

Idiom by Lon Yan

明鏡高懸

ming2 jing4 gao1 xuan2

Occupy Central and its spin-off unrests on the streets have split the community. The division is now starting to spill off into the judiciary as the courts began to mete out judgments in the related criminal cases.

Those who took part in violent acts were sent to jail, policemen and protesters alike. People considered the sentences either too heavy or too light, depending on the side of the political divide they are on.

Discontent are, naturally, directed to the judges, whose impartiality is being questioned. Some are even asking for independent bodies to supervise judicial misconducts. An idiom relating to how courts and judges conduct themselves is “明鏡高懸” (*ming2 jing4 gao1 xuan2*).

“明” (*ming2*) is “bright,” “clear,” “鏡” (*jing4*) “a mirror,” “高” (*gao1*) “high,” “tall” and “懸” (*xuan2*)

“to hang,” “to suspend.” Literally, “明鏡高懸” (*ming2 jing4 gao1 xuan2*) means “a bright mirror hung high.”

The mirror to which the idiom refers was, according to old historical records, owned by the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty. It could show the good or evil of a person.

Figuratively, “明鏡高懸” (*ming2 jing4 gao1 xuan2*) means “perspicacious (明察秋毫) and impartial (不偏不倚) in judgment,” “a fair trial by an honest officer,” “the passing of the finest judgment.”

The statue of Lady Justice at Western courthouses symbolizes impartiality; plaques bearing the characters “明鏡高懸” at old China courthouses serves the same purpose. Apart from being a service pledge, the plaques were also a warning that “your act is being watched.”

Terms containing the character “鏡” (*jing4*) include:

鏡頭 (*jing4 tou2*) – a camera lens, a camera shot

出鏡 (*chu1 jing4*) – to appear on camera; to play a role in a film

上鏡 (*shang4 jing4*) – photogenic

太陽鏡 (*tai4 yang2 jing4*) – sunglasses