



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

The spirit of Christmas is, truly, upon the Government of Hongkong. That is because, I assume, the Chief Executive of the territory is a Catholic. Yes, Mr Donald Tsang Yam Kuen is the only person in any position of authority in the entire Chinese Government's hierarchy, who practises a recognised Western religion. Personally, I do not hold that against this man because, regardless of his religious leanings, he will, still, do the bidding of Beijing: 'Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and render unto God what is God's.' Getting back to the spirit of Christmas, this year, the entire Central Business District of Hongkong Island is full of Santa-this and Santa-that. At Santa Town, there is even a Santa Post Office, erected on Statue Square, just beside the tallest (fake) Christmas Tree in Asia. Children just love to walk around the area and to view the life-like mechanical toys, the sounds of bells and Christmassy music, flooding the area. It is, really, a lovely sight and one cannot help but be filled with the feeling of love for all mankind – which is what Christmas has come to mean to all men of good will. There is a downside to this, also, of course: The Filipino maids of Hongkong, about two hundred thousand of them, by the last reckoning, have been displaced! Usually, on Sundays and public holidays, a large part of the Central Business District is dedicated to pedestrians, with motor vehicles prohibited from entering the area. That cordoned area happens to include Statue Square and its immediate surroundings. Now that the Christmas decorations and the little Santa Town has been built, naturally, nobody is permitted to go near the wooden structures for fear that the Filipino maids would want to take some souvenirs home in order to decorate the rooms in which they live. This is not to suggest that Filipinos are not to be trusted, My Dear Grandchild, but there is no reason that the Hongkong Government should put their honesty to the test. After all, as is well known, everybody has a price ... except you and me, of course. On Sundays, up until recently, little armies of Filipinos would congregate at Statue Square, on the pavement, outside The Mandarin Oriental Hotel, underneath the headquarters building of The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Ltd, and where-ever else space in the cordoned-off area of the Central Business District could be located to suit their fancies. They sit in these areas in order to eat their chicken legs and chicken wings, fried rice and other little delicacies, which may be purchased at special shops, dedicated to feeding these natives of the Philippine Archipelago, who work in Hongkong as cooks and maids and cleaners. Today, however, these little dears will have to find other areas of the Central Business District to suck on their chicken bones, enjoy the company of their own kind and to view Santa Town from a distance. To see them underneath the headquarters building of The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Ltd is really a sight because they remind me of the way in which cockroaches pour out their holes as soon as they are assured of a meal. The Filipinos take over the site, belonging to The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Ltd, with hardly a foot available for somebody to walk. Santa Town in the Central Business District has displaced the Filipinos to a great extent, but it is for the general good, I think. I cannot state that the erection of Santa Town is due to the religious bent of the Chief Executive, but, no doubt, he endorsed the plan, which was paid for by the taxpayers of Hongkong, of which the Filipinos are not included – because they partake of the goodies of the territory, but are not obliged to pay taxes. However, when, on Sunday, December 4, 2005, there were a number of the Filipino maids, chanting along with some eighty thousand qualified residents of Hongkong, that Beijing should give Universal Suffrage to the residents of the territory. I suppose that their joining the democracy march means they maintain that the Filipinos, who pay no taxes, cause the Hongkong Government to pay for the cleaning up of their chicken bones and other mess, after they leave on Sundays and public holidays, also want the right to vote for the leaders of the territory? You have to hand it to these people: Such chutzpah!

Anyway, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Talk to you in 2006.

Chief Lady

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