



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

*So, the maids of Hongkong are complaining about their government, now, are they? Well, at least, that is one group of servants, which is not blaming Grandpa for this or that. That is a welcome relief! But when has it been acceptable for servants to rebel against their masters? You may well ponder that question, My Dear Grandchild. The Filipina maids of Hongkong are complaining about the determination of the Government of the Philippines to impose more charges on them with regard to the processing of the documentation for Filipina servants to seek employment outside the Philippine Archipelago, which is, in reality, part of the Malay Archipelago. I see nothing wrong with the new addition to the taxation system of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, personally. After all, by having a few hundred thousand Filipina servants work in Hongkong, it means that these servants are able to avoid the indirect taxes, which would, normally, be imposed on them if they obtained employment in the Philippines. When a Filipina works, say in Davao, Mindanao, there are taxes, imposed on her when she purchases a gallon of petrol, when she buys a packet of cigarettes, when she goes to a café for some crispy pata, etc. The extreme poverty of most of the country has made it necessary for the Philippine Government to impose taxes where-ever and whenever there is a possibility of squeezing out a little something from the seventy six million human inhabitants. The exportation of the born-to-be servants of the country, the Filipina maids, has come to mean that the Government of the Philippines is losing out on a lot of revenue, which it would, otherwise, have obtained from this group of citizens. The new taxes, recently introduced on the servants of the country, who choose to work abroad, are, basically, an increase in the cost of processing documents, in order for the Government to agree to allow the servants to leave the Philippines and to work in other countries, and a mandatory requirement that these maids, most of whom are without any education – other than falsified documents, suggesting that they are graduates from this Philippine university or that Philippine college – join the country's welfare scheme. The cost of processing the exit visas and stamping employment contracts for these servants has always been there, of course, but, now, these costs have been increased by about twenty percent. Which, to my way of thinking, is reasonable. As for the two hundred Hongkong dollars per year, the mandatory contributions to the country's welfare scheme, I think that it is a wonderful idea. These servants must be made to understand that not everybody is able to be a servant. Some people are born for one occupation; others for other occupations; and, then, there are those people who are unable to earn a living, for one reason or another. It is correct and proper that those with the wherewithal to support those without the wherewithal should ante up. I talked to Grandpa about this whole idea and he agrees with me. So, I must be correct. Hongkong, I told him, should consider more indirect taxation on the population of the territory. I have, already, pushed through The **Mandatory Provident Fund Scheme (MPF)**, forcing employers to pay five percent of workers' salaries into the MPF, along with another five percent, coming from employees, and this has caused many a Hongkong bank to have a nice and steady stream of money, coming in monthly. While it is true that, thus far, the MPF has been a failure, from the standpoint of the employees of Hongkong – it was started in December 2000 – it will come good in the fullness of time ... for Hongkong banks and for the Hongkong Government, that is. Just think of all the employment that the imposition of the MPF has given to Hongkong fund managers! Now, there is another idea on the drawing boards.*

I suppose you are aware that Moody's Investors Service had downgraded all of the long-term debt of the Philippines. Moody's maintains that there is political uncertainty in the country. Quite right, too! The cash contributions from the overseas Filipina servants will go a long way to bolstering the coffers of the country and should, to some extent, alleviate the Government's fiscal problems. It appears that, according to Moody's, the outlook for the country is negative. This is a pity, really, because there are only two female leaders of any merit in the world, today: Me and this Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

Well, I have so many duties this week, what with the holiday of the birth Buddha, Grandpa's favourite resting time. I have to go in order to direct the cook in making vegetarian dishes.

Love you,

The Chief Lady of Hongkong

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