

More Safety, Minimal Inconvenience

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Like many Hong-Kong Chinese business people, I need to undertake international travel from time to time for my import-export company. Last May, I visited the United States for one week to meet with some business contacts.

The flight from Hong Kong to Chicago was smooth although long, and I landed early in the morning Chicago time, which by then was nighttime in Asia. I went to the passport control area and queued up at the visitors' entry counter. There were about 30 to 40 visitors in front of me so I needed to wait patiently for my turn.

I saw that we were organized one behind another with two officers directing us to the proper counter. Everything moved along and it was not chaotic at all. A female Asian-American police officer was among the security personnel assigned to the area.

A sign warned us not to turn on our mobile phones and that anyone who broke that rule could have their phones confiscated! Since I was no longer aboard the aircraft, I was a bit puzzled about this restriction and

couldn't imagine why using a cell phone would be a problem. I have since learned this is another security precaution.

It took about 15 minutes for me to reach the front of the line and be directed to an immigration officer who asked me a few questions. Being satisfied with my responses, she asked me to put my right and left index fingers on a screen, one at a time, for electronic fingerprint scanning. I followed the instructions, she put a stamp on my HKSAR (Hong Kong Special Administration Region) passport and granted my entry into the United States. The whole process took only two to three minutes and I did not experience any problems.

Although when traveling to other countries it has not been necessary for me to go through fingerprint scanning, my personal feeling is that the extra measures now required by the United States cause me only a little extra inconvenience. I don't believe that the personal data the U.S. authorities obtained from me will pose any risk of harm to me personally or to my country and, by requiring it of all visitors, it helps them to ensure the safety of their homeland.

As a Chinese citizen living in Hong Kong, I remember that we also suffered drawbacks after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. I feel that it is in our interests as well to see that the United States remains a safe and prosperous country for its citizens. The cost that I, a visitor, now pay for doing my part for better security is minimal, and one which I am quite happy to bear. ■