

Idiom by Lon Yan

大費周章

da4 fei4 zhou1 zhang1

A cat went out of the window, found a comfortable spot on a ledge and settled down to watch traffic. Its owner was shocked as the flat was on the 38th floor – one wrong step and certain death.

After pleas for her beloved pet to come back was greeted with typical feline response – a disinterested yawn – the distraught owner called the SPCA. Officers arrived and improvised a rather elaborate mini-catwalk, using metal bars and wooden planks, and placed it between where the cat was sitting and the balcony.

It worked. The cat subsequently grew tired of watching traffic and sauntered back into the flat via the bridge, oblivious to fact that SPCA officers have “大費周章” (*da4 fei4 zhou1 zhang1*) to rescue it.

“大” (*da4*) is “big,” “費” (*fei4*) “expenses,” “to use,” “to waste (money or time),” “wasteful,” “周章” (*zhou1 zhang1*) is “trouble,” “pains.” Literally, “大費周章” (*da4 fei4 zhou1 zhang1*)

is “big waste of trouble and pains.” The idiom means “to take great pains,” “to go to a lot of trouble.”

Pursing worthy goals requires much effort and resources, but we do not use this idiom in those situations. “大費周章” (*da4 fei4 zhou1 zhang1*) applies to effort wasted or expended on trivial matters or unworthy causes.

If you search the whole house for your lost keys and it turns out that it was taken by your friend, you may say, “Had I known you’ve taken it, I wouldn’t have to “大費周章” (*da4 fei4 zhou1 zhang1*) to look for it!”

Terms containing the character “費” (*fei4*) include:

費力 (*fei4 li4*) – laborious; requiring strenuous efforts

浪費 (*lang4 fei4*) – to squander; to waste

消費 (*xiao1 fei4*) – to consume

免費 (*mian3 fei4*) – free of charge