

# 答非所問

da2 fei1 suo3 wen4

During campaigning for the district council elections, Wong Tai Sin candidate Mandy Tam Heung-man was embroiled in a controversy over issues including the handling of confidential voter information. After days of bad press, Tam finally decided to call a media conference (記者會). But *Headline Daily* reported that the way she responded to questions was “答非所問” (da2 fei1 suo3 wen4).

“答” (da2) is “to answer,” “to respond,” “非” (fei1) is “not,” “所” (suo3) is “that which” and “問” (wen4) is “to ask.” Literally, “答非所問” (da2 fei1 suo3 wen4) is “answer not that which is asked.” If the answer bears no relation to the question, it must be an irrelevant answer. So the idiom means “to give an irrelevant answer.”

Press conferences usually have a Q & A session, or question and answer session. The chief executive’s annual policy address also has one.

Curiously, in Chinese the session is called “答問

## Idiom by Lon Yan

大會” (da2 wen4 da4 hui4), literally “answer question session.”

This is, in fact, a better description as the occasion is not just for asking questions but for those questions to be answered. Whether the answers given are “答非所問” (da2 fei1 suo3 wen4) is, of course, another matter.

“答非所問” (da2 fei1 suo3 wen4) is not unusual. Politicians and officials alike often resort to this tactic to deflect questions that they don’t want to answer, or for which they have no good answer.

Whether Tam was “答非所問” (da2 fei1 suo3 wen4) proved irrelevant to voters, because she won.

**Terms containing the character “答” (da2) include:**

答案 (da2 an4) – an answer

答謝 (da2 xie4) – to express gratitude

答覆 (da2 fu4) – a reply

報答 (bao4 da2) – to repay kindness or favor