

ADS WITH HIDDEN MESSAGES BY BUSINESS TYCOON LI KA-SHING

On Aug 16th, 2019, Hong Kong's richest man, Li Ka-shing, placed front-page ads in seven of the city's major newspapers, using poetry and cryptic language to deliver a nuanced message calling for an end to the political violence plaguing the financial hub.

The 91-year-old billionaire's ads featured one of two full page statements – both using very few words to convey hidden messages – without expressing any explicit support for the government or the protesters.

1.



In this ad, the billionaire invoked a line from the Tang Dynasty poem, “The Melon of Huangtai”, written by the crown prince Li Xian (654 - 684AD) before his suicide as a plea of mercy to his ruthless mother, the legendary Empress Wu Zetian (624 - 705AD). The line reads:

“THE MELON OF HUANGTAI CANNOT ENDURE FURTHER PICKING.”

A subtle message rich in meaning - if too many melons are picked from one vine, the vine will eventually die. The prince used an over-picked melon tree as a metaphor to describe the brutality of his mother, who would eventually ascend the throne by killing her own sons to become the only female emperor in China's history.

The melon tree is Hong Kong. But who was the business tycoon addressing?

Was it an appeal to the pro-democracy protesters to stop the increasingly violent protests? Or was it a message for the HK government to stop the police brutality against the protesters? Li was deliberately ambiguous about which side he was addressing.

2.



In this ad, Li used encryption to call for an end to political violence.

In the center, two giant Chinese characters for “violence” crossed out in red are flanked on the left and right by the following lines:

**“LOVE FREEDOM. LOVE TOLERANCE. LOVE THE RULE OF LAW
LOVE CHINA. LOVE HONG KONG. LOVE ONESELF.”**

At the top, the header reads:

“EVEN THE BEST INTENTIONS CAN LEAD TO THE WORST OUTCOME.”

At the bottom, the lines read:

“STOP ANGER IN THE NAME OF LOVE.”

A hidden message reveals itself if we take the final characters of the eight lines of text and combine them (see the eight characters circled in red in above image):

“因果由國，容港治己”

“THE CAUSE AND THE RESULT DEPEND ON CHINA. LET HONG KONG DECIDE FOR ITSELF.”

While calling for an end to “violence”, Li did not specify whether he was addressing the government or protesters. As in the other ad, the ambiguity allowed both pro-government and pro-democracy camps to interpret the message to suit their purpose.

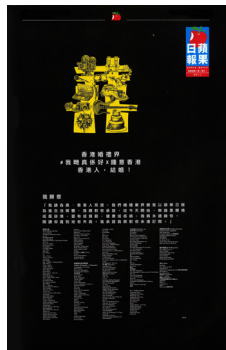
TRANSLATIONS OF APPLE DAILY ADS

3.



An anonymous ad of a “HK postage stamp” with an image of the pre-1996 Chinese Communist Flag. The chart on the flag shows a line in steep decline from 1997 - when HK was returned to China - to 2000, the year this ad was placed.

4.



An ad placed by members of the wedding industry (bridal make-up artists, hair stylists, wedding photographers, videographers, planners, decorators and dress designers). The ad is a “wedding vow” to *APPLE DAILY*.

The big yellow symbol is “**DOUBLE HAPPINESS**” in Chinese which has traditionally been associated with marriage.

Below the symbol, the text plays with the traditional “I DO” wedding vows:

WE DO.

WE, MEMBERS OF THE WEDDING INDUSTRY, INVITE YOU, ALL THE TRUE HONGKONGERS, TO BE OUR WITNESSES, TO HAVE AND TO HOLD *APPLE DAILY*, FROM THIS DAY FORWARD, FOR BETTER OR WORSE, FOR RICHER OR FOR POORER, IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH, TO READ AND CHERISH YOU AND BE YOUR SUBSCRIBERS ALWAYS.

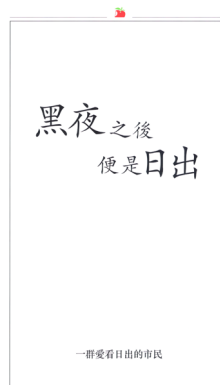
5.



An ad by a group who called itself “**RC comrades**” in support of **APPLE DAILY** using the famous quote from the 16th-century monk and theologian Martin Luther.

**IF THE WORLD WERE TO END TOMORROW,
I WOULD STILL PLANT AN APPLE TREE TODAY.**

6.



An ad quoting a line from the song, “Do you hear the people sing?”, from the musical *Les Misérables* adapted from the eponymous novel by the French writer Victor Hugo (1802-1885). The song was an unofficial anthem for the HK pro-democracy movement. The quote reads:

**EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT WILL END
AND THE SUN WILL RISE.**

From a group of sunrise watchers

7.



A front-page ad placed by the bitcoin investment company Coingaroo using the symbolic image of a blank paper. The text reads:

**I BUY, YOU WRITE.
IT BELONGS TO ME, IT ALSO BELONGS TO YOU.
THIS FRONT-PAGE AD BELONGS TO EVERY HONGKONGER**

#AphraseForeachPerson #SupportHK #SupportApple

8.



