

LCQ6: Promoting traditional customs and cultural activities

Following is a question by the Hon Edward Leung and a reply by the Under Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Raistlin Lau, in the Legislative Council today (May 28):

Question:

It is learnt that the traditional customs of "Petty Person Beating" and "Offering Sacrifices to the White Tiger" carried out underneath the Canal Road Flyover (commonly known as "Ngo Keng Kiu") in Causeway Bay have attracted quite a number of tourists to view and experience them. However, due to the crowded environment at the location, there have been conflicts between tourists and local residents from time to time, which is not conducive to the promotion of the relevant cultural activities. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has compiled statistics on the change in the number of stall operators carrying out the aforesaid traditional customs and cultural activities underneath the flyover in the past 10 years; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) of the details of the authorities' work in promoting the aforesaid traditional customs and cultural activities in the past three years, and whether the effectiveness of such work has been assessed; and

(3) as it is learnt that at present, the aforesaid stall operators only hold business registration certificates and there is no accreditation mechanism for such cultural activities, while the management of stall operators and related activities also involves different policy areas (e.g. environmental hygiene and cultural tourism), whether the Government has considered setting up an interdepartmental management group to improve the relevant accreditation and management work with the focus on cultural conservation, so as to reduce the conflicts between tourists and residents while balancing the operational needs of the industry; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

President Xi Jinping once pointed out that the outstanding traditional Chinese culture is the spiritual lifeblood of the Chinese nation. The current-term Government is committed to promoting the outstanding traditional Chinese culture and has introduced multiple measures over the past two years, including establishing the Chinese Culture Promotion Office and organising the Chinese Culture Festival. "Promote Profound Traditional Chinese Culture

and Develop Cultural Contents with Hong Kong Character" was also formulated as one of the four strategic directions in the Blueprint for Arts and Culture and Creative Industries Development promulgated at the end of last year.

From the perspective of traditional culture, whether a custom qualifies as "outstanding" traditional culture depends on its cultural values in terms of diversity and pluralism. The merit of traditional culture should also be evaluated based on among others, its transmission, dissemination, and level of prevalence.

Both "Offering Sacrifices to White Tiger" and "Beating Petty Person" are traditional Chinese culture with certain folk customs and symbolic meanings. In folk belief, White Tiger is seen as a malevolent spirit believed to bring misfortune. Thus, the ritual of "Offering Sacrifices to White Tiger" aims to ward off bad luck and troubles. "Beating Petty Person", a folk custom in southern China, involves striking paper effigies or wooden figures with various tools to drive away bad luck and negative energy.

The "Offering Sacrifices to White Tiger during Insects Awaken Day" is included as one of the items on the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Inventory of Hong Kong. The item specifically pertains to the practice of "Offering Sacrifices to White Tiger" conducted on the "Insects Awaken Day" within the "Twenty-Four Solar Terms" system, which typically falls on the 5th or 6th of March in the Gregorian calendar. This practice conducted on the "Insects Awaken Day" may include "Beating Petty Person", and the practice of "Offering Sacrifices to White Tiger" can take place at various venues across Hong Kong, without limitation to any specified location. However, the "Offering Sacrifices to White Tiger" and "Beating Petty Person" activities underneath the Canal Road Flyover (commonly known as "Ngo Keng Kiu") in Causeway Bay are operated all year round in general. These activities, which are not included in the scope of the "Twenty-Four Solar Terms" social practices, constitute commercial operations conducted by service providers.

In consultation with the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau and the Environment and Ecology Bureau, my consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Edward Leung is as follows:

The area underneath Canal Road Flyover is a renowned location for "Beating Petty Person". While peak activity occurs during the "Insects Awaken Day" in March each year, the stalls operate "year-round". Currently, around ten stalls operate beneath the flyover for this ritual, primarily concentrated along the pedestrian walkway facing the Hennessy Road tram tracks.

Relevant departments have all along been following up on the environmental hygiene and street management issues arising from "Beating Petty Person" and carrying out enforcement actions within their respective jurisdictions. The Wan Chai District Office (WCDO) co-ordinates interdepartmental clearance operations (Joint Operation) on a regular basis to mitigate nuisances caused by these activities to the local residents and the surrounding environment. On-street activities may involve the purviews of

various departments. The work of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) is mainly to maintain environmental hygiene. The FEHD has been monitoring the traditional customs of "Beating Petty Person" underneath the Canal Road Flyover and officers will, during their routine inspection, take appropriate actions based on the actual circumstances to maintain environmental hygiene.

From January to May 2025, the WCD0 coordinated a total of nine Joint Operations at the aforementioned location. Prior to the operation, the Government will post notices on unauthorised articles placed on Government land, reminding owners to remove the obstructive items. During the Joint Operation day, any remaining articles would be cleared by the FEHD. The WCD0 will advise the "Beating Petty Person" practitioners to maintain clear pedestrian pathways. The Hong Kong Police Force will be present to maintain public order and provide assistance as required. Furthermore, any unauthorised structures found to be occupying Government land would be referred to the Lands Department for follow-up action.

In alignment with the objective of promoting the outstanding traditional Chinese culture, the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) are committed to safeguarding, transmitting and promoting the ICH of Hong Kong while actively supporting the national policies on furthering the safeguarding of ICH. For ICH items across diverse domains, various corresponding measures are implemented to strengthen different aspects of work such as identification, documentation, research, preservation, promotion and transmission and to enhance the public's understanding of ICH and engage the community in safeguarding ICH. An example of these measures includes the ICH Funding Scheme of the LCSD, which supports eligible local organisations and individuals in implementing meaningful local ICH projects to promote the items on the ICH Inventory of Hong Kong. In addition, the LCSD will also develop a mechanism and criteria in 2025 for recognising the bearers of the items on the Representative List of the ICH of Hong Kong, as well as organising the "Hong Kong ICH Month". As to "Offering Sacrifices to White Tiger during Insects Awaken Day", the first "Hong Kong ICH Month" to be held in June this year will include workshops to introduce "Twenty-Four Solar Terms", including the introduction of this ICH item of "Insects Awaken Day".

In addition, the one-stop travel information platform of the Hong Kong Tourism Board, DiscoverHongKong, features information on "Beating Petty Person" under Ngo Keng Kiu. If visitors are interested, they can experience this distinctive local custom firsthand.