

Idiom by Lon Yan

張冠李戴

zhang1 guan4 li3 dai4

The La La Land-Moonlight mix-up was crowned “the biggest mistake in Oscars history”, “the most dramatic moment in the history of the Academy Awards”.

The La La Land team was half way through their victory speeches when the movie’s producer Joran Horowitz discovered that the best picture award should have gone to Moonlight, and announced to a shocked audience “There’s a mistake. Moonlight, you won best picture.”

It was certainly an embarrassing moment for all parties concerned, but the “epic blunder” did present a welcoming comic relief from the world political mess, and food for talk for everyone.

The mistake has apparently been made at the point the results envelope was handed over to presenters Warren Beatty

and Faye Dunaway.

PricewaterhouseCoopers, the firm responsible for the Academy’s ballot-counting, apologized and said it was investigating how that could have happened.

Mixing up people’s identity is in fact quite common, and happens so frequently that it has its own idiom: “張冠李戴” (*zhang1 guan4 li3 dai4*) “張” (*zhang1*) is the surname “Zhang”, “冠” (*guan4*) “a cap”, “李” (*li3*) the surname “Li” and “戴” (*dai4*) “to wear”, “to put on.” Literally, “張冠李戴” (*zhang1 guan4 li3 dai4*) is “Zhang’s hat, Li wears”, “to put Zhang’s hat on Li’s head.”

The idiom means “to attribute something to the wrong person”, “to get people mixed up”, “to confuse a person with someone else.”

It also means “to confuse one thing with another” and “mixing up the facts.”

Terms containing the character “戴” (*dai4*) include:

穿戴 (*chuan1 dai4*) – dress; to dress

戴帽子 (*dai4 mao4 zi*) – to wear one’s hat; to stigmatize

戴假髮 (*dai4 jia3 fa4*) – to wear a wig

戴高帽 (*dai4 gao1 mao4*) – to receive a flattery or compliment; to flatter