

# 斬釘截鐵

*zhan3 ding1 jie2 tie3*

Chief Secretary for Administration Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor gave a pre-retirement interview to the press, some 17 months ahead of time.

One strong message that came out was that she will do what she believes is right in running the administration because she has nothing to fear – she does not want any higher positions.

What she meant was she will not seek to become the SAR's chief executive. "Absolutely not, absolutely not" was her answer when asked if she would change her mind if requested by Beijing. When people speak like that, we say he or she is "斬釘截鐵" (*zhan3 ding1 jie2 tie3*).

"斬" (*zhan3*) is "to cut," "to chop," "釘" (*ding1*) "a nail," "截" (*jie2*) "to cut," "to sever" and "鐵" (*tie3*) "iron." Literally, "斬釘截鐵" (*zhan3 ding1 jie2 tie3*) is "to chop the nail and cut the iron."

When you want to cut objects as hard as a nail or iron, you cannot hesitate. You must deliver a firm and clean stroke.

## Idiom by Lon Yan

So the idiom means "to show firm determination," "to be resolute and decisive," "to be categorical," "to speak in unequivocal terms."

That is the way Lam delivered her message, and *The Standard* editorial said her words "do not leave any room for people's imagination," which is the exact purpose of being "斬釘截鐵" (*zhan3 ding1 jie2 tie3*).

The opposite of "斬釘截鐵" (*zhan3 ding1 jie2 tie3*) is "拖泥帶水" (*tuo1 ni2 dai4 shui3*), literally dragging watery mud, which of course leaves a messy trail, figuratively meaning being equivocal about your intention.

**Terms containing the character "鐵" (*tie3*) include:**

鐵路 (*tie3 lu4*) – railroad

鐵窗 (*tie3 chuang1*) – prison bars

鐵定 (*tie3 ding4*) – unalterable, firm

鐵腕 (*tie3 wan4*) – iron fist