

Idiom by Lon Yan

粉身碎骨

fen3 shen1 sui4 gu3

Some jobs are dangerous. But in peace time, few professions would cause one to be “粉身碎骨” (*fen3 shen1 sui4 gu3*).

“粉” (*fen3*) is “powder,” “身” (*shen1*) “the body,” “碎” (*sui4*) “shattered,” “to break into pieces,” and “骨” (*gu3*) “bone.” “粉碎” (*fen3 sui4*) means “to smash,” “to pulverize,” “to shatter,” “to crumble.” Literally, “粉身碎骨” (*fen3 shen1 sui4 gu3*) is “body pulverized, bones shattered,” “torn body and crushed bones.”

When a person is “粉身碎骨” (*fen3 shen1 sui4 gu3*), death is not only certain but also horrible. So “粉身碎骨” (*fen3 shen1 sui4 gu3*) means “die horribly.”

Jobs that involve the risk of “粉身碎骨” (*fen3 shen1 sui4 gu3*) include bomb disposal or walking on high-wire. Police work or firefighting are dangerous but generally would not lead to “粉身碎骨” (*fen3 shen1 sui4*

gu3). Television artistes could suffer injuries during shooting but should never have to risk “粉身碎骨” (*fen3 shen1 sui4 gu3*).

So jaws dropped when MC Grace Chan said during live broadcast of TVB’s anniversary gala that the station’s artistes would not mind “粉身碎骨” (*fen3 shen1 sui4 gu3*) when performing their duty.

The 2013 Miss Hong Kong winner had apparently uttered the wrong idiom. Fellow artiste Carol “Do Do” Cheng, a very experienced MC herself, subtly clarified that the proper idiom to use is “奮不顧身” (*fen4 bu2 gu4 shen1*) – to do something regardless of personal safety.

Chan grew up in Vancouver and probably didn’t have the benefit of much training in Chinese, so the mistake was understandable.

Terms containing the character “碎” (*sui4*) include:

心碎 (*xin1 sui4*) – heart-broken

碎石 (*sui4 shi2*) – crushed stone; gravel

肉碎 (*rou4 sui4*) – minced meat

打碎 (*da3 sui4*) – to smash