

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

We, all, know that most of the ethnic, Chinese tourists from the Motherland to Hongkong act in a manner which, to be kind, is uncouth and foreign to the way in which we act; and, I was wondering as to the real reason for their manners ... or the lack of them. In the United States and in nearly every part of Europe, farmers, labourers and shopkeepers, and even those with little to no formal education, act with a certain amount of consideration for their fellows. Not so, however, it seems for the majority of the ethnic Chinese tourists from the Motherland to our territory. One sees, in shopping malls, in hotel lobbies, on buses, on the Mass Transit Railway, in restaurants, and even on the streets of Hongkong how these tourists act, jostling their way, very aggressively, being almost oblivious of their fellows, and thinking nothing of causing discomfort to others as they try to accomplish whatever it is that they want to achieve. From birth until it is time to leave the parents' nest, children take with them the teachings of their nurture. They assume the manners and mannerisms of their parents or guardians so that, if one's upbringing lacks decorum and acceptable propriety of behaviour in polite company, one may appreciate what baggage such an adult brings into the world. The people of China have, throughout the centuries, embraced their unique culture, they have perfected their artistic temperament, they have written poetry of unsurpassed beauty, they have followed the tried-and-true moral teachings of pantheistic religions, in the main, they have studied the works of the great Chinese philosophers, such as Confucius and Mencius, the teachings of whom may be found in The Sishu (The Four Books). The reverence, paid to Confucius, today, is such that Hongkong pays tribute to this great teacher of China by honouring him, annually, on the anniversary of his birthday, which is a national holiday. And, yet, I wonder how many of the ethnic Chinese tourists from the Motherland to Hongkong can even recall one word of this great thinker of the Zhou Dynasty. I would go further to suggest that many, if not most, of these ethnic Chinese tourists have never even heard of the Zhou Dynasty. I venture to suggest, also, that it is highly unlikely that many of these Chinese tourists would be able to recite one Chinese poem, to name one great Chinese artist of bygone days – in spite of the fact that China is credited with being the founder of 3-dimensional art. Chinese artists were depicting nature and scenes from history and mythology in 3 dimensions while the Western World was still, walking round in its artistic diapers. The pity of all this is that, replacing the many virtues of the past, what has evolved is a society in China, bent on being acquisitive for the sake of ostentatiousness. If one has no money for food, one may appreciate how the waking hours of such a mendicant would be spent in pondering the plight. When there is no paucity of money, sufficient to pay for the next meal, for what reason could there be to amass very material wealth for the sake of saying to one's neighbour: 'You see what I have accomplished?' Accomplishments, therefore, are determined by viewing the number of zeros after a numeral in one's bank account. What beauty is there in a bank book where the figures contain many zeros? What art is there in producing goods for sale in order to add more material wealth to one's already overflowing coffers? Even in the art of Chinese calligraphy, so revered in ages past, it is obvious that it has been almost completely forsaken as the current generation of adults of the Middle Kingdom learn, only, how to write numerals in cheque books, numerals that look more like chicken's feet than the pleasant cursive scroll of yesteryear. There was a time in China when the educated man's calligraphic talents were considered one of the most-important attributes of erudition, along with the writing of poetry and painting scenes from nature.

In Hongkong restaurants, today, one need not ask which of the Chinese guests come from the Motherland – because it is very apparent. Shovelling food, quickly, down their gullets as though there were a fear that the food might, suddenly, disappear if not devoured in a flash, it is a sure sign of the lack of table manners of our ethnic Chinese guests from the Motherland. I use the term, 'guests from the Motherland,' but I dare say

that they, themselves, do not consider that they are guests of Hongkong, but part owners of the territory. These people are my people, to be sure, but they are, to a great extent, alien to my way of life and I, really, cannot understand them and/or many their actions or their lack of appropriate actions. Case in point, one notes that many of these tourists do not possess handkerchiefs or paper, facial tissues as they walk down the street or sit in buses or restaurants so that, when they sneeze or cough up phlegm, the expectorate is available for all to witness – because it is either, being wiped away on the back of a tourist's sleeve or, worse yet, deposited on the sidewalk or floor or onto or into whatever is most convenient. Is it possible that the transition from 1948, with the advent of Chairman Mao Tse Tung (Mao Zedong) and the birth of the People's Republic of China, up to today, whereby the Motherland is fast becoming the largest and most-important economy of the world, has changed the face of China so much that the current human population has forsaken many of yesterday's virtues?

What happened to the idea of conformity of life and conduct with accepted moral principles, so treasured by our ancestors? Is there little to no more moral excellence, remaining in the Motherland? What is the price of beauty? What is the price of righteousness? Is there a price that may be ascribed for charity? Are these questions worthy of discovery? Think about it, My Dear Grandchild.

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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