



Dear family, friends, clients and colleagues:

Hope this letter finds you all healthy and prosperous. This year went by so quickly. I'm so glad our office and family are still standing, amid this global economic downturn and another year without U.S. immigration reform.

I recently returned from my Silk Road trip to China. I watched its 60th anniversary celebration, and thoroughly enjoyed the eight-day holiday. Reminded me of my trip to India in 1998, when the country celebrated its 50th year of independence. It's awesome how countries and times change.

My family is doing well. Mom remains our matriarch approaching the age of 90. Kam is taking full advantage of his semi-retirement. Steven and Allison are both in law school. I feel they have more of an appreciation for what it takes to become a great lawyer. There are no shortcuts.

My sisters Cecilia and Rose, and my brother George, are busy helping Mom and running the Pearl of the Orient restaurants. (Mom still thinks she's so independent.) My nephew Francis, and my niece Theresa, joined our firm, but I'm not as fortunate with my lawyer nephew Joseph, who has decided to stay in Columbus to pursue his legal career.

I was so thrilled to be invited to write for the Albany Government Law Review this summer. It is doubly exciting because this was something I had always dreamed of doing all through law school. I continue to co-chair the NAPABA Immigration Law Committee and our annual conference this year will be held in Boston this November. I am also co-chairing a major fundraising campaign for my alma mater, the University of Buffalo Law School. In addition, I was recruited by Senator Sherrod Brown (whom I have known since we were both very young) to be on the nominating committee for the new Ohio U.S. Attorney. And, to revisit my most harrowing bar exam memories, I spent hours cramming at the last minute for the Multistate Professional Responsibility Exam, and am proud to report that I passed. What a relief!

My partner Scott Bratton has joined the ranks of Leading Lawyer for Northeast Ohio, Inside Business Magazine, Ohio Super Lawyer Rising Star, Law & Politics Magazine and Best Lawyers in America. Congratulations, Scott! Together our firm continues to do cutting edge legal work, resulting in several published, precedent setting cases in Circuit and District courts. We couldn't have done it without our great team.

I continue to host two of the highest rated, live Chinese talk shows in New York City. In addition, every Thursday night, we answer callers' questions and discuss current immigration issues during our hour-long internet talk show at <http://chataboutit.com/>.

We did quite a few high profile cases, including representing President Obama's aunt. I'm glad that we remain on the top of our game.

The practice of immigration law has become increasingly difficult. We had a near-miss when one of our new clients was put on a plane to be deported, but we worked swiftly with the U.S. Attorney's office, the 6th Circuit Clerk of Courts, and ICE attorneys to return him to Ohio after the plane stopped in Chicago. It was a daunting experience, like watching a horror movie without knowing how it will end.

I finally finished my first book and it is in the hands of my publisher as I write this letter. Dad and Mom, being lifelong publishers, readers and writers, would be proud.

I wish you another great, happy, successful, and healthy year!

Margaret Wong
Margaret W. Wong

12/09



My dearest Dad,

Last night while channel surfing, I happened upon a news report documenting three Amish teenagers' struggle to break free of their restrictive lifestyles, and their ultimate journey back home. Dad, I wish you could have been there watching with me, because it was like *déjà vu*. Remember? Mom's motto used to be – come to think of it, it still is – *Out of a stick comes a respectful son. Out of chopsticks comes a spoiled brat*. Somehow, this saying in English doesn't have quite the same ring as the original Chinese proverb, but the meaning remains the same. Fear of punishment makes a child respectful, while pampering can spoil him.

Sadly, to me, respect was a concept as foreign (or as odious, depending the day) as stilton cheese. I can still remember the words my grade-school teacher spoke when she caught me sticking my tongue out when I thought her back was turned: "Oh, you think that's funny? I'll show you funny." She proceeded to lead the entire class to the bathroom and have them watch me clean the floor on my hands and knees for the rest of the class period. I can't say that she immediately cured my lack of respect, but it certainly taught me how to calculate behavior/consequence ratios with lightening speed.

You once told me the Chinese phrase for *respect* was made up of two words: fear and reverence. In the hierarchy of Chinese culture, parents are ranked third, only behind God and country. Teachers are not far behind. Their words are absolutes. They leave no room for disagreements, let alone arguments. Often, *respect* boiled down to one single edict: "Yours is not to question why, yours is but to do or die". For someone as rebellious as I was at the time, that was a hard pill to swallow. Dad, remember all those times you were called to the principal's office because of my inability to conform? Despite your kindness, understanding and support, I am sorry to say that like those Amish teenagers, I couldn't wait to leave that stifling environment. As if God heard my prayers, I was accepted into a college in America: the land of the free, a utopia ripe with rights, opportunity and wealth. Little did I know that this journey would ultimately lead me to finally understand the mentality of those authority figures that I had once loathed.

