

Idiom by Lon Yan

以身作則

yi3 shen1 zuo4 ze2

Cyd Ho Sau-lan who lost her Legislative Council seat in the September election was back in the limelight with her recent eye-popping Facebook posting.

In it, she targeted new lawmaker Yau Wai-ching, saying that the biggest problem with the younger politician was not coarse language but her long hair.

Long hair requires more water than usual to keep clean, Ho expounded, and using non-organic shampoo and conditioner would contaminate the water, which would require more electricity for sewage treatment, and that, in turn, would harm the environment.

We should, of course, encourage everyone to be environmentally friendly, and people who really believe in what they preach should “以身作則” (*yi3 shen1 zuo4 ze2*).

“以” (*yi3*) is “to use as;” “身” (*shen1*) “body;” “personally;” “作” (*zuo4*) is “to act;” “to be;”

“to act as” and “則” (*ze2*) is a “standard,” or a “criterion.” Literally, “以身作則” (*yi3 shen1 zuo4 ze2*) is “use the body as standard.”

The “body” here refers to one’s own body, so “以身作則” (*yi3 shen1 zuo4 ze2*) means “to set a good example with one’s own conduct;” “to teach by personal example;” “to lead by personal example;” “to set an example;” “to serve as a model.”

For Ho to “以身作則” (*yi3 shen1 zuo4 ze2*), it is not enough, as she has promised, that she would not grow long hair. She should actually go further, or better still, go all the way by shaving her head.

That would, of course, be absurd, but no more so then to suggesting that keeping long hair is environmentally unfriendly!

Terms containing the character “身” (*shen1*) include:

身體 (*shen1 ti3*) – the body; health

身份 (*shen1 fen4*) – identity; status; capacity

身份證 (*shen1 fen4 zheng4*) – identity card

身亡 (*shen1 wang2*) – to die