

Idiom by Lon Yan

如假包換

ru2 jia3 bao1 huan4

A Chinese restaurant used conch meat instead of abalone in its “abalone fried rice.” So it was fined HK\$5,000 for “false descriptions in trade or business.” The shop’s owner apologized to customers, saying that everyone connected to the mistake has been fired, and guaranteed that real abalone meat would be used from now on.

Dishonest trade practices are, in fact, quite widespread, even though many shops like to promote their products by promising “如假包換” (*ru2 jia3 bao1 huan4*).

“如” (*ru2*) is “if,” “假” (*jia3*) “fake,” “false,” “counterfeit,” “包” (*bao1*) “to undertake,” “to assume responsibility for,” “guarantee,” and “換” (*huan4*) “to exchange,” “to change.” Literally, “如假包換” (*ru2 jia3 bao1 huan4*) is “if fake guarantee exchange,” “replacement guaranteed if not genuine.”

Figuratively, it is used as an assurance that something is authentic. “如假包換” (*ru2 jia3 bao1 huan4*) is often employed by retailers as a tag line to assure customers that their products are genuine.

But even if a shop that sells fake goods exchanges a fake product for you, you would probably just get another fake one. Also, in the old days, it is hard to prove a product is fake – in the restaurant case, a DNA test had to be done to show that the meat was not abalone.

In any event, “如假包換” (*ru2 jia3 bao1 huan4*) has lost much of its relevance in this day and age when the market is flooded by fake products which people buy knowingly because they are cheap.

Terms containing the character “假” (*jia3*) include:

假如 (*jia3 ru2*) – if; supposing; in case

假冒 (*jia3 mao4*) – to counterfeit; to impersonate

假釋 (*jia3 shi4*) – to release on parole

假設 (*jia3 she4*) – to assume; to presume; to suppose