

# Idiom by Lon Yan

## 愛不釋手

**ai4 bu2 shi4 shou3**

A survey found one in five people in Hong Kong almost never puts away their smartphones. But the study by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University probably only confirmed what we already know.

The relationship between phone addicts (or phone lovers if you prefer), and their mobile devices can be described by the expression “愛不釋手” (*ai4 bu2 shi4 shou3*).

“愛” (*ai4*) is “love,” “affection,” “to love,” “to be fond of,” “to treasure,” “不” (*bu2*) “no,” “not,” “釋” (*shi4*) “to let go,” “to release,” and “手” (*shou3*) “a hand.” Literally, “愛不釋手” (*ai4 bu2 shi4 shou3*) is “love so much as not to let go.” The idiom means “to love something too much to part with it.”

A collector who holds a piece of beloved jade stone in his hand all day long can be said to be “愛不釋手” (*ai4 bu2 shi4 shou3*) with the jade stone. So the idiom also means “to

fondle admiringly.”

Being “愛不釋手” (*ai4 bu2 shi4 shou3*) with something you are fond of seems to be quite natural. But “愛不釋手” (*ai4 bu2 shi4 shou3*) with a mobile phone is not exactly harmless – the survey also found many people are “phubbers” – using a phone and snubbing others.

Phubbers might want to know while they can’t bear to part with their phones, 83 percent of people cannot bear people who keep playing on their mobiles while talking to each other, and 66 percent find such behavior during dining unacceptable.

Many people did recognize that smartphones have made people more distant to others.

### Terms containing the character “釋” (*shi4*) include:

釋放 (*shi4 fang4*) – to set free

解釋 (*jie3 shi4*) – to explain; explanation

釋疑 (*shi4 yi4*) – clear up doubts

假釋 (*jia3 shi4*) – to release on parole