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1997 and the plight of locally born 'foreigners'

WITH all these discussions over the Sino-British talks on Hongkong, I cannot help but feel that I should point out that there has never been any mention about what would happen to the locally born non-ethnic Chinese, ie Europeans, Eurasians, Indians etc, who hold Hongkong British passports, but who were educated in local European schools and never took up Chinese as their second language.

I understand that with the new clause now added in the HK British passports, saying that all HK British passport holders do not have the right of abode in the UK, what I would like to know is: will these people be Chinese citizens after 1997, when their education has been basically concentrated on Western culture?

Many of them, who have European fathers, obviously tend to be more Westernised. How will they survive if they cannot read or write Chinese?

Surely, they may start learning it now, but it will be unfair for them as they would be at a disadvantage.

Recently, I applied to go to China. Being locally born, with a European father and a Chinese mother but holding a Hongkong British passport, I decided to get a re-entry permit to Hongkong and to China.

To my amazement, I was not grant-

ed one. The Immigration Department advised me that my ethnic origin was not Chinese and the re-entry permit was only issued to locally-born Chinese. Therefore, it was suggested that I should get a visa.

When I went to China Travel Service to further query this, I was again advised that I could have a visa as CTS too regarded me as a "foreigner," although as I've mentioned earlier, I was locally born and hold a HK British passport.

I cannot somehow help wondering, if this is the case, what will happen to me when the Chinese Government takes over Hongkong in 1997.

● Will I then be accepted as a Chinese citizen?

● Will the British wash their hands and leave this minority of "misfits" to live in Hongkong and be Chinese citizens, if granted citizenship by China, but not be able to read or write the local language, having to lead a different way of life?

Surely it will be difficult for Britain to take all HK British passport holders, as I understand that there are over two million of them. However, I am sure that at least 98 per cent of these are ethnic Chinese and it would be easier for them to settle down to life in Hongkong under the Chinese Government.

Then again, I can understand that it will obviously be difficult for Britain to say it will take only those HK British passport holders who are not ethnic Chinese, as this might suggest racialism.

Obviously the easiest thing for us to do will be to follow our parents' nationality, but then again, we may be second or third generation and it has been suggested to me by the consulate concerned, that it will be a difficult and time consuming task, with no guarantee of being granted a passport.

Perhaps Britain may absorb this small group of HK British passport holders as immigrants, as we do only represent one to two per cent of the local population, and risk being called racialisists by the other two million odd ethnic Chinese HK British passport holders.

Or, we may become refugees left to the mercy of some benevolent third country and await resettlement.

The other course is to adapt and overcome our handicapped situation and eventually change our identity, family name and become ethnic Chinese, if the Chinese Government decides not to treat us as "local foreigners."

Until then, we will continue to apply for a visa to go to China as though we were Westerners till 1997.

SILENT MINORITY