

匪夷所思

fei3 yi2 suo3 si1

A US man wrote to Queen Elizabeth asking her to take back control of the United States because he did not like the Republican presidential candidates.

That someone would even come up with such an idea is “匪夷所思” (*fei3 yi2 suo3 si1*). That he actually put the request to the British monarch is even more “匪夷所思” (*fei3 yi2 suo3 si1*).

The most “匪夷所思” (*fei3 yi2 suo3 si1*), however, is that the queen gave a serious reply, through her aide, politely turning down his request. “匪” (*fei3*) is the old version of “非” (*fei1*), which means “not.” “夷” (*yi2*) is “foreign tribes,” or “level,” “safe,” “ordinary,” “所” (*suo3*) is “that which” and “思” (*si1*) is “to think,” “to consider.”

Literally, “匪夷所思” (*fei3 yi2 suo3 si1*) is “thinking that is not ordinary.” It means “what one could never imagine,” “beyond com-

Idiom by Lon Yan

prehension,” “totally inconceivable.” “匪夷所思” (*fei3 yi2 suo3 si1*) is not a compliment. Calling someone’s suggestions or conducts “匪夷所思” means you think they are weird, or even outrageous. Perhaps it is a bit harsh to call Buckingham Palace “匪夷所思” (*fei3 yi2 suo3 si1*). It was probably just being nice.

Earlier this year, a six-year-old girl invited the queen to her birthday party, and her aide replied that the queen “greatly appreciated the thought and hopes you have a lovely time.” In modern day usage, the character “匪” (*fei3*) means “a robber,” “a bandit.”

Terms containing the character “匪” (*fei3*) include:

劫匪 (*jie2 fei3*) – a robber

土匪 (*tu3 fei3*) – a bandit

綁匪 (*bang3 fei3*) – a kidnapper

竊匪 (*qie4 fei3*) – a burglar