Some drug stores and Chinese herbs and dried sea produce shops are so unscrupulous that they can only be called heinous (令人髮指). Their operators should be regarded as criminals, not traders.

Some of them distract customers when they are paying by credit card and debit 10 or even 100 times the original amount. In some cases, shops even close the gate and intimidate customers when they decide not to buy anything.

The Consumer Council will publish the names of the worst shops to shame them and to warn the public. But such actions are sometimes frustrated as the stores change their names and continue to operate at the same locations.

The council calls these “face-lifted” stores, and use the idiom “改頭換面” (gai3 tou2 huan4 mian4) in the Chinese text.

“改” (gai3) is “to change,” “to modify,” “頭” (tou2) is “the head,” “換” (huan4) also means “to change” or “to switch” and “面” (mian4) is “the face.” Literally, “改頭換面” (gai3 tou2 huan4 mian4) is “change head and switch face.”

In the movie Face/Off, John Travolta and Nicholas Cage “switch faces” with face-transplant surgery. A full-face transplant was actually completed in 2010.

But no known human head transplant has been done, except by the fictional Dr Frankenstein, though an Italian neurosurgeon recently claimed he could perform one.

So, the idiom “改頭換面” (gai3 tou2 huan4 mian4) does not really mean changing the head and switching the face. It is a derogatory expression that means “to change the appearance,” “to make only superficial change,” and “changing the appearance only.”

Terms containing the character “改” (gai3) include:

- 改造 (gai3 zao4) - reshape, remodel, reconstruct
- 改革 (gai3 ge2) - to reform
- 改正 (gai3 zheng4) - to correct
- 改過 (gai3 guo4) - to repent