

# Idiom by Lon Yan

## 火紅火綠

*huo3 hong2 huo3 lü4*

Christmas is here and red and green decorative lights are everywhere. But these are not the kind of lights people are talking about these days. The red and green lights of interest are the kind given by the central government to chief executive candidates.

One of those who has taken center stage in the red-light-green-light show is John Tsang Chun-wah. He had indicated interest in running, but had, for weeks, made no move, leading some pundits to speculate about him waiting for the “green light” from Beijing while others suggested he had actually been given the “red light.”

But such speculations are, in most cases, just speculations by those who didn't really have inside information. There is a Cantonese expression for such talks – “點紅點綠” (*dian3 hong2 dian3 lü4*) – literally point red and

point green, meaning “to talk nonsense or rubbish (胡扯),” “to chat idly.” The expression is also used to describe bossy know-it-all who “指點” (*zhi3 dian3*) – giving instructions – to others as if they have the authority or knowledge to do so.

Another red-green expression is “火紅火綠” (*huo3 hong2 huo3 lü4*), literally “fire red fire green”. Fire represents anger. When people are angry, their face turn red, and their green veins stand out. So “火紅火綠” (*huo3 hong2 huo3 lü4*) means, figuratively, “in great anger,” “highly agitated.” When two parties are arguing heatedly, we can say they are “火紅火綠” (*huo3 hong2 huo3 lü4*).

As the chief executive election draws closer, sparks are flying. Hopefully, those who are vying for the job would not become overly “火紅火綠” (*huo3 hong2 huo3 lü4*).

### Terms containing the character “紅” (*hong2*) include:

紅色 (*hong2 se4*) – the red color

紅蘿蔔 (*hong2 luo2 bo*) – carrot

紅外線 (*hong2 wai4 xian4*) – infrared rays

紅人 (*hong2 ren2*) – an influential person; a popular person