



## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*The popular Press of Hongkong is going, entirely, too far. Chicken flu reports are being distorted and they are frightening – even me. We do not eat chicken or duck in our house, any more. According to my friends in Chao An County, Guangdong, Hongkong reporters have been filing reports before they have been read and approved by the Vice Governor, Mr Zhong Yang Sheng. This is just not on. I told Grandpa: ‘Don’t just sit there, like you always do. Do something constructive! Sack the reporters of Hongkong!’ As usual, however, he just repeated: ‘Too shallow! Too shallow!’ What is happening – and it is terrible – is that Hongkong reporters are listening to hearsay and anecdotal evidence, according to Vice Governor Zhong, and, then, repeating what they hear. Vice Governor Zhong is thinking of suing the Hongkong newspaper(s)/reporters for publishing such nonsense. Reporters of Hongkong should be more responsible because hearsay evidence and anecdotes could lead to gigantic financial losses to chicken and duck farmers of China. Since the illegal reports were filed in the Motherland, of course, those illegal actions are subject to the laws of the Motherland, not the laws of Hongkong. There is a strict procedure to be followed for all Hongkong reporters, working in the Motherland, but many of them, because the Motherland is so kind, abuse that sacred trust, afforded them by their positions. If those Hongkong reporters do not follow those procedures, then, they will have to pay the penalty for violations of the Motherland’s laws. In the case of the bird flu, the correct procedure is, firstly, to apply to the Ministry of Agriculture for confirmation of the hearsay evidence. Then, secondly, application should be made to the Office of Vice Governor Zhong for permission to publish the report, as confirmed by the Ministry of Agriculture. While, no doubt, some people may question the time that it takes to confirm or to substantiate hearsay and anecdotal evidence, sufficiently, the alternative is just not acceptable. Let me give you an example: Suppose Mr Wong Kai Pong, a reporter on Dateline Daily News of Hongkong (I just made up the name, you understand), talks to a shop-keeper in Chao An County, who says that she heard that a pig sneezed after it passed an area in which the chickens and ducks of the farm, usually scavenge for food. It would be wrong for Mr Wong Kai Pong to report that that pig had contracted bird flu from the chickens and ducks, or, even, that the pig had caught a cold. The pig could, very easily, have a feather in its nose, which it wanted to evacuate. What about a couple of dead chickens, found in a farm in Chao An County? Those birds could have died from old age, kicked by an ox, or run over by a farm wheel barrow. A dead bird does not an epidemic make, as the saying goes. Reporters of Hongkong should, as I was taught by my family, be seen, but never heard.*

*The recent Hutton Report of the United Kingdom, when a former reporter of the **British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)** wrongly accused the Government of Prime Minister Tony Blair of misleading the people of England in respect of linking military armaments with the United States when it liberated Iraq, should be a lesson for Hongkong reporters to remember. The former BBC reporter had to resign his position and, today, he is walking the streets of London, looking for work. That reporter said that the gist of his report was correct. Lord Hutton disagreed. The gist of a report is not good enough, however: The report must be correct – in every aspect. That is the reason that reporters, wanting to work in the Motherland, must go through the correct channels of Government before filing stories with their Hongkong offices. The trouble with Hongkong reporters is that they*

*live under the mistaken impression that they are free to write whatever comes into their little heads. The time has come to put a stop to this nonsense. I am sure that you agree with me. I have always maintained that one should believe only about fifty percent of that which one hears – unless it is out of the mouths of my Government Ministers – and thirty percent of that which one reads, unless it is an official release from the Government's Information Services Department (I employ only special people in this department, just to make certain that everything is absolutely kosher).*

*Well, I must go and write my speech for the Ladies Auxiliaries on the subject of objectivity in Government. It won't take me long to finish it because I know exactly how I feel about the topic.*

*Love you,*

*The Chief Lady of Hongkong*

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