



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

On my last trip to Kagoshima, the southern-most port of Japan, at the museum in the middle of this very pretty city centre, I noted that there were rows and rows of Japanese names, inscribed on one wall, of kamikaze pilots, who died for the honour of Emperor Hirohito, during World War II. After the names of the pilots, there were their ages, some of whom were as young as fourteen years. I was shocked to learn that many of these suicide sortees were piloted by children, who were just achieving puberty. I thought to myself: How could a parent, any parent, in any part of the world, condone such acts of permitting children to commit suicide for the sake of a god-like figure, who was less than five feet in height and could not have weighed more than one hundred pounds, soaking wet? And these children, all knew that once they took off, they would die! What kind of madness is this! And, then, I noted that Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, annually, pays homage to those Japanese who died in World War II by visiting shrines, dedicated to those Japanese soldiers who died in that horrible and stupid war. On May 16, 2005, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, in response to a question, raised by a Diet Member, said, inter alia: '... A visit to Kasukuni Shrine described as prettifying militarism is unexpected of me ... I will make appropriate judgment when to go there'. The Prime Minister went on to state that he would continue to visit the Kasukuni Shrine in years to come in order to continue to pay homage to those who died in the war. Pay homage to those bellicose jingoists of the Japanese Government of 1942, who ordered the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 when the US was not even involved in World War II? Early in the morning of December 7, 1941, Japanese submarines and carrier-based aeroplanes attacked the US Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor. Nearby military airfields were, also, attacked by the Japanese aeroplanes. Eight American battleships and thirteen other naval vessels were sunk or badly damaged, almost two hundred US aircraft were destroyed, and approximately three thousand naval and military personnel were killed or wounded. The attack marked the entrance of Japan into World War II on the side of Germany and Italy, and the entrance of the US on the Allied side. The visit to this war shrine by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, among other things, opens up, once again, the festering sores of the Chinese, who suffered, horribly, under the Japanese Government military machine's brutalisation of China between the 1930s right up to 1945, when Japan surrendered.

A little history is, perhaps, in order, here. In September 1931, Japan alleged that the Chinese had sabotaged part of the Japanese-controlled South Manchurian Railway. The Japanese invaded Manchuria and gained control of the city of Mukden (now Shenyang) with its large Chinese garrison. The Japanese set up a puppet government and renamed the region Manchukuo. In response to Chinese resistance, in 1932, the Japanese attacked Shanghai and pillaged the countryside. The League of Nations branded Japan as an aggressor in October and Japan withdrew from The League of Nations several months later. During the next few years, Japanese forces in Manchuria exerted military pressure in northern China and, by 1935, had moved into parts of Chahar (now part of The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region) and Hebei Provinces. In July 1937, a serious clash between Chinese and Japanese troops at the Marco Polo Bridge near Beijing precipitated a full-scale, though undeclared, war between the two countries. The threat posed by Japan temporarily united the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party in an uneasy political truce. The Chinese were

hampered by their lack of industrial bases and well-trained army officers and enlisted men. The Japanese quickly captured the major cities in northern China, including the KMT Capital of Nanjing. In 1938, the Japanese, also, seized Hankou (now part of Wuhan) in central China, and Guangzhou in the south. The then KMT leader, Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek, with the help of the US Government of the day, led his armies westward into the interior and established the new wartime capital at Chongqing, in Sichuan Province. The Japanese were able to cripple the Chinese economy and isolate Chiang Kai Shek's forces by capturing the entire coastal strip of China and cutting off communications with the interior. The Chinese, however, continued to resist the Japanese. How many innocent Chinese were killed by the Japanese soldiers during those bloody years, nobody has ever tried to count, but it is known to be in the tens of millions, to be sure.

And the Japanese Government of today honours their dead leaders of these bloody times, along with their soldiers of that period instead of vilifying the ignominious Japanese Government of the day! It is hard to swallow, isn't it? The Jews of the world remember the holocaust when the German Government, between 1939 and 1945, killed some six million Jews. There are, still, many Jews who refuse to purchase goods, made in Germany. Who can forget the German concentration camps where the widespread slaughter of the innocence, men, women and children, was carried out in the name of the Fuhrer? I wonder what objections would be raised by the Israeli Government if the present Chancellor of Germany, Mr Gerhard Schröder, were to pay homage to some of the high-ranking members of the Hitler Regime of World War II; or, what objections would be raised if he were to pay to visit a German cemetery, devoted to commemorate the deaths of the German soldiers, who acted as guards at one or more of the concentration camps and who took an active part in the extermination of those six million Jews? In some ways, the Japanese Government of the 1930s and the 1940s were not much different from the German Government under Adolf Hitler. As the Jews will never forgive the Germans of this period for their brutality, during World War II, so the Chinese must find it very difficult to forgive the Japanese for their atrocities, during that international struggle, which cost the lives of more than fifty million people, worldwide, with twenty million dead in Russia, alone.

How, I ask you, My Dear Grandchild, can the terrible past be forgotten, or at least, put in the rubbish bin of history, when the head of Japan's Government, openly, honours the fallen soldiers of World War II, soldiers who took delight in perpetrating atrocities on Chinese innocence? Has Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi forgotten that the Yasukuni Shrine honours, not only Japan's World War II rank-and-file dead, but, also, fourteen known and convicted war criminals of World War II, all of whom were hanged in Tokyo, following thirty one months of trials, held by an international court? The Japanese, in fact, still want to change history in their schoolbooks by putting a slant on the period between 1930 and 1945, a slant which tends to justify the actions of the government of the second-largest economy of the world, today. Where is the outward display of remorse that is duly owed to the people of China by the Japanese Government? Or, are there, still, Japanese leaders, today, who believe that the invasion of China by the Japanese in 1931 was justified? When may we put the history of this period to bed, forever?

Oh, justice! Where is your white cloak of purity? Where is honour buried? On which field has the red blood of courage soaked and congealed into the soil of history to fertilise future generations with flowers of learning? Talk to you next week,

Chief Lady

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