



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

While toy companies of the US and Europe continue to complain about problems in the production process in China of their orders, with, inter alia, unacceptable levels of lead in the paint, used to decorate toddlers' toys, I have just discovered that some tanneries in China are screwing themselves – and my Motherland – by using inferior dyes in the production of leather goods. As you know, My Dear Grandchild, because Bo-Bo, my fat frog of a husband, continues to grow more and more rotund as the weeks fly by, his feet continue to swell and, due to this problem, he has started to wear more informal footwear. For some time, Bo-Bo has been buying shoes from Timberland because he claims that the lasts of this company are among the best, at least for his tender tootsies. The lasts may be good, I have discovered, but not the tanning of the leather of the shoes that are being made in China, these days. Last week, without my permission, Bo-Bo went to a Timberland store and purchased 4 pairs of shoes at the cost of \$HK3,564.80. When he brought back the shoes and told my maid to clean them, all, Maria, my Filipina maid, complained that the shoes stained her hands. I remarked that shoe polish does that to one's hands and I dismissed the complaint out of hand. Filipinas complain so much these days that I pay little attention to their gripes. Bo-Bo went to the office, last Wednesday, and, while in the office, he noted that his white socks were turning black. (Bo-Bo likes to wear white, thin sports socks in the hot summer due to the ability of these socks to absorb his perspiration, which can be rather smelly at times.) Taking off his new, black Timberland shoes, he discovered that most of his white socks were streaked in black lines – from the stains of the interior of the new, black Timberland shoes! He was, at first, amazed, and, then, that amazement turned into fury. Rushing back to the Timberland store, he approached the same clerk that served him when he purchased the shoes and demanded an explanation. The store clerk called for the store's manager, a young Chinese lady by the name of Ms Jennifer Ng. On looking at Bo-Bo's socks, Jennifer explained that, originally, the leather of the shoes was not black but tan. She went on to state that, naturally, the leather had to be dyed in order to make it appear to be black. All this seemed logical enough to Bo-Bo so he patiently continued to listen without uttering a dicky bird. You have to be patient, Jennifer explained to Bo-Bo, but it will take some time before the black stain on the inside of the shoes dissipates sufficiently so that you may wear white socks, again, without the socks, being stained black. 'In the meantime, I suggest that you wear black socks,' Jennifer ended her monologue. At this point, Bo-Bo was outraged. He yelled: 'Are you telling me that, when I buy a pair of black shoes from a Timberland store, I must, always, wear black socks! This is the most ridiculous thing that I have ever heard!' Jennifer replied: 'But the shoes are made in China!' She, then, continued, suggesting that Bo-Bo should not have purchased shoes, made in China, which have black leather linings. 'You should have bought brown, leather-lined shoes,' Jennifer countered. With that, Jennifer intimated that Bo-Bo return the black leather shoes and the shop would replace them for brown leather shoes. Now, Bo-Bo is noting that his white socks are all turning brown! He can't win for losing!

This Jennifer story reminds me of the American lady who purchased a bright-yellow parrot in Los Angeles, California, some years ago. The owner of the pet store explained to the lady that the colour of the bird was extremely unusual and, for that reason, because the parrot was a mature female, the shop had to charge double the usual price for such a rare parrot. The lady took the prize parrot home and displayed it in a

golden cage in her living room. As the days went by, the bright-yellow feathers of the rare parrot started to turn less bright and less yellow. Within a month or so, the bright-yellow, feathered parrot had turned into a dull-grey, feathered parrot. The lady took the parrot back to the pet shop and asked for an explanation. The owner of the shop asked the lady: 'I suppose that you stopped feeding the parrot the yellow of an egg for breakfast? That is the reason that the bird's feathers are no longer a bright yellow colour.'

The point of this letter, My Dear Grandchild, is not so much about Bo-Bo's problems with Timberland shoes – he should have asked for my permission before going shopping by himself in the first place, anyway – but about the shoddy workmanship of many things, produced in China, these days. Of course, I know that China is able to manufacture superior products, also, but it is apparent that, in some industries – furniture, toys, shoes, clothing, pet foods, toothpaste, etc – many of the manufacturers of the Motherland are cutting corners in order to increase profit margins. I realise, also, that, in the case of Timberland, quality control by Management's buyers, at the manufacturing stage, is sadly lacking. But because of this facet, eventually, to employ a pun, Timberland will be shooting itself in its proverbial feet. People will not want Timberland shoes again – at any price. Also, what kind of dyes is being used by the people of China in tanning leather? Do the dyes have a heavy lead content? Extrapolating the Timberland situation, may one expect motor vehicles, produced in China, to be manufactured of such poor workmanship that they are unsafe to drive over a certain speed. And will salesmen of China-made vehicles maintain that the reason for a traffic accident was because the motor vehicles should not have been driven at excessive speeds of 50 miles per hour and more? If the Government of China does not step in to regulate the country's manufacturers of certain industries in a timely manner, China will, definitely, lose her advantage of having an almost unlimited supply of relatively cheap labour and relatively cheap land. The Western World looks at price, of course, but if goods, produced in China, are shoddy, then, customers of the US and Europe would prefer not to purchase them – because goods, manufactured in China, are no longer trustworthy. And that would be a sad state of affairs, would it not?

Talk to you next week.

Chief Lady

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