

Idiom by Lon Yan

面目全非

mian4 mu4 quan2 fei1

A picture with three Chinese women, heads and chins wrapped in bandages, turned viral, not because people like to see people suffer, but because of the story behind it.

It was reported that the three were barred from boarding their plane at a South Korean airport because their faces were swollen beyond recognition after cosmetic surgery.

Immigration officers at the check point weren't able to confirm their identity using their passport pictures as they have become "面目全非" (*mian4 mu4 quan2 fei1*).

"面" (*mian4*) is "face," "目" (*mu4*) "an eye," "面目" (*mian4 mu4*), as a term, means "face," "features," "facial features," "appearance," "the appearance of things," "全" (*quan2*) "fully," "completely," "entire," "all," "whole," and "非" (*fei1*) "not," "wrong," "an error."

Literally, "面目全非" (*mian4 mu4 quan2 fei1*) is "face and eyes all wrong,"

"the appearance is totally not right." It means "everything has changed beyond recognition," "change beyond recognition."

The story was picked up by major media around the world, with the picture splashed across news pages, complete with background on the booming plastic surgery industry in South Korea.

But the South Korean Ministry of Justice has since denied that such an incident ever happened. A spokesman said the reports were "not true," and that no one was "detained or questioned at the airports because they could not be identified."

Subsequent reports also pointed out that careful examination of the picture showed the women weren't even at an airport.

If that is the case, then we can say that the original news reports have rendered the true state of affairs "面目全非" (*mian4 mu4 quan2 fei1*).

Terms containing the character "非" (*fei1*) include:

非常 (*fei1 chang2*) – very; greatly; unusual; extraordinary

非法 (*fei1 fa3*) – illegal; unlawful

非凡 (*fei1 fan2*) – remarkable; outstanding

非洲 (*fei1 zhou1*) – Africa