

1997
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1997 and new education system not separate issues

I READ with interest Margaret Ng's column (SCM Post, May 19) on the proposed new education system as advised by the team of foreign experts recently in Hongkong.

Ms Ng's views are always straightforward and to the point and she has plenty to say.

Up to now several of Ms Ng's columns have dealt with 1997 and the need for something positive and concrete to be put over to the public at the earliest possible date, an issue which, until we hear from the parties involved, will be of major concern to us all.

As Ms Ng's last column on May 19 was not on the 1997 question but on education in Hongkong, it is understandable that is what she wrote about. However, I was rather surprised that the column did not mention education in connection with 1997, especially as the newly proposed ideas, if carried out, presumably will last for more than 14 years.

Educating our youngsters is a major issue on any government's budget, and therefore assumes that a new system would need more than a dozen or so

years to show results and be worthwhile.

It should be our Government's aim to make us feel more secure about 1997 and show faith both in the local population and in whatever views China might have.

I therefore find it disturbing that the Government thought it necessary to consult foreign experts to advice on the education of local children. Is there really no one qualified in Hongkong to advise what is right for Hongkong students?

Presumably the experts talked to local educationists before announcing their suggestions. If the advice from local teachers carried any weight at all, why bring in foreign experts in the first place?

With regard to 1997 I believe that it would be in China's own interest to have a say in the education of youngsters in Hongkong, and I certainly think it will be one of the points on which China will be very definite, bearing in mind that some time in the future Hongkong will once again be part of mainland China.

Perhaps this was taken into consid-

eration by the team of foreign experts but, if so, it was certainly not mentioned.

As the people of Hongkong are Cantonese and speak Cantonese, it seems perfectly acceptable that classes should be conducted in that language and, English taught as a foreign language as it is in all other non-English countries.

However, again with 1997 in mind, did the experts also suggest that Mandarin ought to be as important as English?

English may be *the* international language but, considering there are one billion people in this part of the world who speak or at least understand Mandarin, should it not be important enough for Hongkong students to learn?

How can China draw on the know-how of Hongkong people in the future if all negotiations have to be conducted in English but with their own race, namely, the Chinese people of Hongkong.

There must be other people who believe that plans for a new educational system and the 1997 question cannot be kept as two separate issues.

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