

LCQ12: Mr Tsang Tsou-choi's ink writing

Following is a question by the Hon Tanya Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (January 13):

Question:

It has been reported that the pieces of calligraphy painted at various places in the streets on Hong Kong Island and in Kowloon by the late Mr Tsang Tsou-choi, who was known as "the King of Kowloon", have been damaged deliberately by someone recently, and the perpetrator claimed that he had caused the damages because of the authorities' ineffective efforts to conserve such pieces of calligraphy. Given that Mr Tsang's pieces of calligraphy have become part of the collective memory of many Hong Kong people, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it knows the locations of Mr Tsang's pieces of calligraphy at various places in the streets on Hong Kong Island and in Kowloon at present, their latest conditions and the conservation arrangements;

(b) given that in its reply dated December 30 last year to my enquiry on the aforesaid matter, the Home Affairs Bureau had described Mr Tsang's pieces of calligraphy as "works" only, how the authorities' choice of this word reflects their attitude to deal with Mr Tsang's pieces of calligraphy;

(c) whether the Government will reconsider conserving all existing pieces of calligraphy of Mr Tsang in the streets, as well as reviewing and improving the methods for conserving such pieces of calligraphy; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(d) whether it will consider conducting a study on the artistic, social and cultural values of Mr Tsang's calligraphy or commission an academic institution to conduct the study, so as to establish more objectively the conservation value of his pieces of calligraphy; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(e) whether the authorities will consider arranging temporary or permanent display of Mr Tsang's pieces of calligraphy in the cultural and arts venues within their purview; if they will, of the specific arrangements; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(a) We have found Mr Tsang Tsou-choi's ink writing in the following public places: a fencing wall at Kai Lim Road in Tsui Ping Estate, two electricity boxes at Kwun Tong Road (near Ping Shek Estate), a concrete pillar at Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry Pier and a lamp post near Ping Shek Estate. Since the ink writing is mainly left on outdoor walls or metal surfaces and the ink used is not durable, most of the ink writing has faded considerably and is hardly discernible after years of weathering and erosion. The physical condition of these pieces of ink writing is far from satisfactory.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has carefully inspected the ink writing at the above locations and examined the feasibility of applying protective films or covers to preserve the two pieces of ink writing left in the latter two places which are comparatively in a better condition. A transparent protective cover has been mounted over the pillar at Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry Pier and a caption provided. For the ink writing left on the lamp post near Ping Shek Estate, LCSD has attempted to cover it with inert and transparent polyester film, but the result was not satisfactory. The film has hindered the natural air ventilation over the lamp post surface and water moisture was noticed to have trapped or built up between the film and the lamp post, thus causing the iron-made lamp post to rust more rapidly and the ink to peel off. The installation of a detached protective cover similar to the case of the Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry Pier pillar is also considered not possible as the pavement where the lamp post is located is too narrow. As such, LCSD will continue to conduct regular checking and documentation of the ink writing left on the lamp post. LCSD has already documented and kept a complete photo record of the rest of Mr Tsang's ink writing.

(b) The general public have diverse views on the ink writing left by Mr Tsang Tsou-choi in public places and use different terms to describe it ranging from graffiti, calligraphic works, Chinese brush-writing, or simply calligraphy. The term "ink writing" is a general description of Chinese brush-writing works. In view of the much divided views on the artistic merits of Mr Tsang's ink writing, we consider "ink writing" an objective description.

(c) We have carefully inspected Mr Tsang Tsou-choi's ink writing left in known

public places. In most cases, the ink writing has faded and the physical condition is far from satisfactory. Only the ink writing on the concrete pillar at Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry Pier and the lamp post near Ping Shek Estate is comparatively in a better condition. We have therefore installed a protective cover and a caption for the pillar at Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry Pier and will continue to inspect and document the condition of the ink writing on the lamp post near Ping Shek Estate regularly. LCSD has already documented and kept a complete photo record of the rest of Mr Tsang's ink writing. We have also sought relevant departments' assistance in reminding their contractors or agents not to whitewash or remove Mr Tsang's ink writing left in public places.

(d) There has been considerable discussion on the artistic merits and socio-cultural significance of Mr Tsang Tsou-choi's ink writing. The diverse views of the art and cultural community reflect that Hong Kong is a pluralistic and open city. The Government respects different views and perspectives and welcomes interested parties and academic institutions to conduct studies and reviews of the issue.

(e) Mr Tsang Tsou-choi's ink writing originates in street graffiti. It is considered more desirable to have these pieces of ink writing kept in situ in the streets.

Ends/Wednesday, January 13, 2010