

7 years enough to earn the right of abode

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THREE cheers for Mr Lu Ping! We were very pleased when we saw him on the screen again, giving us assurance on three important issues. At the same time, we are bewildered by the attitude and remarks of Szeto Wah and his colleague, Martin Lee.

Mr Lu Ping assured us on:

- NO political parties and party politics in HK.
- EQUAL political rights for all local inhabitants, irrespective of race, blood, nationality etc.

- DEFINITION of local inhabitants — as identical to Permanent Residents i.e. all those having fulfilled the 7-year residence, embracing people of both Chinese or non-Chinese descent, including locally born individuals of any race or nationality. All local inhabitants are entitled to "right of abode" and permanent identity cards. Individuals born to local inhabitants with "right of abode" should also be entitled to "right of abode" and full rights as a "local inhabitants".

For example, the "local inhabitant" may, for various reasons, reside in mainland China, Indonesia, Taiwan or Singapore for a number of years. His or her children, wherever they are born, will be entitled to the full rights accorded to local inhabitants.

By contrast, children of Singapore citizens born outside Singapore will or will not be given the full rights automatically, depending on whether this Singapore citizen is of the 1st or 2nd class. The children of a 2nd class citizen born outside Singapore must earn citizenship by residing in the country for the required number of years.

If Mr Lu Ping can achieve a "oneness" in this local inhabitant rights issue, he would have done better than Singapore's Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

Mr Lu said "the problem of how a foreigner (or a holder of a foreign passport) can prove that he has made Hongkong his permanent place of residence would have to be solved later."

May I suggest that people who have abided by the 7-year residence rule be conferred with the right of abode, which should never be taken away.

At the same time we can examine Britain's right of abode policy since the amended nationality acts of 1971 and 1981. Any immigrant who fulfilled the residence requirement (5 years) would be given the right of abode and deemed a British Citizen, the place of permanent residence would hence be taken for granted without any further "enquiry" or "need" to solve "any problem in connection with proof of permanent residence", because no such "problem" exists.

"British citizenship" thus earned is permanent, even if the citizen leaves England and resides in the USA for a number of years.

Similarly, we hope the same can be done for HK residents returning here after residing in foreign countries for a number of years.

We believe that some of them are genuinely interested in building up a prosperous and stable Hongkong for China. With the exception of the Chief Executive, all secretaries and principal officials should be chosen on the basis of merit and capability, rather than descent and nationality.

After seeing the examples of America, India, Palestine and South Africa, we have no choice but to insist on the principle of "justice and equality" — we hope to break through nationalistic myopia and general passport rites.

In conclusion, may we remind each other that in order to fight for and win freedom and walk the path of democracy, we must keep cool politically. Now that the political parties and political rights issues have come close to a sensible conclusion, the single most important issue left is that of our money reserve.

As a financial and trade centre, we must recognise the Exchange Reserve and the Lands Sale Fund as our two lifelines. Come what may, these two lifelines will have decisive roles in the SAR's strength and the eventuality of our dream of freedom and democracy.

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