

Idiom by Lon Yan

毀屍滅跡

hui3 shi1 mie4 ji4

Tokyo police found “multiple” dismembered bodies when they searched an apartment while investigating the case of a missing woman.

A 27-year-old jobless man was arrested, and media reports said he has confessed to cutting up the bodies after killing the victims before stuffing the body parts in cold-storage boxes covered with cat litter. Police said the suspect told them he did that to hide the evidence.

The suspect’s action is “毀屍滅跡” (*hui3 shi1 mie4 ji4*).

“毀” (*hui3*) is “to damage,” “to destroy,” “屍” (*shi1*) “a corpse,” “滅” (*mie4*) “to extinguish,” “to exterminate,” and “跡” (*ji4*) “a mark,” “a trace,” “vestiges.” Literally, “毀屍滅跡” (*hui3 shi1 mie4 ji4*) is “to chop up a corpse and obliterate all traces,” “to bury the corpse in

order to destroy all traces of one’s crime.”

The idiom can be used literally, as in Japan or with other murder cases. It can also be used figuratively to mean “to destroy evidence,” “to obliterate any trace.” Destroying evidence and traces of one’s action usually involves crimes, like murder.

But when an accountant shreds falsified accounting records, or a burglar gets rid of all stolen property, we can also call it “毀屍滅跡” (*hui3 shi1 mie4 ji4*), even if it does not actually involve an actual human body.

The idiom may even be used in situations that involves no crime. When a boy breaks a vase and sweeps up and hides all broken pieces so that his parents would not find out, it is also a kind of “毀屍滅跡” (*hui3 shi1 mie4 ji4*).

Terms containing the character “滅” (*mie4*) include:

滅火 (*mie4 huo3*) – to put out a fire

滅口 (*mie4 kou3*) – to silence someone by killing him or her

滅亡 (*mie4 wang2*) – to die out; to be destroyed

滅門 (*mie4 men2*) – to terminate an entire family