

The Wong Way

Mr Wong is a practising solicitor in the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Because he is a solicitor, he is very proud of his position in society. He wears only the latest fashionable clothes, which he purchases at a very fashionable departmental store, the same fashionable departmental store from where he purchased all of the furniture for his home. Solicitor Wong lives on The Peak, a very fashionable part of Hongkong. He lives in a house. He is married to a former teacher of the English language. He has a teenaged son who attends an international school. He is the proud owner of a white Rolls-Royce, which he purchased, second-hand, about 8 years ago.

The following are just some of the things that Solicitor Wong does; and, the reasoning (or lack of it) for his actions.

Life is, only too often, enigmatic, and, while the purported holy people, who walk this earth, claiming to know that which ordinary mortals cannot ever hope to understand, for the majority of the mere mortals, morality is that which is laid down in statutes, social mores, or the hand-me-downs of religions which had their roots in many centuries ago. When, for instance, Solicitor Wong was a very young man, his late father had, always, told him that he must marry a virgin. This virgin must be Chinese and must be the fructus naturales of a good Cantonese family. That was more than 50 years ago and, today, if Solicitor Wong were to be asked whether or not his father's advice had been correct, it is highly unlikely that he would come down on the side of paterfamilias. So, today, Nicholas, the 10 year-old son of Solicitor Wong and his wife, Judy, was only partially literate in the Chinese language, in speaking, reading and or writing. However, he was obtaining praise for his ability to swim, to sing with the range of at least 2 octaves, and to have fairly decent table manners. The reason that Nicholas had only a rudimentary knowledge of the Chinese language was because, about 10 years ago, his socialite father was persuaded by his then peers to place him in an international school in Hongkong where only the children of the rich and famous were admitted. Neither Solicitor Wong nor Judy thought very much of having Nicholas learn very much about the Chinese language, Chinese history, Chinese arts and crafts, Chinese culture and/or the many and varied forms of Chinese music that have evolved over the past 5,000 years or so. The thought, actually, had never occurred to either one of these upstanding members of the elite Hongkong society at the time that Nicholas was ready to attend school in order to prepare himself for the time that he would leave the family nest and become his own person. But that was a decade ago and, today,

Solicitor Wong, without admitting any fault of his own, was concerned about the formal education of Nicholas. *'I am surprised,'* Solicitor Wong said one evening after Nicholas had gone to bed, *'that our son can hardly speak Cantonese or Mandarin and cannot read a Chinese newspaper. As a former teacher, I would have thought that you would have insisted on him, being fluent in Chinese. Instead, we speak only English at home – because of Nicholas's ignorance of his cultural birthright.'* Judy had been studying the latest fashions from Chanel, pondering whether or not they would be suitable for her slim figure. She had not been paying too much attention to her husband's utterances and, in fact, of late, she had distanced herself from some of his outlandish concepts. But, when she caught the word, *Nicholas*, she started to pay some attention. She said in defense of her position: *'It was your idea to put him in an international school in Hongkong, claiming that it would be easy for Nicholas to enter university when it was his time to indulge in studies of higher learning. I just went along with my husband's plans. Now, you are complaining!'* And, then, she went back to studying the Chanel catalogue as a woollen dress caught her eye.

Solicitor Wong knew that he could not fight Judy because, although he did not want to admit it, openly, it was he who had strongly advocated the path that Nicholas should take in obtaining what he determined was a decent education. At the same time, however, one decade earlier, it would have been unthinkable for a socialite father of a son or daughter not to place his offspring in an international school. What would the residents of The Peak say if they were to learn that the son of Solicitor Wong was attending an ordinary school to which even the sons and daughters of fishmongers and tradesmen attended? Also, at gatherings of the parents of children, attending international schools, there was, always, the off chance of distributing his visiting card just in case his knowledge of Family Law would be required at some future date by a passing acquaintance. But times had changed and, in today's world, a thorough knowledge of the Chinese language was a must for any officer of the Hongkong High Court. But Nicholas was, in this respect, a dunce. Something had to be done – yesterday!

It was a lovely summer's evening on The Peak and, seated in Solicitor Wong's handkerchief garden with a slight breeze, cooling the brow of this learned gentleman, he asked Judy, politely: *'Could you tutor Nicholas in the Chinese language?'* Once again, on hearing the word, *Nicholas*, Judy's antennae seemed to rise from her forehead as she announced: *'Well, you know that every Monday, Nicholas has a swimming lesson; on Tuesdays, he has piano lessons; on Wednesdays, he has to brush up on his soccer skills; on Thursdays, he is supposed to indulge in community projects for the school; and, on Fridays, he has to attend the clinic in order to learn to play tennis with his coach at The Ladies Recreation Club. So, you see, he is fully occupied – and so am I.'* Solicitor Wong asked: *'What about Saturdays and Sundays, then?'* Judy replied: *'Those are my days to do the shopping, have a facial, get my hair coloured, highlighted and trimmed, and, generally, do all of those things that I am unable to do between Monday and Friday – because I am too busy, driving Nicholas to his appointments.'* Solicitor Wong was beaten to a frazzle.

And so it came to pass that a tutor was engaged for Nicholas at a cost of \$HK10,000 per month. The tutor was instructed to teach the young man all that he should have learned in primary school, with all of the lessons, conducted in Putonghua, formerly known as Mandarin, a Chinese dialect, known to both Solicitor Wong and his wife, Judy, but today, it is the national language of the country of about 1.30 billion people.

And all of the above would strongly suggest that the formulae of yesteryear's world may not take kindly to being imported into today's world: There just may not be a fit. Further, trying to right the wrong determinations of yesteryear may well turn out to be an expensive proposition ... and, even then, the result may well be failure.

Like most of us, life is not always easy and, for Solicitor Wong, he learned that the yesteryear's lessons may or may not be apropos in today's world.

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