

Idiom by Lon Yan

誤中副車

wu4 zhong1 fu4 che1

A woman who was forced into an arranged marriage tried to kill her husband by putting poison into his glass of milk.

But the husband didn't drink the milk. Instead, it was used by the mother-in-law to make another drink, which was consumed by everyone else in the house, killing 15 of them. A few more were sent to hospital in critical condition.

The incident happened in Pakistan. The 21-year-old wife was arrested for multiple murder, and her action was a tragic case of “誤中副車” (wu4 zhong1 fu4 che1).

“誤” (wu4) is “an error,” “a mistake;” “中” (zhong1) is “to hit a target;” “副” (fu4) “secondary;” auxiliary;” and “車” (che1) “vehicle;” “car.” Literally, “誤中副車” (wu4 zhong1 fu4 che1) is “hitting the secondary vehicle by mistake.”

The idiom came from the story of a botched assassination attempt on Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇) – the First Emperor of Qin - in which the assassin, a powerful man wielding a sledgehammer weighing 120 catties, smashed a vehicle in which he thought the emperor was riding. But he only hit the “副車” (fu4 che1) – secondary vehicle.

So “誤中副車” (wu4 zhong1 fu4 che1) means to miss the real target and hit the wrong party.

The expression can be used in situations in which any attack, literal or otherwise, that misses the target and hit an innocent party, a “副車” (fu4 che1) who, in modern day state-sponsored killing missions, are euphemistically (婉轉地) referred to as collateral damage.

Terms containing the character “誤” (wu4) include:

誤會 (wu4 hui4) – misunderstanding; to get something wrong

失誤 (shi1 wu4) – a fault; a lapse; to slip up

誤導 (wu4 dao3) – to mislead; to misguide

誤殺 (wu4 sha1) – manslaughter