

Idiom by Lon Yan

弄假成真

rnong4 jia3 cheng2 zhen1

A 60-year-old man pulled out a gun and pointed it at his neighbor in an open area at a Tseung Kwan O public housing estate. The gunman was apparently trying to scare the other man with whom he had a nasty quarrel a few days back.

The 37-year-old neighbor was suitably intimidated, so much so that he made a report to the police.

Even as the “gun” was believed to be a fake, the police are taking no chances, sending a team of 30 policemen in bullet-proof vest, with real guns, to lock down the building into which the gunman was seen entering, and conducted a door-to-door search. A suspect was subsequently arrested later that evening.

Fake or not, whipping out a gun in public is a very serious matter. So the man was duly

charged with criminal intimidation, which is a real criminal offence that carries the very real penalty of imprisonment.

What has happened was “弄假成真” (*nong4 jia3 cheng2 zhen1*). “弄” (*nong4*) “to play with,” “to make,” “to do,” “假” (*jia3*) “fake,” “false,” “成” (*cheng2*) “to become” and “真” (*zhen1*) “real,” “true.” Literally, “弄假成真” (*nong4 jia3 cheng2 zhen1*) is “make believe becomes real.”

The idiom means “pretense that turns into reality,” “to play at make-believe, but accidentally make it true.”

A boy who pretends to cry to attract attention, but is then spanked by his mom and starts to cry real tears is “弄假成真” (*nong4 jia3 cheng2 zhen1*). A happy variety of “弄假成真” (*nong4 jia3 cheng2 zhen1*) is screen lovers turning into real lovers.

Terms containing the character “真” (*zhen1*) include:

真心 (*zhen1 xin1*) – heartfelt; sincere

真相 (*zhen1 xiang4*) – a real situation; the actual facts

真實 (*zhen1 shi2*) – true; real; authentic

真理 (*zhen1 li3*) – truth; gospel