

Idiom by Lon Yan

故弄玄虛

gu4 nong4 xuan2 xu1

A 50-year-old taxi driver was jailed 15 years for sexually assaulting the two under-aged daughters of his mistress. The accused told the victims that he was a “reborn man” who could use the sex acts to help them “avert disaster”.

The court lambasted the accused, not only for the offences but also for spinning such outrageous and bizarre tales to try to justify his perverted acts. The judge used the idiom “故弄玄虛” (*gu4 nong4 xuan2 xu1*).

“故” (*gu4*) is “intentionally,” “弄” (*nong4*) “to do, make or handle something,” “to get,” “玄” (*xuan2*) “profound,” “abstruse,” and “虛” (*xu1*) “empty,” “void,” “hollow,” “abstract,” “shapeless,” “false,” “virtual.” “玄虛” (*xuan2 xu1*) means “abstruse” (深奧的; 費解的), “mystical.”

Literally, “故弄玄虛” (*gu4 nong4 xuan2*

xu1) is “to deliberately make something abstruse.” The idiom means “to turn simple things into mysteries,” “to make a mystery of something,” “to make things unnecessarily complicated,” “to make things look unnecessarily mysterious,” “to play tricks.”

Not only devious rapists would “故弄玄虛,” many people do the same, though in less abominable circumstances. Some “故弄玄虛” (*gu4 nong4 xuan2 xu1*) to make themselves look smart, important or cool. But the motive is mostly to mislead or deceive.

The judge also denounced the accused for “妖言惑眾” (*yao1 yan2 huo4 zhong4*). This related idiom means “evil words to fool public,” “to mislead,” “to baffle the mass by spreading fallacies and lies,” “to spread wild rumors to bewilder people.”

Terms containing the character “虛” (*xu1*) include:

虛構 (*xu1 gou4*) – to make up; fabrication; fictitious

虛偽 (*xu1 wei3*) – false; hypocritical

虛弱 (*xu1 ruo4*) – feeble; debilitated; weakness

虛榮 (*xu1 rong2*) – vanity