An anonymous ad in support of **APPLE DAILY**. On the “blank” ad, the text reads:

SUPPORTING EVEN WITH A BLANK PAGE!

9. and 10. refer to the event known as “HK12”. On Aug 23rd, 2020, 12 young activists were intercepted at sea by the Chinese authorities while attempting to flee to Taiwan. They were detained in China for over 50 days with scant information from the authorities. These two ADs were placed during that time as a call for their return to HK for a fair trial.

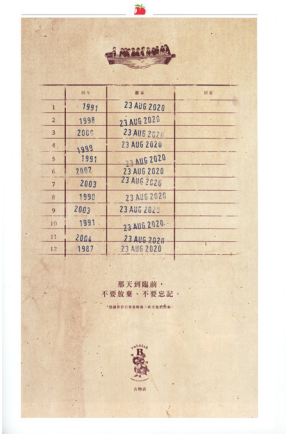
9.



An ad placed by fans of the Blackburn Rovers Football Club showing a toy set of 12 soccer player figurines representing the 12 detained activists. The text reads:

**TWELVE
NOT ONE LESS**

10.



An ad placed by a vintage shop. Beneath the drawing of a boat with 12 passengers is a chart of 12 rows and 3 columns. The first column indicates the year of birth of the 12 activists. The middle column indicates the date of their detention - Aug 23rd, 2020. The third column – left empty - has the header: “date of return”. The text reads:

DON'T ABANDON THEM. DON'T FORGET THEM.

11.



An anonymous ad of an image of a yellow safety helmet - a pro-democracy symbol as they were worn by protestors to protect themselves during the protests. The popular protest slogan, “HK ADD OIL “香港加油” is encrypted into the characters 香港 (Hong Kong). The text reads:

PROTECT OUR CHILDREN PROTECT HONG KONG

For the characters 香港 (Hong Kong), the ad uses the iconic encrypted design by the Taiwanese Designer Kyo Chen. His clever design uses the magic of Chinese calligraphy to show two different meanings to the two characters when viewed at a different angle. Turn the characters “香(Hong Kong) 90 degrees anti-clockwise, and they transform into “加油”(Add Oil).
港”



“Add oil” is a Cantonese term that originated as a cheer at the Macau Grand Prix in the 60s and roughly translates as “step on the gas” and is a popular chant used to express support and encouragement in sports events. The term is so widely-used amongst non-Cantonese speakers that it was entered into the Oxford Dictionary in 2018.

12.



An ad placed by a group of mothers who gave birth in October 2014 at the height of the 2014 Umbrella Movement - a peaceful 3-month demonstration calling for universal suffrage promised under the Basic Law signed by Britain and China before HK's handover.

The movement got its name from the umbrellas that protesters used as shields against police pepper spray. The umbrella was transformed overnight from an everyday object into an iconic pro-democracy symbol of passive resistance.

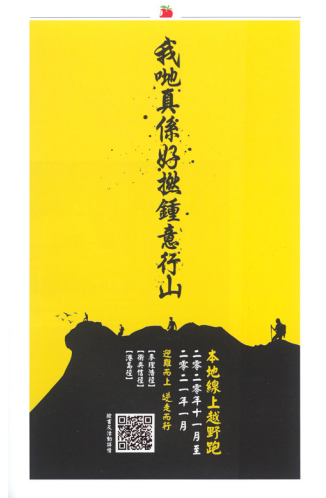
The 2019/2020 protests initially began in opposition to an extradition bill that would have allowed extradition from Hong Kong to mainland China. The bill was eventually withdrawn but by then, the protests had already escalated into violence as well as wider demands of democratic reforms and inquiry into alleged police brutality.

The text next to the umbrella reads:

2014 BORN IN TROUBLED TIMES
2020 LIVING IN FEAR

**FOR THE SAKE OF OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE, WE SHALL DO OUR BEST TO SAFEGUARD
FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN OUR LAND,
EVEN IF THE SIZE OF THE LAND IS REDUCED TO THE SIZE OF THIS AD.**

13.



An ad placed by a group of hikers showing hikers on HK's famous mountain, Lion Rock - an iconic symbol of HongKongers' resilient spirit. The text reads:

WE REALLY LOVE HIKING.

**VIRTUAL RUNING TRAIL:
11/2020 – 01/2021**

**RISE TO THE CHALLENGE
BRAVE THE ADVERSITY**

14.



An ad placed by a craft studio, an event organizer and a courier service showing an image of a group of Hongkongers holding the symbolic blank papers in response to a question about their conscience. They signed off with the words –

SPONSORED WITH CONSCIENCE

15.



An anonymous “black and white” AD on the idea of conscience. The four characters reads:

BLACK/WHITE
CONSCIENCE

16.



