



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

When you come to think of it, about seventy five percent of the world's entire human population speaks English to some degree. Only about twenty percent of the world's population speaks a Chinese dialect: Cantonese (about 200 million people); Mandarin [Beijingese] (about 300 million people); Shanghainese (about 200 million people); Hakka (about 60 million people); Taiwanese (about 30 million people); and, the other, 28 Chinese major dialects (about 600 million people). It is wrong. I have decided to try, once again, to promote the use of the Chinese language wherever I go because, after all, the Chinese language is, in essence, the symbol and mark of the sovereignty of our great, sophisticated country. I talked to Grandpa about this, some years ago, and suggested to him that English phraseology should be proscribed in Hongkong because it is a reminder of Hongkong's unfortunate past when we were under the yoke of imperialism. I said to Grandpa, at the time, that the Chinese language is the cultural embodiment of all that is good about ethnic Chinese people. Even Chinese calligraphy is an expression of China and of its peoples. Grandpa agreed with me (of course!), but his instructions to the Hongkong Education Department, to use Chinese as the principal language of instruction in schools, did not result in the youth of the territory, benefitting as I had hoped. Grandpa, the poor dear, got bogged down with trying to take care of the Hongkong trouble-makers: He lost track of my idea. I tried to suggest, in order to ease his load, that I take over the Ministry of Education, but I was reminded that that could only come about if I joined the Hongkong Civil Service. And that is not on, to be sure. I have not lost my resolve, however, even though our grandchildren go to the United States to complete their education in the English language, as do most of the other children of the other senior, Hongkong civil servants. As do, by the way, the senior cadre in Beijing and Shanghai. When one looks at the style of writing of English, one cannot help but come to the conclusion that it is, really, quite ugly, having no specific character or original design: Just some squiggly lines, not unlike the cuneiform strokes, popular in about 3,000 B.C., which graduated into, what is known, today, as Akkadian. The Chinese language, because it still depicts ideographic considerations, is beautiful; we should teach our children, and our children's children, of the beauty of the Chinese language since, in that way, we are passing on, from one generation to the next, Chinese culture, philosophy, art, and, yes, even music. The tonal quality of Cantonese, for instance, with its distinctive, nine different tones, is the music of the poetry of the south of the country. While the world thinks about economic recessions and interest rates, the important and lasting things in life, such as language, have been forgotten, to a very great extent. In fact, there ought to be a law against mixing up English phraseology with Chinese. We should outlaw the bastardisation of the Chinese language. I do not understand the reason that we have to use American terms for the Internet, in fact. The trouble with the English language is that it is not pure and steals words and phrases from all other languages. We must keep the Chinese language pure. If Americans want to deal in commerce with us, they will have to learn the Chinese language – or they can go to Hell! We must advocate the purity of our national language for the sake of all. If language is a means of communication, then, let us communicate in an expression of purity – and love of country.

When you look at modern Japanese, you note that they have 'borrowed' quite a number of words and phrases from the Americans. Today, an educated Japanese speaks Japanese, using English words for radio, table, X-rays, etc. Even Japanese food has taken on the character of American food – sadly. One of the worst things, for the Japanese language, was when the Imperial Japanese Army lost World War II. The knock-on effects were the introduction of such dishes as deep-fried foods (tempura, etc), steaks, and the drinking of whiskey, which is, even, produced in the country, today. The cessation of hostilities in 1945 ushered in a number of changes, not just in Japanese eating habits, but, also, in the language. It was a mistake for the Japanese to lose the war, but compounding that mistake was the tacit agreement that was made to encompass Americanisms into the pure language of the Japanese. China has never lost a war so that we are, still, blessed with the purity of our language. The English, half of the time, have no idea of their language, with most of them, knowing next to nothing of its grammar. As for the French, it does not matter what they say just so long as it is pronounced, correctly. This is important to the French because, most of the time, they are sloshed in wine. While the Americans put ketchup on most of their dishes, from spaghetti to steak, and the English use HP Sauce on their bangers-and-mash and bacon and eggs, we, Chinese, continue in the time-honoured tradition of our forefathers: We do not eat ketchup, HP Sauce, and do not get sloshed on French wine. The time has come for Hongkong people to stand up and say: 'Enough is enough! Chinese for all; and, all for Chinese!'

I have just received confirmation that Regina Ip, my former Security Director, has enrolled her daughter in an American university. I was told that the entrance examination results of her daughter were among the best, ever, of any prospective student of any year. You see, Chinese are clever people, after all. Hongkong will miss Regina: She was an excellent servant of the people – and she listened, carefully, to Grandpa and his directions. There ought to be more servants of the ilk of Regina Ip.

Love you, or should I say, love y'all,

The Chief Lady of Hongkong

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