

# Idiom by Lon Yan

## 來歷不明

*lai2 li4 bu4 ming2*

The year 2017 will go down in local history as the “year of no crabs.” Due to food-safety problems, traders are having difficulties getting hairy crabs imported from the usual favorite mainland sources.

This means humongous losses in business – up to HK\$10 billion, according to shops, as locals consume as much as 200 tonnes of the crustacean during the three-month season every year.

When half the season has passed with no indication that the dioxin-related ban would be lifted, alternative “hairy crabs” started to appear at markets and shops, some bearing certificates of origin, which the shops readily admitted to be not genuine.

Clearly, the wait had been too long, and the craving too great that consumers are buying the crabs even if they are “來歷不明”

(*lai2 li4 bu4 ming2*).

“來歷” (*lai2 li4*) means “past history,” “background;” “不” (*bu4*) “no;” “not;” and “明” (*lai2 li4 bu4 ming2*) “clear;” “to understand.” “來歷不明” (*lai2 li4 bu4 ming2*) – “history and background not clear.”

The idiom means “of unknown origin;” “of obscure origin;” “of dubious background;” “of questionable antecedents.” It can be used to describe things and also people.

If you find a suitcase that is “來歷不明” (*lai2 li4 bu4 ming2*) outside your front door, you would not want to touch it, and should call the building manager. If someone who is “來歷不明” (*lai2 li4 bu4 ming2*) applies for a job, he or she would not be hired.

And if crabs are “來歷不明” (*lai2 li4 bu4 ming2*), you eat it at your own risk!

### Terms containing the character “歷” (*li4*) include:

歷史 (*li4 shi3*) – history

經歷 (*jing1 li4*) – one’s past experience; to go through; to experience

歷程 (*li4 cheng2*) – a course; a progress

歷險 (*li4 xian3*) – to experience adventures