



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

The next time that you hear somebody say that the Chinese do not appreciate the value of human life, or that the Chinese do not appreciate human rights, you say to that person: 'Remember Judge Zheng Wei Yang!' The Americans, with their trite expression, 'Remember The Alamo!' have nothing on the Chinese, following the decision of Judge Zheng Wei Yang to permit a murderer, facing the death penalty, to have a last visit with his wife. This is the first time that such great mercy has been shown to a condemned person, you must understand. In the past, it was 'guilty', then, the firing squad – and send the cost of the bullet to the accused's family for reimbursement. In this precedent-setting case, Judge Zheng Wei Yang, on hearing the plea from the murderer to say goodbye to his wife, had his heart softened: And, the request was granted. Hail, Judge Zheng Wei Yang! According to Grandpa, the case was not too terrible, with the accused, a Mr Li Jun, who had been a seller of port in an open Beijing market, having killed his neighbouring vendor, following many years of arguments, between the two hawkers. Mr Li Jun, being thirty years of age, thought that he was tougher than his neighbouring vendor and took advantage of his physical prowess. One day, following another altercation with his hawker neighbour, Mr Li Jun killed him, outright ... and that was that. The Number One Intermediate People's Court tried the case, found Mr Li Jun guilty, and sentenced him to death for his rash behaviour. Now, he is dead. But, just before the firing squad was assembled, Mr Li Jun asked Judge Zheng Wei Yang to permit him to see his wife for the last time. The venerable Judge, for the first time, granted the request of the accused, who was given twenty minutes in a sealed room, a glass panel, separating the wife from the husband, to say goodbye to his family. The entire discussion, via a telephone connection, specially installed for this historic-setting situation, was recorded for posterity. The conversation included instructions to his wife to take care of her health and the health of Mr Li Jun's family, and a little lovey-dovey stuff. Then, in appreciation of Judge Zheng Wei Yang's decision, Mr Li Jun thanked him for permitting the twenty-minute talk to take place. I am told that he died a happy man. That is the way that it ought to be: If a man is to be shot for his crime, then, he should be happy to face the consequences of his acts in a happy frame of mood, with a smile on his happy face. Henceforth, if a felon, awaiting the firing squad, requests to see his family for the last time, he is likely to be granted his wish. Judge Zheng Wei Yang remarked that the human rights of the condemned should be respected in China, even if they are not respected in America, the United Kingdom, or any other part of the world. I do not know whether or not you appreciate this precedent-setting departure from the deterrent form of sentencing in China, but it means that we, the Chinese, are showing much more compassion than other jurisdictions where prisoners are not afforded the same, or equal, rights, as in the Middle Kingdom. Further, my dear, you will note that, after sentencing somebody to death, the execution is carried out, promptly, sometimes within hours of the Court, handing down its verdict. That prevents the accused from suffering any more than he/she/it has to suffer. After all, a bullet in the head is rather a finite thing, isn't it?

Looking at this situation from the jurisprudential point of view, it must be viewed as the first step, down a very long legal road. In England, people in the seventeenth century were Transported for life. That means that they were shipped to Australia, from where there was no escape. Transportation for Life could be the punishment for

defacing a public monument or even a bridge in the middle of a hamlet. It was not nice at all. It took the British many centuries to stop sending people to Australia because it was discovered that even the kangaroos did not appreciate the masses of unwashed Englishmen, Scots and Irishmen. The British, you know, never respected human life, and used to hang, draw and quarter felons, leaving their bodies on scaffolds to rot in order to frighten the knickers off people, who passed by and viewed the decaying corpulent hulks. The Chinese never did such terrible things. When a person was guilty of a capital offence, it was 'Off With His/Her/Its Head!' – and quickly, too. You see, no undue suffering for Chinese felons. The Chinese, it is said, are sometimes slow to appreciate certain concepts, but, once such ideas are accepted, that's it. Respecting the rights of man is a wonderful thing; and, the decision of Judge Zheng Wei Yang is an example of the changing face of China. One day, who knows what might happen. It is possible that China could invent a new way of killing felons, a way that is even faster than a bullet. The first step, having been completed, now comes Step Number Two. Yes, China is progressive and receptive to new ideas. One day, the death penalty will be re-introduced in Hongkong and, when that time comes, you will see just how humane Grandpa can be.

Well, that's if for today.

Love you.

The Chief Lady of Hongkong

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