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Dear Colleague:

I've just returned from a visit to Taipei and would like to share with you my uneventful experience of air travel, economy class. What struck me most was that we were a plane full of refugees. This impression forced itself upon me for the following reasons. First, we were packed shoulder to shoulder in the big hold (called euphemistically "main cabin"); second, most of us looked anxious and some of us looked rather desperate as though we were not at all confident that we would ever reach safe shores; third, we all seemed to be wearing ill-fitting clothes that did not drape but wrapt themselves around us and looked as though their pockets were stuffed with apples or bananas; third, our hair, after a few hours of flight, was disheveled and looked unclean; fourth, children crawled on the aisles and infants brawled on the laps of harassed mothers; fifth, after eight hours of flying on an empty stomach our hands reached up from the slouched position of our seats to the food that was handed down--it would seem from a great height--by well-groomed attendants who wore the calm superior faces of gods and goddesses; sixth, early in the morning we waited in line outside the lavatories wondering whether our sphincters could maintain their grip and hating the people inside for taking so long over--what?--the painting of their fingernails?

But I have saved the clinching evidence till last. We looked like refugees because of all the bulging paper and plastic bags that were grouped around us and which we guarded as though they were our children. Were the bags packed with warm sweaters, cough drops, and memorabilia from the past? No. This is where we differed from real refugees. Our bags were packed with duty-free Chanel no. 5 and bottles of whisky. Psychologically, however, the difference was not all that great, at least, not through the duration of the flight. We felt almost as helpless, and we deferred without question to our betters--our attendants who functioned also as officers of law and order. But what made us so pathetic was our greed. The greed has always been there; greed for more and more possessions. But it is only when we travel that we realize greed's virulent power, for it is then that we revert to the status of primitive beings who have to protect their wealth against possible marauders with darting eyes and snarling teeth.

Best wishes,

*Ji-Fu*