Fast forward 35 years. Now I have children of my own. The first time I heard the word "no," I was dumbstruck. No? What do you mean, no? Being a late bloomer and a slow learner, it took me a while to accept that in this democratic society, respect is not a God-given right. It cannot be coerced nor can it be demanded; it must be earned or inspired. That honor and regard from the heart is much more valuable than mere concealment of contempt for overbearing disciplinarians.

More and more, baby boomers and the generation before them lament the fact that this gen X has no concept of respect, not taking into account that the concept varies greatly between generations, and cultures. Respect to one can be servility to another. The line between reverence and subservience is extremely fine, as is the one between fear and awe. We preach independence and promise liberty for all; however, liberty and independence taken to an extreme can disintegrate unity, of family and society alike.

Dad, if only we can find a middle ground somewhere with the best of both worlds – a place where our children are taught civility as a basis for respect, and filial and civic duties as moral obligations; a place where their right of free speech carries the weight of the power of the word; a place where elders are held in high esteem for their life experiences instead of their age and are treated with dignity and compassion because they afford us opportunities that we often take for granted, to get us to where we want to be.

I think John D. Rockefeller says it best. "[...] every right implies a responsibility; every opportunity an obligation; every possession a duty." That, to me, in a nutshell, is respect for everyone and everything we hold dear.

Dad, this will be the thirteenth year you are not spending Christmas with us, and I miss you as much as the day you left.

Merry Christmas.

Your third daughter,

Rose





Greetings from Joseph in Hong Kong!

I am writing this letter from an apartment/room that is a little over 100 square feet (luckily, this doesn't include the bathroom). More relevantly: I am spending a semester abroad at the Chinese University of Hong Kong to (a) brush up on Cantonese, and (b) reconnect with my "roots."

The first reason for going to Hong Kong is straightforward—although we were all stuck in Mandarin Chinese Saturday school at an early age, my cousins, siblings, and I never formally "learned" the Cantonese dialect; our grasp of the language is based on whatever we gleaned, consciously or unconsciously, from our parents and relatives. As a result, we tend to speak with our parents a haphazard mixture of Cantonese and English, with the occasional Mandarin phrase thrown in—a common situation experienced by ABCs (American Born Chinese) all over the country.

The second reason is related: I wanted to live in Hong Kong to better understand the collective experience of my parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Although they came to the U.S. for college relatively early in their lives, Hong Kong remains an integral part of my parents' generation. Speaking to one another, they easily slip into the endearing tones, colorful idioms, and wacky expressions that only Cantonese can provide. They reminisce about childhood pastimes, favorite snacks, and places that are rich in their memories (I'm sorry to report that most have been razed to make way for hi-rises). Like every other person who grew up there, they automatically select the verb "to return" (*fāan*) when describing their travels to Hong Kong. Clearly, those formative years in Hong Kong resulted in deep "roots" for their generation. My goal is to explore some of these roots, and in the process, possibly find a few of my own.

At a defining moment when China has become a leading economic power, there has been a worldwide surge in interest surrounding the Chinese language and culture. It would thus appear that my generation—having grown up in the U.S. but having spent summers or semesters abroad in China or Hong Kong—has been blessed with the perfect cultural "mix" between the two cultures. However, the result is not so simple. Indeed, as my cousins, siblings, and I continue to explore the post-college or post-professional school world, we frequently find ourselves having to (re)define our identities. Meeting new people in the U.S., we still get the "where are you from?" question (answering "Cleveland" doesn't work, since the follow-up question is "so where are your parents from?"). Meanwhile, no matter how correct our grammar, we are immediately recognized as foreigners in China or Hong Kong whenever we speak Chinese (betrayed by our slightly "Americanized" accents, of course).

And so we are left straddling two worlds, one foot in each (though some of us have better balance than others). Personally, I do not believe that this apparent conflict can ever really be resolved; it is an issue that we will continue to deal with for the rest of our lives. After all, we can no more deny the "Chinese-ness" of our upbringing (as we wished we could as children) than we can deny that we see the world around us through the lens of American liberal-arts educations.

Although the reality is that our identities are quite entangled, I am confident that my cousins, siblings, and I can embrace this "mixture" to produce something worthwhile and unique. It helps that we've had a head start—looking back, it is increasingly apparent that what we used to consider constraints were actually "roots," planted and nurtured by our parents and grandparents, "roots" that provided us with the foundation from which to grow and thrive as individuals.

From my family to yours, we wish you the best this holiday season in nurturing your own roots, as well as creating new and exciting branches!

Joseph Fungsang
2nd son of the 2nd daughter

