

Idiom by Lon Yan

返魂乏術

fan3 hun2 fa2 shu4

Samsung finally accepted defeat with its Galaxy Note 7 by announcing a permanent halt in sales and production.

It was not as if the phonemaker didn't try to salvage the situation after reports poured in from around the world about the cool device getting too hot, catching fire and even blowing up.

It offered new phones in exchange. But the replacements continued to get too hot, catch fire and blow up.

And when airlines started banning the devices from passenger and freight flights, and people joked about soldiers using Note 7 as incendiary bombs, there was simply no hope.

We can say that at that point Note 7, albeit one of the most sophisticated designs to date, is “返魂乏術” (*fan3 hun2 fa2 shu4*).

“返” (*fan3*) is “to return,” “魂” (*hun2*)

“soul,” “spirit,” “乏” (*fa2*) “lack” and “術” (*shu4*) “method,” “technique,” “skill.” Literally, “返魂乏術” (*fan3 hun2 fa2 shu4*) is “lack the method to return the spirit.”

The spirit leaving the body means death. And “返魂” (*fan3 hun2*) – to return the spirit to the body – means to revive the dead.

So the idiom means “there is no way to revive the dead.” It can be used in actual medical situations. When a person is already lifeless when arriving at the hospital, doctors are “返魂乏術” (*fan3 hun2 fa2 shu4*) as they can't bring the dead back to life.

“返魂乏術” (*fan3 hun2 fa2 shu4*) can also be used figuratively to say a bad situation has gotten to a point of being beyond salvaging, like Galaxy Note 7, or someone not being able to save a dead company.

Terms containing the character “術” (*shu4*) include:

算術 (*suan4 shu4*) – arithmetic

術語 (*shu4 yu3*) – a jargon; a technical term

技術 (*ji4 shu4*) – technique; technology

藝術 (*yi4 shu4*) – art