虚驚一場

*xu1 jing1 yi4 chang3*

Bird flu is a scary epidemic and we cannot be too careful about preventing an outbreak (疫症爆發). So when a test sample of chickens at a farm in San Tin was “unusual” more tests had to be done. Fortunately, the follow-up tests did not find any evidence (證據) of bird flu, and the chicken farm was given the all clear to restart sales to the market. Had there been an actual infection, the aftermath (後果) could have been bad. All 38,000 chickens on the farm might have been culled (屠宰).

The incident can be called “虚驚一場” (*xu1 jing1 yi4 chang3*). “虚” (*xu1*) means “false,” “unreal,” “驚” (*jing1*) is “startled,” “frightened,” “fear,” “一” (*yi4*) is “one,” and “場” (*chang3*) means “a spell,” “a period,” “a bout.” Literally, “虚驚一場” (*xu1 jing1 yi4 chang3*) is “false fear one bout” or “having had a bout of false fear.”

The “fear” to which the idiom refers is actually real. What is “false” is the feared eventuality. So the idiom means “a false alarm.” The idiom may be applied to many situations.

When the fire alarm sounds but it turns out that there is no fire. It is “虚驚一場” (*xu1 jing1 yi4 chang3*) for residents who have been evacuated (疏散) to the street.

If your boss said he is going to fire you, but changes his mind and lets you keep your job, you should be glad that it is just “虚驚一場” (*xu1 jing1 yi4 chang3*).

**Terms containing the character “虚” (*xu1*) include:**

虚報 (*xu1 bao4*) – make a false report
虚構 (*xu1 gou4*) – based on imagination rather than reality
虚假 (*xu1 jia3*) – deceitful, false, hypocritical
虚名 (*xu1 ming2*) – hollow reputation