Idiom by *Lon Yan*

妖 言 惑 眾
yao1 yan2 huo4 zhong4

Hong Kong will be under an extreme cold spell and experience what could be the coldest Chinese New Year in history, with sub-zero temperate and a chance of snow.

Recently, such "weather forecast" circulated on the Internet and our weathermen were alarmed, as the information was attributed to the Hong Kong Observatory.

To dispel such rumor, the observatory published a clarification, in the form of a light-hearted conversation between a senior scientific officer responsible for forecast and his imaginary friend, warning people not to be duped.

The worry is that such wolf-crying may mislead people, and if people were lied to too many times, they may not make preparation when bad weather really comes. What those responsible for spreading such false information did was "妖言惑眾" (*yao1 yan2 huo4 zhong4*).

"妖" (*yao1*) is "a demon," "evil spirits," "evil," "fraudulent," "wicked," "言" (*yan2*) "speech," "word," "to say," "惑" (*huo4*) "to be puzzled," "to be bewildered," "to be perplexed," "to delude," "to mislead," "to fool" and "眾" (*zhong4*) "crowd", "the public."

"妖言" (*yao1 yan2*) is "evil fallacies," "heresy." Literally, "妖言惑眾" (*yao1 yan2 huo4 zhong4*) is "wicked words to bewilder the public." The idiom means "to spread fallacies to mislead people," "to spread wild rumors to blind the mind of the people."

The false weather information was most likely a prank, for it is hard to imagine what anyone would gain from spreading such rumors, except maybe a merchant who has inadvertently ordered a shipment of heavy duty ski jackets, or over-stocked electric heaters.

But spreading false information can have much more sinister motives, like destroying a competitor or shake up the stock market for a quick kill.

Terms containing the character "妖" (*yao1*) include:

妖怪 (*yao1 guai4*) – monster; globin

妖冶 (*yao1 ye3*) – seductive-looking

妖術 (*yao1 shu4*) – black magic or art

妖風 (*yao1 feng1*) – immoral atmosphere