

**THE INVASION OF PIAZZA FILIPINA :
GIVE ME BACK MY SHADINESS !**

Traditionally, at least for the past 5 years, that is, Chater Garden had been the exclusive territory of the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) of the Filipina maids, known in the parlance as domestic helpers, or, just, domestics.

During Sundays and public holidays, these domestics would congregate at the Chater Garden concrete park, to talk, to pass the time of day, to take photographs of each other ... until it was time to return to their employers' homes.

The domestics hold '*Church*' services at what has come to be known by the European residents of the HKSAR as Piazza Filipina, or, for the Chinese: '*Siu Ma Lay Lai* Little Manila'

The domestics commune with nature, chant prayers, sometimes with incantations, they dance; they sing the praises of the Lord; they eat hundreds of chicken wings and huge quantities crispy pata (pig's skin); and, generally have a good time on their one day of freedom from work per week.

When not praying to God or eating and drinking, many of the domestics, set up '*shop*' by offering manicure and pedicure services to whoever comes along, from anything, ranging from \$HK10 and up.

The reason that Chater Garden has come to be known as Piazza Filipina is due to the fact that, normally, it is full to overcrowded, just like a Manila square or an Italian piazza.

But, for the past few months, leading up to the long Easter weekend, ended April 1, Piazza Filipina has been '*invaded*'.

The invaders were the Chinese illegals, who were claiming the right of abode in the HKSAR.

These 3,000-odd, ethnically Chinese camped out in Piazza Filipina, set up beds and lit incense to their gods (in obvious defiance to the Filipina domestics' gods) in the hope that the Government of the HKSAR would relent and allow them to stay in the 416 square miles that constitute the territory.

On Monday, April 1, however, it was the last straw for many Filipina domestics.

The 5-year battle of the illegal immigrants, some of whom claimed that they wanted to stay in the territory in order to keep their families together, was over, and the 3,000 defiant ones challenged the Government of Mr Tung Chee Hwa to do whatever it deemed it must.



Who Said Mom Is Always Correct ?

Some of these illegals were on hunger strike while some just refused to move from their illegal campsites at Piazza Filipina.

Said Ms Pilita Urias, a 33-year-old domestic, who has been in the HKSAR for the past 5 years: *'They should be boycotted! Why not the police clear them away?'*

'This is the place of the Filipinas, not the Chinese (meaning, the exclusive place for the Filipinas on Sundays and public holiday).

'They (the illegals) are like squatters: Dirty and smelly and leaving messes.'



Praying For Help !

Ms Urias is not alone in her estimation of the situation, with some of her colleagues, being much more vocal.

'They (the Chinese illegals) have not any right in Hongkong. I am here, legally. They are not,' said Ms Verna Ricardo, a 38-year-old domestic.

'I have been here for 9 years and I do not sleep in Piazza Filipina; and, I do not mess there, too. But these Chinese do these things.

'It is giving us a very bad name, you know.

'I have right to be angry because, even though we (Filipinas) are many, when we go to Piazza Filipina or Statue Square, (another favourite haunt of the Filipina in Central Hongkong), we don't make trouble for police. We obey law.

'The (Hongkong) police company is very unfair; too, because we are not allowed to have the shady area around the Legislative Council building. But look! Those Chinese crime people are there, right now.

'Why not us? Discrimination!

'But the Mainland Chinese are illegals people, and, although I understand their stories, I don't care.

'We were here, first, and they should not take up all the covered areas in Piazza Filipina because then I and my friends have no place to sit in the shade when it is hot or it is raining.'

Many Filipinas voiced similar opinions about the situation, but most were unwilling to go on record about the situation.

The illegal immigrants claim that they had the right to stay in the HKSAR even though they arrived in the territory by illegal means, in some cases, or were overstayers, in other cases, or were legal, once, but Beijing determined otherwise.

Their years of fighting through the HKSAR legal system have cost the HKSAR taxpayers tens of millions of dollars.

But the illegals have lost, every step of the way.

And, when they appeared to be winning the game, Beijing saw to it that it put paid to such a suggestion as a victory for the illegals.

Certain members of the Catholic Church of the HKSAR have been supporting them in their fight, encouraging them to fight on.

This, to many people, gave the illegal immigrants a false hope of beating the system.

Many of the Filipinas, interviewed by TARGET, clearly, did not understand the reason that some 500 or so illegal immigrants had been camped at Piazza Filipina for such a long period of time.

Ms Isabela Nabalta, a 42-year-old domestic helper, having been in the HKSAR for the past 18 years, said, honestly: *'I don't (understand) why they are here ... taking up our places.'*

She went on to state that the situation is *'very confusing'* and that she maintains that Filipinas must not get involved in the situation, voicing any kind of opinion, because, otherwise, *'the Government (of the HKSAR) will come after us, next.'*

'I pity them,' she told TARGET. *'But they must go back (to China). They are illegal, you know.'*

Ms Shirley Lego, a 28-year-old Filipina domestic helper, who has been working for a Chinese family in the HKSAR for the past 3 years, said: *'They are abusing the rules. They (the illegal immigrants from the PRC, proper) are also humans. I know that. But must they take up all the rooms in this place (Piazza Filipina)?'*

'I hope they leave here soon so I and my friends can have back the shady place at Piazza Filipina.'

Ms Lego's friend, Ms Jorelyn Moreno, a 25-year-old Filipina domestic helper, said she agreed with Shirley, and added dolefully: *'They have taken my place near the entrance (of Piazza Filipina)!*

'I, also, had that place, but, for the last month, I have had to stay in the stairwell on Sundays.

'The police ought to have a control of here so that we can all share the shadiness places.

'Also, what about showers for us? In the summer, it is very hot, you know.'

TARGET has confirmed that there is no intention of the HKSAR Government to install showers at Piazza Filipina, but toilet facilities have been in place for some years, ever since Chater Garden became a haunt of the Filipina domestic helpers who, lovingly, call it their place ... PIAZZA FILIPINA.

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