

# 顧此失彼

gu4 ci3 shi1 bi3

A man jumped into the harbor off Central ferry piers to retrieve his bag. But when he swam back to shore, he found his wallet missing. The wallet had apparently slipped out of his pocket while he was busy getting the bag.

So he dived into the water again to look for the wallet, but was too exhausted to stay afloat. Fortunately, his cries for help were heard by a domestic helper, and her companion threw a life ring to the man and pulled him up.

The man may be a good swimmer, but at the age of 58, he should have realized that he is no longer in a condition to keep jumping off the pier into the sea and climbing back up. He was reported to be fine after resting, but went to the hospital for a check-up anyway. This was a typical case of “顧此失彼” (gu4 ci3 shi1 bi3).

“顧” (gu4) is “to look after,” “to take care of,” “to take into consideration,” “此” (ci3) means “this,”

## Idiom by Lon Yan

“these,” “失” (shi1) “to lose,” “to miss,” “to fail to,” and “彼” (bi3) is “that,” “those,” “the other.” Literally, “顧此失彼” (gu4 ci3 shi1 bi3) is “take care of this and miss the other.”

The idiom means “to take one thing into consideration to the neglect of the other.”

In this case, the man was thinking only about the lost bag, and neglected the wallet in his pocket.

The English expression “can’t see the forest for the trees” is also about focusing on one thing and missing the other. It means “to focus only on small details and fail to understand larger plans or principles.”

### Terms containing the character “顧” (gu4) include:

顧客 (gu4 ke4) - a customer; a client

顧問 (gu4 wen4) - an adviser; a consultant

顧慮 (gu4 lü4) - misgivings; concerns

照顧 (zhao4 gu4) - to look after