

魚目混珠

yu2 mu4 hun2 zhu1

A restaurant was taken to court for serving beef as ostrich meat for its hotpot dishes, in contravention of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (商品說明條例). It could have been an honest mistake, but the prosecutor suggested the restaurant served beef when it ran out of ostrich meat, which is sometimes hard to get from the market.

A beef trader said it is, in fact, hard to mix up beef and ostrich meat as the latter is a darker red and has a different texture. A nutritionist said consuming beef thinking that it is ostrich meat over a long period of time may affect health as beef has a higher fat content.

Irrespective of whether the restaurant was guilty of the offense, the alleged wrongdoing is a ploy often employed by fraudsters called “魚目混珠” (*yu2 mu4 hun2 zhu1*).

Idiom by Lon Yan

“魚” (*yu2*) is “a fish,” “目” (*mu4*) is “an eye,” “混” (*hun2*) is “to mix,” “to blend,” “to pass off as,” and “珠” (*zhu1*) is “a pearl,” “a bead.” Literally “魚目混珠” (*yu2 mu4 hun2 zhu1*) is “to pass off fish eyes as pearls.” Figuratively, it means “to pass off something as genuine,” “to mix the genuine with the fake.”

Fish eyes are worthless, and pearls are valuable, hence the trick. Unscrupulous traders obviously have the know-how to make a fish eye look like a pearl. In any event, if you are mixing a few of these fake pearls with a bunch of real ones, it is probably hard to detect.

Terms containing the character “混” (*hun2*) include:

混亂 (*hun2 luan4*) – disorder, chaos

混戰 (*hun2 zhan4*) – a scuffle, a dogfight

混濁 (*hun2 zhuo2*) – muddy, murky

混凝土 (*hun2 ning2 tu3*) – concrete