

掩人耳目

yan3 ren2 er3 mu4

Burglars broke into a Japanese restaurant in Wan Chai, taking a dozen live lobsters worth about HK\$5,000.

What do you do with 12 lobsters? You can't just go to the market and sell them. So the thieves must have a connection with seafood vendors, another restaurant where the lobsters can be used as ingredients, or are seafood lovers who intend to cook and eat them.

The shop has security cameras. These devices are supposed to act as the eyes and ears of the owner when the shop is unattended. But in this case, the "eyes" could not see because their lenses were blocked by chewing gum.

Blocking the eyes and ears of others is the literal meaning of the idiom “掩人耳目” (yan3 ren2 er3 mu4). “掩” (yan3) “to cover up,” “to shut or close,” “人” (ren2) “people,” “耳” (er3) “the ear” and “目” (mu4) “the eye.”

Idiom by Lon Yan

The purpose of covering people's eyes and ears is to ensure they do not see or listen to what you are doing. So the idiom means “to deceive the public,” “to hoodwink (遮眼、蒙蔽、欺騙) people.” It is the equivalent of the English expression “to pull the wool over someone's eyes.”

It is inconceivable that a crook who tries to deceive people will actually go up to them and physically cover their eyes and ears with their hands. But when the “eyes and ears” is a camera, you can apparently do that with a piece of chewing gum.

Terms containing the character “掩” (yan3) include:

掩飾 (yan3 shi4) - to gloss over

掩鼻 (yan3 bi2) - cover the nose

掩藏 (yan3 cang2) - to conceal, to hide

掩護 (yan3 hu4) - to shield, to cover