

Idiom by Lon Yan

錯綜複雜

cuo4 zong1 fu4 za2

People wore masks when they went out as Hong Kong's air pollution rose to serious levels while the entire Pearl River Delta region was shrouded in thick smog.

Air in Hong Kong has not been clean for many year, and our beloved sight of a "blue sky with white clouds" is becoming more and more elusive.

Some say the pollutants are from the mainland, other point fingers at local sources, such as heavy traffic. Then there are the sun, the humidity and wind strength and direction. With myriad factors at play, the actual causes of local air pollution can only be described as "錯綜複雜" (**cuo4 zong1 fu4 za2**).

"錯" (**cuo4**) is "a mistake," "faults" but the character also means "alternate." "交錯" (**jiao1 cuo4**) is "to interlock," "to crisscross," "to interlace." "錯綜" (**cuo4 zong1**) means

"intricate," "complex," "complicated" and "複雜" (**fu4 za2**) "complicated," "complex," "perplexity."

"錯綜複雜" (**cuo4 zong1 fu4 za2**), literally, is "complicated and complex," and the idiom means just that - "intricate," "complex," "mazy (迷宮般的; 迷陣似的)," "reticular (網狀的; 錯綜的)," "labyrinthine," "tangled and complicated."

The idiom can be used to describe a complicated novel or movie plot, an issue, or a problem. Human relationships are notoriously easy to become "錯綜複雜" (**cuo4 zong1 fu4 za2**), hence they can caused much misery.

And when you don't want to talk about something, you can say: "This is too "錯綜複雜" (**cuo4 zong1 fu4 za2**) for me to explain and for you to understand!"

Terms containing the character "雜" (**za2**) include:

雜亂 (**za2 luan4**) – disorderly and confused

雜物 (**za2 wu4**) – miscellaneous articles or objects; junk; items of no value

雜費 (**za2 fei4**) – miscellaneous fees or expenses

雜技 (**za2 ji4**) – acrobatics and other performances