

Idiom by Lon Yan

心無二用

xin1 wu2 er4 yong4

The idiom “心無二用” (*xin1 wu2 er4 yong4*) is very much in the news these days.

Chief executive Leung Chun-ying used it in his online posting earlier, saying that he hoped the SAR’s leadership team can “心無二用” (*xin1 wu2 er4 yong4*) when serving the community.

Some saw the remark as being directed at financial secretary John Tsang Chun-wah, telling him to focus on his job instead of thinking about running for the chief executive election.

Last week, former Legislative Council president Jasper Tsang Yok-sing took issue with Leung’s remarks, saying that he could, of course, “心無二用” (*xin1 wu2 er4 yong4*) as the incumbent for the territory’s top office does not have to resign to run for re-election.

“心” (*xin1*) is “the heart,” “無” (*wu2*) “without,” “nil,” “二” (*er4*) “two” and “用” (*yong4*)

“to use.” Literally, “心無二用” (*xin1 wu2 er4 yong4*) is “heart not two uses.”

It means “one cannot keep one’s mind on two things at the same time;” “one cannot concentrate on two things at the same time;” “one’s attention cannot be divided by two undertakings simultaneously;” “one should concentrate on one’s work.”

The idiom is a description of the limitation of the human mind. It is also an advice not to attempt to do too many things at the same time, or to focus on a single task instead of getting distracted.

But in these day and age, everyone is talking about multi-tasking, so people might consider “心無二用” (*xin1 wu2 er4 yong4*) outdated.

Terms containing the character “用” (*yong4*) include:

用具 (*yong4 ju4*) – utensils; apparatus

用途 (*yong4 tu2*) – a purpose; a use

用心 (*yong4 xin1*) – attentively

用力 (*yong4 li4*) – to exert oneself