeling jealous. “爭風吃醋” (*zheng1 feng1 chi1 cu4*) means “to be jealous of a rival in a love affair,” “to fight for a man’s or a woman’s favors,” “to quarrel from jealousy.”

Idiom by Lon Yan

The connection between jealousy and vinegar was said to have come from a colorful incident involving the Emperor Taizong of Tang (唐太宗).

Taizong sent two beautiful women to the home of a capable minister to be the latter’s concubines, but the minister’s wife objected. Taizong summoned the wife and asked her to either permit the concubines or drink a “poison” wine. The wife chose the wine, which was actually vinegar. The emperor considered the wife “too jealous,” but seeing her determination, decided to let the matter go. Since then, people have been using vinegar to represent jealousy, especially in matters concerning love relations.

Terms containing the character “爭” (*zheng1*) include:

爭取 (*zheng1 qu3*) – to fight for

爭執 (*zheng1 zhi2*) – to dispute

爭奪 (*zheng1 duo2*) – to contest for

爭吵 (*zheng1 chao3*) – to quarrel