

Idiom by Lon Yan

非同小可

fei1 tong2 xiao3 ke3

For some reason, people like to toss coins. They toss them into wells and fountains, believing wishes made that way would come true. They also toss coins at tortoises at zoos and temples, thinking if the coin hits the head of the poor reptile, it would bring luck.

Recently, an 80-year-old woman even threw coins – a total of nine – at an engine of a plane on the tarmac at Shanghai’s Pudong International Airport as she was boarding. She said she believed the offering would ensure her husband, daughter, son-in-law and herself would fly safely to Guangzhou.

Eight of the coins bounced off, one disappeared inside the air intake of the engine and took hours to be found and removed. So the woman managed to, single-coinedly, delay the China Southern Airlines flight for nearly six hours.

She was let off with a caution not to do it again. Apparently, the authorities believed she was just superstitious and senile, and didn’t realize the consequences of her action could be “非同小可” (*fei1 tong2 xiao3 ke3*).

“非” (*fei1*) is “not,” “同” (*tong2*) “alike,” “equal,” “like,” “similar,” “小” (*xiao3*) “small,” “little,” and “可” (*ke3*) “can,” “may.” But as a term “小可” (*xiao3 ke3*) means “unimportant,” “trivial.” Literally, “非同小可” (*fei1 tong2 xiao3 ke3*) is “not like it’s trivial.”

The idiom means “very serious,” “tremendously important,” “no small matter.”

If you want to warn someone who is about to do something that could bring disaster, you can say, “Don’t do it! The consequences of your action is “非同小可” (*fei1 tong2 xiao3 ke3*).”

Terms containing the character “可” (*ke3*) include:

可能 (*ke3 neng2*) – possible; probably; can; may

可以 (*ke3 yi3*) – can; may; surely; certainly

可行 (*ke3 xing2*) – feasible; workable

可惜 (*ke3 xi1*) – It’s a pity; regrettable