

# Idiom by Lon Yan

## 一馬當先

*yi4 ma3 dang1 xian1*

When Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor resigned from the government and declared her intention to run for chief executive, the Chinese media used the term “去馬” (*qu4 ma3*) to describe her move.

Locals love horses, or more specifically, horse racing. That probably explains why there are so many lively colloquial local terms that are associated with “馬” (*ma3*).

“去馬” (*qu4 ma3*), literally “go horse,” means to proceed with a task or venture. “去馬” (*qu4 ma3*), in this case, referred to Lam’s move to go forward with her election plan.

There is also “上馬” (*shang4 ma3*) – mount the horse, meaning to take up a task or to embark on a quest. When John Tsang Chun-wah announced his candidacy after much

speculation, we can say he has finally “上馬” (*shang4 ma3*).

And among the four candidates, who is “一馬當先” (*yi4 ma3 dang1 xian1*)?

“一” (*yi4*) is “one,” “馬” (*ma3*) “a horse,” “當” (*dang1*) “at,” “to be,” and “先” (*xian1*) “ahead,” “first,” “before.” “當先” (*dang1 xian1*), as a term, means “in the front ranks,” “at the head.” Literally, “一馬當先” (*yi4 ma3 dang1 xian1*) is “one horse at the front.”

The idiom means “to take the lead,” “to be in the forefront,” “to be the first to take on the enemy or to do work”. In a race, the one who is “一馬當先” (*yi4 ma3 dang1 xian1*) is the frontrunner. In the chief executive race, everyone knows who that is, at least for now.

### Terms containing the character “先” (*xian1*) include:

先前 (*xian1 qian2*) – before; previously

先進 (*xian1 jin4*) – advanced; developed

先例 (*xian1 li4*) – a precedent

先人 (*xian1 ren2*) – an ancestor