



## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*While the United States of America and Europe fret about the flood of Asian-produced consumer goods, hitting their marketplaces, I wonder whether or not the leaders of the countries, most affected by these imports, realise that, by and large, the Asian-manufactured goods are generally shoddy, compared with similar goods, produced in the United States and in most parts of Europe. It is said that cheap things can be expensive in the long run. I know that this is a truism from personal experiences. The average American or European, having purchased a shirt/blouse/pair of shoes/consumer electrical/electronic product, etc, will complain loudly to the shopkeeper and demand a cash refund if that product is proven to be of a quality, which does not measure up to the standard, which is expected by the average consumer. It has happened to me so I know that it is true. I have purchased clothing from China only to discover, within days, that certain seams come undone due to the fact that the amount of material, where two pieces of material meet and are connected, is too small to afford a secure connection. As a result, the seam is soon fatigued and comes apart. I am certain that my experience is not a one-off because my friends have told me of similar stories with regard not just to Chinese-produced clothing, but also to Chinese-manufactured electrical goods, the live of which are very limited. In fact, on a visit to purchase a new electrical thermos in Hongkong, recently, one used in the kitchen in order to allow me to have hot water all of the time, I was informed by the salesman that I should only buy one, manufactured in Japan or South Korea. 'You will only complain to me if you buy an electric thermos, produced in China,' he told me, flatly. Today, most people of Hongkong, those who expect quality in their goods, would not purchase consumer goods, made in China, because they know what they are likely to be buying: Lack of quality control; shoddy workmanship; cheap raw materials, used in the manufacturing process; and, much of the time, goods that do not perform as one would expect or has been warranted by the manufacturer/Hongkong agent/retailer. I am certain that any Italian man or woman, given the choice of owning a pair of Italian shoes or a pair of Chinese-made shoes, would opt for the former not the latter. China, today, is interested in producing quantity, not quality. This is a sad reflection on the country, to be sure, but it is just a matter of time before the country will have to start to compete with its European and American rivals with regard to quality. While some of the largest retail companies of the world are continuing to purchase consumer goods, produced in China, in Vietnam, in Cambodia, in Thailand, in The Philippines, etc, etc, etc, and shipping the goods back to their home markets, it is well known that these goods cannot compete with homegrown products of similar quality. For the most part, Asian-made consumer goods from low-cost areas, such as the above-named countries, are no match for similar products, made in the United States, Italy, Germany, France, etc, etc, etc. Perhaps, Asian-made consumer products will never be able to compete with the likes of products, manufactured in countries where the work ethic has been ingrained in its artisans over many decades, oft-times, from father to son. One notes that Japan produces export goods, which can measure up against similar goods, produced anywhere in the world. I have, as I recall, told you of the Japanese manufacturer, talking to his counterpart in Detroit, Michigan, where he was told that the American manufacturer had brought down his rejection factor to three percent. To which, the Japanese manufacturer asked politely as to the meaning of a rejection*

*factor. Such a concept as a rejection factor, you understand, is unknown in Japan: Nothing leaves the assembly line unless it has passed stringent inspection. I am told that, in South Korea, a similar work ethic has been ingrained in its workers for many years. Sadly, not so in China where workers are still too 'young' to appreciate the importance of maintaining a high degree of pride in one's labours. My father used to counsel my brother, when he was young, that it mattered little what my brother did when he grew up, but whatever his life's work was to be, he should attempt to attain the highest standard of excellence that was possible, be it that of an expert street sweeper, to an expert sign painter, to an expert engineer, to an expert surgeon. For many people in China, Vietnam, The Philippines, Cambodia, etc, the only consideration, today, is to be able to earn sufficient money to feed oneself and, perhaps, contribute to the family coffers in order to alleviate the burdens of all. Such niceties, as I have explained in respect of sewing a seam, is of minor importance in the overall struggle to earn sufficient money to clothe oneself and be in a position to buy three good meals per day. Since the late 1940s, the people of China have been taught to work together in order to create a strong nation for the benefit of all: One must sacrifice oneself for the benefit of the Motherland. There has never been a suggestion that one's labours should be of a very high standard in order to be able to compete with the labours of one's counterparts on the North American Continent or in Europe. It will take many more decades before goods, produced in low-cost regions of Asia, will attain the status of similar goods, manufactured in Asia's largest markets.*

*Talk to you next week.*

*Chief Lady*

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