

Idiom by Lon Yan

正本清源

zheng4 ben3 qing1 yuan2

Heated debate flared up again as the final arrangements for co-locating mainland and Hong Kong immigrations at the express rail terminal at West Kowloon were unveiled.

Critics called office area to be allocated to mainland immigration “land ceded.” The government said it was just “office space leased.”

Critics further said it sets a dangerous precedent to carve out a place within Hong Kong where mainland law is enforced. That could even be a violation of the Basic Law, they argued.

But Secretary for Justice Rimsky Yuen Kwok-keung countered that the Basic Law allows the SAR government to lease out land in Hong Kong. In any event, land in Hong Kong had always belonged to the state, and any claim of “ceding land” is a non-issue.

The co-location arrangement is designed

for the stated purpose of saving time and trouble for passengers, so that they don’t have to get off the train in the middle of the journey to clear mainland immigration.

But the issues involved are complicated and the difference in views fundamental. So chief executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor called on everyone to be pragmatic, and said to resolve the dispute, we need to “正本清源” (*zheng4 ben3 qing1 yuan2*).

“正” (*zheng4*) is “correct,” “right,” “本” (*ben3*) “the origin,” “the source,” “清” (*qing1*) “to clear up,” “pure,” “clear”, and “源” (*yuan2*) “the cause,” “the source.” Literally, “正本清源” (*zheng4 ben3 qing1 yuan2*) is “correct the origins and clear up the source.”

The idiom means “reform from the bottom, or from the heart,” “getting to the source of a problem to solve it,” “solving a problem by dealing with its origins.”

Terms containing the character “正” (*zheng4*) include:

正確 (*zheng4 que4*) – correct; proper

正常 (*zheng4 chang2*) – normal; regular

正式 (*zheng4 shi4*) – formal; official

正義 (*zheng4 yi4*) – justice; righteousness