

借屍還魂

jie4 shi1 huan2 hun2

The police recently busted an unlicensed bar operated illegally from the address of a former church office on the upper floor of a busy Mong Kok commercial building.

The bar was able to operate for months without being detected as the church signage in the elevator and outside the building had not been removed. It also served only “known” customers.

Police must have been tipped off eventually, and undercover officers posing as customers discovered that the church was, in fact, not a church. *Headline Daily* used the idiom “借屍還魂” (*jie4 shi1 huan2 hun2*) to describe the cunning ploy of hiding the illegal bar behind the front of the former church office.

“幸” (*jie4*) is “to borrow,” “to take advantage of,” “屍” (*shi1*) is “a corpse,” “還” (*huan2*) is “to return to,” “to give back,” “to reinstate,” and “魂” (*hun2*) is “the soul,” “the spirit.”

Idiom by Lon Yan

Literally, “借屍還魂” (*jie4 shi1 huan2 hun2*) is “to borrow corpse to return the spirit,” “to reincarnate in someone else’s body.” It describes a rather macabre (令人毛骨悚然的) practice in Chinese folklore of resurrecting a person by having his or her spirit enter a fresh and unburied corpse.

It is used figuratively to mean “reviving something evil in a new guise,” “resurrecting a discarded or discredited idea in another guise.”

Governments will sometimes reintroduce a proposal previously rejected by the public or the legislature in another form. This kind of tactic may also be called “借屍還魂” (*jie4 shi1 huan2 hun2*).

Terms containing the character “借” (*jie4*) include:

借用 (*jie4 yong4*) - to borrow for use

借錢 (*jie4 qian2*) - to borrow money

借宿 (*jie4 su4*) - to stay overnight at somebody else’s place

借鏡 (*jie4 jing4*) - to use other people’s experience