

Idiom by Lon Yan

千奇百怪

qian1 qi2 bai3 guai4

A wife beater in Shandong got himself into the news recently.

The poor wife had been suffering for over 10 years before deciding to seek a divorce, but the husband wouldn't let her leave the house. When she called up the newspapers, reporters who came to investigate got beaten up too.

Being a wife beater is heinous. Trying to justify the violence makes it worse. And reporters found out that in this case, the man had been giving various weird excuses for his violent behavior, including having a dream that his wife ran away with a man.

The media called these excuses “千奇百怪” (*qian1 qi2 bai3 guai4*).

“千” (*qian1*) is “a thousand,” “奇” (*qi2*) “unusual,” “strange,” “百” (*bai3*) “a hundred” and “怪” (*guai4*) “strange,” “odd.” The term “奇怪” (*qi2 guai4*) means “odd,” “queer,”

“strange,” “surprising,” “unusual,” “peculiar,” “freakish.”

Literally, “千奇百怪” (*qian1 qi2 bai3 guai4*) is “a thousand strange, a hundred odd”. The idiom means “numerous strange forms,” “grotesque or weird shapes,” “oddities of every description.”

When we see a range of novel and interesting new inventions at an exhibition, we don't call them “千奇百怪” (*qian1 qi2 bai3 guai4*). The idiom is usually used to describe things that are unusual in a freakish (怪異的; 反常的) way.

Situations and practices that defy logic, good sense, or accepted norms can also be called “千奇百怪” (*qian1 qi2 bai3 guai4*). When a company promotes lazy workers and penalizes hard work, we can call its policies “千奇百怪” (*qian1 qi2 bai3 guai4*).

Terms containing the character “怪” (*guai4*) include:

怪事 (*guai4 shi4*) – strange happenings

怪人 (*guai4 ren2*) – a strange person

怪物 (*guai4 wu4*) – a monster

鬼怪 (*gui3 guai4*) – evil spirits