



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

Now, who am I? Can you guess by reading the words to the latest song, being sung in Central Hongkong:

*Where-ever a mother may be,
In Tokyo, London, Washington, Hongkong or gay Paree,
There you will find, us, the happy nannee,
Just down from a tree,
Taking care of your babee.
La-lee, La-lee, La-lee, LA-LEE!*

*We come from Marcos land,
Where our little toes once embraced soft, yellow sand
As we walked, without a care
Smelling the unpolluted air.
But, now, we is your export au pair.
La-lair, La-Lair, La-lair, AU PAIR!*

If you guessed that this is the latest song, sung to the tune of 'America The Beautiful', was composed by happy Filipinas and Filipinos, then, you win the gold ring. It seems to me that Filipinas and Filipinos should bow when they pass a photograph of Mrs Imelda Marcos because it was this lady's inspiration that have guaranteed employment for a large proportion of her people for many generations to come. Citizens of The Philippines no longer have to concern themselves about employment, unemployment and under-employment. They do not have to look for jobs – because jobs are looking for them! The Philippines is the one country in the world, today, where the job statistics mean next to nothing. Nobody in The Philippines has to worry about the number of people, which joined the workforce of the country, during any period of time, because the number of jobs, hunting for able-bodied Filipinas and Filipinos, regardless of their height, their weight, their lack of comely physical appearance, their academic background (or the lack of it) appears to be unlimited ... and growing, daily. And the one person who made this situation possible was Mrs Imelda Marcos, the wife of a former President of The Philippines, Mr Ferdinand Marcos. Mr Imelda Marcos came from the same simply background as the Filipinas and Filipinos who, today, toil away in other people's houses, doing the simple menial tasks. In countries, such as Japan, Canada, the United States of America, Taiwan, France, Germany, and many parts of the Middle East, Singapore and Hongkong, just to mention a number of countries and territories that readily come to mind, when the economies are bad, the Filipina worker is still badly required. When the economies of these countries are good, Filipinas and Filipinos are in even higher demand. It is unlikely that this situation will ever change. Indonesia and Malaysia have tried to climb aboard the Filipina/Filipino bus, but to no avail: It is, still, the Filipina and Filipino who are considered the best type of person to look after the baby, be trusted to wash and iron clothes, to polish the silver and shoes, and perform other household duties. One could say that The Philippines has, just about, scooped the markets of the world, almost to the point of monopolising the entire, international marketplace with their people export. Good luck to them!

About one year ago, it was Macau that realised that there was a large need for domestic helpers because the

small population of the former Portuguese colony was engaged in work in respect of the new hotels and casinos. Here come the Filipinas and Filipinos to fill the void. In southern China, the same thing happened. In South Korea, the call went out: 'We need you, Filipinas and Filipinos! Come to us!' Filipinas and Filipinos speak, for the most part, 2 languages: Tagalog and English. So, for southern Chinese and South Koreans, there was the added bonus, when hiring a Filipina or Filipino, that the child in their care would, automatically, learn a second language. Of course, in Malaysia and India, there is no need for the services of Filipinas and Filipinos because they have their own breed of servant who knows, not only the culture of the country, but also the likes and dislikes of the people and their food. When a Filipina or Filipino works in a foreign land, things are nearly the same as when working at home in The Philippines because, in both places, the requirement for deep thought is not required. This was, exactly, the thinking of Mrs Imelda Marcos when she pushed through the legislation to export her people, round the world. It was a brilliant concept! Her original idea was that, since there were hundreds of thousands of unemployed males and females in The Philippines, many of them, being in fact, completely unemployable in the country, for one reason or another, and since most of them had a very low intelligence quotient, they were perfectly fitted to be domestic helpers and what-have-you in other parts of the world. Further, since Mrs Imelda Marcos had an insatiable appetite for money and shoes (the latter, being her admitted passion because, when she was very young, she did not have any shoes, her family, not being sufficiently wealthy to afford shoes for the children, just like so many of the Filipina and Filipino exports of today), the exportation of Filipinas and Filipinos to other parts of the world could be turned into cash. The plan was multifold: The Philippines could earn money by determining who should be permitted to be exported to other parts of the world by having them sign a contract of employment with agencies, established in The Philippines and controlled by the government of the day, and, then, by making it law that the Filipinas/Filipinos remit part of their incomes back to the country and pay tax, directly or indirectly, on their incomes, earned overseas. In addition, naturally, all cash remittances must go through Philippine Government banks or banks, endorsed by the Government – naturally at a handsome fee. The Imelda Marcos plan worked, beautifully, as may be witnessed on any Sunday by visiting Worldwide House in Hongkong Central and noting the Philippine banks, doing a roaring trade, remitting money to The Philippines. Because most of the Philippine nationals, working in Hongkong, are not, exactly, Einsteins, it never occurs to them that they are being ripped off by their own government. If they were able to understand such a thing, of course, they would not be permitted to be exported in the first place! Say what you like about Mrs Imelda Marcos, but you cannot question that she is a very shrewd lady. Because she laid down the foundations of the exportation of Filipinas and Filipinos, some 30-odd years ago, the country has grown rich from the proceeds of the remittances of the Filipina and Filipinos, and the banks of The Philippines have, also, grown richer by translating foreign currencies into Philippine pesos at favourable rates, favourable, that is, to the Government of the Philippines. Also, every few years, the Filipinas and Filipinos fly home to see their families and, of course, the national airlines of the country benefit there, also.

The one thing that does bother me, however, is that, while the Filipinas/Filipinos work abroad and send money home to their families and/or the husbands, it never seems to accumulate, according to Alice, my maid. Alice has a husband, who lives in Mindanao and he receives money on a monthly basis, according to Alice. She has not seen him for the past 5 years because he told her that the airfare to fly home is too high. It is better for Alice just to send her husband monthly remittances so that he can start planning to establish a chicken farm. He has been saying the same thing for many years and, every so often, he asks for more money for this or that. Alice suspects that Jesus (that's the husband's name) has another wife in Davao, but she has no proof so she just does what Jesus tells her to do. She told me: 'I am married to Jesus. I am the bride of Jesus so I must follow him and do what he asks. I have to trust Jesus. He is my love for my life. I am a Catholic.' I think the sentiment is very sweet, but I fear that Jesus is living the life of a kept man while Alice scrubs floors, washes clothes, cooks simple dishes (she is not at all clever in the kitchen) and so on. I know that she does not cheat on Jesus because Sundays are spent either in Church – where she donates money, weekly – or sitting on the ground in Central Hongkong with some of her friends, who, also, are maids or nannies. Because she does not keep company with a man, I think that she may well end up like many of those 'other' Filipinas who manage to satisfy their natural cravings in the company of their own kind. (Do you understand what I mean, My Dear Grandchild?) Although I have never gone to certain areas of Hongkong Island and Kowloon, I am told that there are many Filipinas, working in certain red-light areas as dancers and prostitutes. I suppose that they work as comfort ladies of the night because they are so used to giving comfort to others. I asked Alice one day as to what was in her future. She said that it depends on Jesus. I know that she has little in the way of worldly goods and almost no money in the bank. Yet, it does not seem to matter to her. In a way, it is good to be that way because the more things that one accumulates, the more problems one has. Don't you agree? People with next to nothing have next to nothing about which to concern themselves. The perfect model for Mrs Imelda Marcos to export from The Philippines, I suppose.

Talk to you next week.

Chief Lady

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