

Idiom by Lon Yan

供不應求

gong1 bu4 ying1 qiu2

Products that are good and cheap usually end up “供不應求” (*gong1 bu4 ying1 qiu2*), like Tesla’s Model 3 – the company’s cheapest model, which starts at US\$35,000 (HK\$273,000).

People love the car, so it is selling like hot cakes, with 500,000 reservations as of early August. But the company is lagging badly in production – building only 260 units in the last quarter, less than a fifth of its 1,500-unit target.

The company blamed the lower-than-expected output on “bottlenecks,” which it did not specify. But whatever that is, the situation of “供不應求” (*gong1 bu4 ying1 qiu2*) in respect of Model 3 is indeed very serious.

“供” (*gong1*) is “to provide,” “to supply,” “

不” (*bu4*) “no,” “not,” “應” (*ying1*) “to answer,” “to respond.” “應” (*ying1*) refers to “應付” (*ying4 fu4*), meaning “to handle,” “to meet,” “to cope with,” and “求” (*qiu2*) “to look for,” “to demand.” “供不應求” (*gong1 bu4 ying1 qiu2*) means “supply does not meet demand.”

The opposite situation is “供過於求” (*gong1 guo4 yu2 qiu2*) – “the supply exceeds the demand,” which usually happens when the maker of a product overestimates demand, or if demand suddenly falls due to changing circumstances.

To businesses, “供不應求” (*gong1 bu4 ying1 qiu2*) is usually a happy problem. “供過於求” (*gong1 guo4 yu2 qiu2*), on the other hand, is just a problem, for there is nothing happy about a shop full of unsold goods.

Terms containing the character “求” (*qiu2*) include:

求救 (*qiu2 xue2*) – to cry for help

要求 (*yao1 qiu2*) – to ask; to request

求職 (*qiu2 zhi2*) – to seek for employment; to apply for a post

求婚 (*qiu2 hun1*) – a proposal of marriage