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in these day and age, everyone is talking about multi-tasking, so people might consider “心無二用” (xin1 wu2 er4 yong4) outdated.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