An ad placed by “**members with conscience of the HK Husky Association**”. Once nicknamed “Asia’s Finest”, the HK Police Force has been the target of allegations of police brutality and excessive violence during the protests. Protesters called officers dogs and police called demonstrators cockroaches. The text reads:

**BLACK DOG
OR WHITE DOG.
ANY DOG WITH CONSCIENCE
IS A GOOD DOG.**

17.

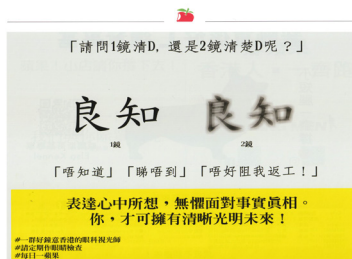


An ad placed by a group of “sons and daughters who love looking in the mirror”. Beneath the mirror, the text reads:

**PERHAPS IT IS BECOMING DIFFICULT TO SEE YOUR TRUE SELVES.
PLEASE TAKE THIS MOMENT TO THANK YOURSELVES.**

**THANK YOURSELVES FOR BEING
TRUE HONGKONGERS.**

18.



An ad placed by a group of ophthalmologists on the idea of conscience.

Question: [Do you see more clearly with LENS #1 or LENS #2?]

CONSCIENCE CONSCIENCE

Answer: [I don't know] [I can't see] [Can't answer now! I'm late for work!]

**IN ORDER TO HAVE A BRIGHT AND CLEAR FUTURE,
ONE MUST CONFRONT THE TRUTH AND EXPRESS IT WITHOUT FEAR!**

**#AgroupOfophthalmologistsWHOloveHK
#GETanEYEexamREGULARLY
#anAPPLEaDAY**

19.



An ad placed by a group of BMW owners using the famous Chinese proverb "Point to a Deer and call it a Horse" (指鹿為馬) as a metaphor. The Chinese name for BMW is "Precious Horse" (寶馬).

A pun on the word "horse", the AD references the Qin Dynasty proverb - "Point to a deer and call it a horse" (指鹿為馬) - on blind loyalty which describes situations in which truth and facts are purposely distorted for ulterior motives.

During the reign of the second Qin Emperor, Qin Er Shi (221 to 206 B.C.), the conviving and ambitions prime minister, Zhao Gao, wanted to attempt a coup on the Emperor. One day, in order to gauge the loyalty of the Emperor's court, Zhao Gao presented the Emperor with a deer but said it was a horse.

The Emperor exclaimed, "Prime Minister, you are clearly mistaken! That is a deer!"

Zhao Gao replied, "If that is the case, Your Majesty, why don't you ask the member of your court what it is?"

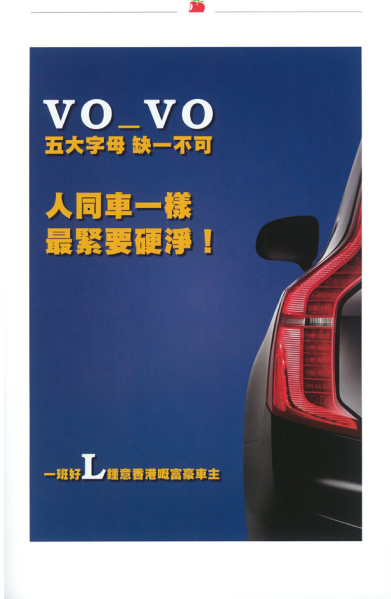
Fearful that they would face Zhao's retribution, some of the court remained silent. The more shameless courtiers went along with his claim. The upright officials who told the Emperor the truth – that the animal was a horse - were executed.

Thereafter, the barefaced peddling of falsehoods was referred to as "Point to a Deer and call it a Horse" (指鹿為馬).

The text that accompanies the image of the BMWs (Precious Horses) reads:

THESE ARE "HORSES", NOT "DEERS"

**GIVE US BACK FREEDOM OF PRESS.
WE SUPPORT APPLE TO GIVE US THE TRUTH.**



An ad placed by a group of luxury car owners playing with the missing “L” in “VOLVO”, alluding to the pro-democracy slogan “5 Demands not 1 Less”.

The 5 demands were:

1. Full withdrawal of the extradition bill
2. A commission of inquiry into alleged police brutality
3. Retracting the classification of protesters as “rioters”
4. Amnesty for arrested protesters
5. Dual universal suffrage in accordance to “One Country Two Systems”.

In Cantonese, “L” refers to the vulgar word “𩵿 (LUN)” which, like its English equivalent, “fucking”, is often used as an adverb to strengthen one’s tone.

VO_VO
5 LETTERS NOT 1 LESS

LIKE CARS,
THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITY
IN HUMAN BEINGS IS STAMINA!

From a group of luxury car owners who “fucking” love HK



An ad placed on Aug 31st, 2020, the one-year anniversary of the “831” incident in which police attacked passengers at the Prince Edward metro station while arresting protesters on the night of Aug 31, 2019. Police has denied allegations that several protesters were beaten to death. The text beneath the white flowers reads:

PLEASE CUT ALONG THE DOTTED LINE AND OFFER THESE WHITE FLOWERS TO IN REMEMBRANCE OF 831.