

# Another 'no' to language foundation

THE Government yesterday refused to resurrect a plan to set up a Chinese Language Foundation despite strong pleas from several Legislative Councillors.

The foundation was recommended by a working party in 1982.

However, after considering the proposal for four years, the Government decided in April last year that such a foundation was not needed.

During yesterday's adjournment debate on the subject, six councillors — all speaking in Cantonese — unanimously urged the Gov-

ernment to re-examine the idea.

They pointed out that as Hongkong would be returned to China in 1997, there was an imperative need to upgrade the standard of Chinese among the local community.

The Secretary for Education and Manpower, Mr Ron Bridge, assured councillors that the Government was fully committed to the upgrading of the standard of Chinese.

But the question at stake was how to do it in an economic and effective way, he said.

Mr Bridge said the recommended work of the foundation included the provision of high quality Chinese books both for education and leisure purposes, the promotion of the use of Chinese and the encouragement of research in related fields.

He said the best way to achieve a high language standard was through the existing education system.

The Education Department had contacted the territory's secondary schools to encourage them to adopt Chinese as the teaching medium. An encouraging re-

sponse had been received. Besides, a Chinese Textbook Committee was set up to ensure a high quality of textbooks. It had completed its first stage of work and the Government would soon make a decision on its recommendations, he said.

The Government was also putting more emphasis on the use of Chinese in communications among departments as well as with the public, Mr Bridge added.

However, Legco member Mr Szeto Wah was not satisfied with the reply.

He said Mr Bridge had been evasive and had not ad-

dressed their concerns. In his debate speech, he pointed out that the low standard of Chinese here was a problem left over from history, as was the future of Hongkong.

Hongkong people had the responsibility to solve this problem, he said.

The use of the mother language had been proved to be successful in cultivating people's sense of belonging to a community, he said.

"If the Chinese language was not awarded its proper importance, the transition of Hongkong would be a failure," he said.

Mr Yeung Po-kwan pointed out that the foundation would serve a different purpose from the Chinese Textbook Committee.

"While the Chinese Textbook Committee aims at promoting the use of Chinese in school education, a Chinese Language Foundation would enable comprehensive planning and co-ordination in the general promotion of the Chinese language," he said.

Another councillor, Mr Lee Yu-tai, said Hongkong people were becoming vulgar in their spoken and written Chinese under the influence of "pop culture".

"The only way to improve the situation is to develop a counter-culture by setting up a foundation to make available publications which are lacking in the market and allocate necessary resources for sponsoring the mass media in the production of cultural programs," Mr Lee said.

Mrs Pauline Ng suggested that part of the money in the Sir Edward Youde Memorial Fund could be used to help the establishment of a Chinese Language Fund since both funds served a similar purpose.