

Idiom by Lon Yan

改名換姓 *gai3 ming2 huan4 xing4*

What's in a name? Ukrainian Olexander Turin will tell you it's an iPhone 7 valued at US\$850.

In fact if you go to Ukraine, you won't find Turin – his is now iPhone 7, or iPhone Sim (Seven) in the local language. He changed his name when an electronics store offered the latest Apple product to the first five people to do so.

What iPhone 7, the man, has done is “改名換姓” (*gai3 ming2 huan4 xing4*).

“改” (*gai3*) is “to change,” “to switch to,” “名” (*ming3*) “a name,” “換” (*huan4*) “to change,” “to exchange” and “姓” (*xing4*) “surname.” Literally, “改名換姓” (*gai3 ming2 huan4 xing4*) is “change name and surname,” “to change one's first name and also change the last name.”

People change names for many legitimate reasons. In Western countries, many women still change their last name after they are

married, though more married women are now choosing to retain their original family name.

Companies sometimes change name for branding and corporate restructuring purposes.

These are cases of literal “改名換姓” (*gai3 ming2 huan4 xing4*). But the idiom is used more often to mean “to disguise oneself under an alias”.

Criminals would “改名換姓” (*gai3 ming2 huan4 xing4*) to evade capture. Crooks would do the same to avoid being found after making off with other people's money.

But disguising oneself with an alias is not necessarily for sinister purposes. Those under witness protection would certainly want to “改名換姓” (*gai3 ming2 huan4 xing4*) to avoid being killed.

Terms containing the character “改” (*gai3*) include:

改善 (*gai3 shan4*) – to improve

改革 (*gai3 ge2*) – to reform; to innovate

改過 (*gai3 guo4*) – to repent and reform

改變 (*gai3 bian4*) – to change; to transform