

Idiom by Lon Yan

六月飛霜

liu4 yue4 fei1 shuang1

Unseasonal heavy snow hit the Chilean capital Santiago, and the white stuff accumulated up to nearly two inches. Local meteorologists say it was the heaviest snowfall since 2007.

There is an idiom about unseasonal weather – “六月飛霜” (*liu4 yue4 fei1 shuang1*).

“六月” (*liu4 yue4*) is “the month of June,” “飛” (*fei1*) “to fly,” and “霜” (*shuang1*) “frost,” “frost-like powder.” Literally, “六月飛霜” (*liu4 yue4 fei1 shuang1*) is “frost flying in June.”

June is supposed to be hot. Frost forms only in sub-zero weather. So having frost in June is not normal. But frost doesn't fly, snow does. So the “霜” (*shuang1*) in the idiom probably refers to snow and frost in general.

In ancient times, people believed that the gods in heaven keep a watch over the goings-on in the world, and when people do

something extremely good or bad, the gods would express their feelings through weird weather phenomenon.

The idiom was said to refer to Zou Yan and his friends of the state of Qi during the Warring States Period in ancient China who came to aid the king of Yan but was jailed by him instead. When the king saw snow starting to fly in June, he realized a grave mistake has been made and released the prisoners.

So “六月飛霜” (*liu4 yue4 fei1 shuang1*) means “grave injustice;” “a grave injustice has occurred.”

But in this day and age, unusual meteorological phenomenon like “六月飛霜” (*liu4 yue4 fei1 shuang1*) are not seen as relating to injustice, but only as the effect of global warming and climate change.

Terms containing the character “飛” (*fei1*) include:

飛機 (*fei1 ji1*) – an airplane

飛彈 (*fei1 dan4*) – a missile

飛行 (*fei1 xing2*) – aviation; to fly

飛毛腿 (*fei1 mao2 tui3*) – a fast runner