

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

An important exclusion of the Western World as it views Asia, today, is that it has failed to treat with equality, in its political thinking, that of culture. And this, I think, is one of the causes of many mistakes in the thinking of the leaders of the Western World in its dealings with the East, and, specifically, in its relations with China. The rise of superiority of the Western World over most other parts of the 'civilised' world since the Renaissance (between the 14th Century and the 16th Century) was due to advances in science and scientific techniques and to political institutions, the last-mentioned, having been firmly implanted during the Middle Ages (A.D. 500 to about A.D. 1453). What has happened, in many parts of the Western World, is that it has adopted, probably without realising it, a West-European imperialistic flavour. This, if left unchecked, could result in the deterioration of the present power of the West unless it can reverse its constructive-destructive course. One might like to ask what is harder to overcome: Imperialism of culture; or, imperialism of power? The United States, today, lauds over the world in thinking with regard to imperialism of power, but it is sad to realise that it is sadly lacking in its understanding of the immense cultural differences that separate the thinking of the West from the thinking of the East. Let me give you an example, My Dear Grandchild: If you travel to China and determine to engage the services of a China-trained solicitor, it is almost a guarantee that your newly appointed solicitor of record will, firstly, state that he or she holds a duty of fidelity to the Government of China of the day and, if called upon so to do, this solicitor would not think twice of opening the firm's books in respect of your dealings and/or instructions to your solicitor to any and all officials of that Government; if, for instance, you want to perpetrate an act which, in the West, would be commonplace, such as the establishment of a certain corporate entity in, say, Shanghai, that entity to be engaged in certain business activities in China, your China-trained solicitor will, without question, take the view that your instructions are not in keeping with existing laws in China and he might well inform the powers-that-be of your instructions without informing you of his/her intention to become a whistle-blower. At your trial, if found guilty of trying to perpetrate an act, contrary to China law, your China-trained solicitor is quite likely to rise from his chair, on hearing the determination of the Court, and state, stentoriously: 'I agree with this Court's finding in this case'. The Western concept of the inviolability of solicitor-client confidentiality is, today, non-existent in China although it is highly unlikely that any China-trained solicitor would admit, openly, that this is the case. It is not in the culture of a China-trained solicitor to go against the grain of legal concepts or philosophical beliefs, deeply rooted in the population of the country, regardless of their efficacy.

I talked this over with my froglike husband, Bo-Bo, who said, on hearing my thoughts, that I am correct (for a change, he agreed with me). He said, among other things, that the Tang Dynasty in China (A.D. 7th Century – A.D. 10th Century) was a remarkable period in the history of development of China, but the Western World has yet even to understand the advances that this dynasty made in the field of art, literature and poetry. The cultural advances in China were made while, in the West, it was still struggling to come to grips with what has come to be known as 'The Dark Ages'. The Frog said that it was surprising that the West, during World War I and World War II, did not realise or appreciate the huge chasm that divides Western thought and Western Culture from that of Eastern thought and Eastern Culture. In World War II,

especially, the West, suddenly, woke up at about 8 a.m. on December 7, 1941, to the realisation that 'tiny' Japan had vast military potentiality and that The Land of The Rising Sun would come perilously close to defeating the West in that horrible war. The unprovoked attack on Pearl Harbour was based, inter alia, on the Japanese belief that the response of the United States would be insignificant, based on the passivity that had been shown by the Government of the United States toward Japan's successful aggression in the north of China. The Frog went on to state: 'The Japanese Government made a terrible miscalculation in respect of the reaction of the Government of the United States in 1941, mainly, I think, because of the cultural divide between the West and the East. The Government of the United States, likewise, made a terrible miscalculation in respect of the military might and its application of Japan, prior to December 7, 1941, and how it would be deployed against the 'sleeping giant'. Similar examples of the cultural divide are evident in respect of Russia and Germany, China and the United States. It was wrong, at the outbreak of World War II (1939 – 1945), as it is, today, to think that civilisation is the singular prerogative of the West. In short, that civilisation was imbued in the West, only, and that no other part of the world was 'civilised'. 'Such arrogance!' remarked The Frog. And, still, the West has refused to accept that there are other very viable civilisations than its. 'You know, Betty', The Frog continued, 'I was recently asked whether or not Western-styled democracy would be embraced in China if a referendum were to be held and the people asked to chose between today's lifestyle in the Middle Kingdom and the West's lifestyle whereby the Government is beholden to the people instead of the people, being beholden to the Government. I responded by stating that, whereas, democracy is a wonderful political concept, it is dependent upon historical and cultural understanding by the proletariat. It is unlikely that the majority of the people of China would agree to such a radical political change, although, in time, things are quite likely to change, markedly.

Today, democracy appears to be the most-popular form of government in the world, but take a look at Singapore where, until only recently, Mr Lee Kuan Yew held the reigns of political office for some 25 year, from 1965 until 1990, and, then, he anointed himself as Minister Mentor to those Prime Ministers that took over the reins of power from him. The Constitution of Singapore is, and always has been, since Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew came to power, illiberal, but still formally a democratic regime. Under that form of "democracy", Singapore prospered economically. But Singapore's Government has never encouraged liberal principles in the Republic. Today, the Lee Dynasty continues with the son of Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, recently having been almost unanimously voted in as Prime Minister. By the way, Betty, all of the judges in Singapore are installed by the Prime Minister. It is an interesting example of another type of democracy which, no doubt, one day, will take a different political path. One must remember that Singapore has an imperial history, having once been a Crown Colony of Great Britain. Another culture, you understand.'

History is a wonderful teacher, My Dear Grandchild, but only too often, sadly, the world does not embrace the lessons of the history. It is very apparent to me that the Government of United States of America, under the Administration of President Barack Hussein Obama, does not recognise the importance of cultural equality. Many people and many countries dislike the many relatively recent actions of the United States, rightly or wrongly, and this is a real pity because I, personally, believe that, generally, the Government of the United States has the best intentions in the world: It just does not fully understand all of that which it is doing. It is sad, don't you think?

Talk to you next week.

Chief Lady

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