



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

A present-day, distinguishing trait of a Hongkong believer and a refined European gentleman became very clear to me, recently, when I overheard this conversation in a swank Hongkong restaurant:

Chinese Businessman: What is the main course that you ordered for dinner?

Chinese Businessman's Wife: You will see when it is on the table.

Chinese Businessman: I want to know, now!

Chinese Businessman's Wife: Clams, steamed in garlic, you stupid idiot! I'm not going to poison you!

This conversation had been overheard by another Chinese businessman, seated at a table, nearby. He commented to the Chinese businessman and his facetious-speaking wife that he had attempted to order the clams, also, but he was told that they had all been sold. The Chinese businessman, whose wife had ordered the clams, only minutes earlier, quickly responded: 'I'll sell you mine ... for a profit, of course!' Had the same scenario been played out in, say, Berlin, Germany, Bilbao, Spain, London, England, Paris, France, etc, a European gentleman of refinement, most likely, would have responded: 'Please have mine. I can always order something else.' Such is the difference in the way that many, if not most, Hongkong businessmen approach life, compared with the actions and thinking processes of their European counterparts. Let me put it another way. A bus driver, negotiating a country road in England, during a heavy rainstorm, may well complain to his passengers that the white dividing lines of the road needed to be repainted; and, that he was having trouble in seeing them. Had that same bus driver been a Hongkong believer, as soon as the rainstorm had abated, he might well have considered ways to make application to the County Council in order to sell to that authority some white paint ... made in China.

Money is better than sex in Hongkong, today, and it is, certainly, considered much more important than most ethical considerations. Many Hongkong businessmen and business ladies are willing to prostitute themselves in order to obtain a little more of this important medium of exchange. In Pacific Place, an upmarket shopping mall at the eastern edge of the Central Business District of Hongkong Island, it is designated, today, as being a Smoke-Free Shopping Complex. It is a recent fad in the territory for a number of commercial buildings to proscribe smoking since, as we all know, second-hand smoke can kill just as easily as first-hand smoke. However, at Pacific Place, it is common to note that visitors from Mainland China, on entering boutiques, ostensibly to view clothes on sale, take out a cigarette and light it even though there are multiple signs, which state that smoking is prohibited in the complex. The salesgirls of the boutiques, by and large, are afraid to tell prospective buyers that smoking is not permitted in Pacific Place because, should the prospective buyer be upset at the dressing down by a lowly salesgirl, he or she is unlikely to buy anything from the shop. In Japan, there is no question that a visitor must follow the rules of the country. If, for instance, a visitor jaywalks and is caught by an

alert policeman in the act, that visitor would not be fined, but would be politely asked to learn the rules of walking: Back and forth would the jaywalker be ordered to cross the road until the policeman was satisfied that the lesson of the day had been learned. In the event that the jaywalker refused to learn the lesson of the day, it would be off to the Japanese cop shop where, presumably, the jaywalker would be forced to learn another lesson, in addition to abstaining from jaywalking in The Land of The Rising Sun. Getting back to the Smoke-Free buildings of Hongkong, there is no legislation on the books to proscribe smoking in these buildings, but owners of them have made the determination that they do not want smokers to pollute the air of their edifices. As such, orders have been issued to management companies 'to encourage' tenants and visitors to refrain from smoking in the building and its surrounds. However, more often than not, when it comes to the visitors from Mainland China, for the most part, they are not very interested in learning, or following, Hongkong rules because they have never been taught as to the efficacy of such rules. Also, for the vast majority of them, after their first trip, they are unlikely to return to Hongkong for some time, if at all. So, for what reason should they consider Hongkong rules of conduct? It is not that the Mainlanders want to be seen to break Hongkong rules, but it is just that they see no reason to abide by them. Further, they are so far behind in respect of what is good for health and what is harmful to health, that they see no logic in not smoking when the spirit moves them. Many of them recall the words of the late Paramount Leader of China, Mr Deng Xiao Ping, who chain-smoked until he died at the age of ninety three years in 1997, the year that British Hongkong was returned to the Motherland. Mr Deng Xiao Ping is known for his defense of smoking and cared little for the inconvenience that it caused those people close to him when he lit up a cancer stick: 'Some people have different ideas about smoking ... and so do I.'

Ah well, che sera sera!

Talk to you next week.

Chief Lady

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