顧此失彼

"these," “失” (shí) “to lose,” “to miss,” “to fail to,” and “彼” (bǐ) 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