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## Documents Online

**Title:** "An Open Letter to the Chinese People" by Pearl Buck

**Date:** 1938

**Location:** I-Friends-1993-2

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## AN OPEN LETTER TO THE CHINESE PEOPLE

When I put down those words, the Chinese people, I think of you as the ones I have known all my life, the common people of China. You are the first to call yourselves that. Many times one of you, speaking to me, has said, "I am only a common man, but this I think and feel -- " and so you have gone on to speak and I have always listened to what you said because it has been wise and liberal and just. You may not, most often, indeed, you cannot read and write, but you are more civilized than any people. You have inherited centuries of tradition of tolerance and wisdom about human life.

~~(As to your own life,)~~ You live in villages and market towns and cities. You till the land, you carry on business in shops, large and small, you are vendors and travelling cobblers and dishmenders, sellers of sweets for children. In ordinary times you get on well enough, because you are healthy and strong and you can pay for the sort of food you like best, bread and rice and cabbage and a bit of meat or fish, your bowl of tea and a pipe or a cigarette. Your houses are poor by some standards and yet I know, for I have eaten and slept in them, they are real

homes, full of gayety and overflowing with children. Everybody works, and so you all manage together. You live the sort of life I admire above all others, frugal, cheerful, simple and without self-consciousness. Therefore when I think of what you are now undergoing at the hands of militarist Japanese, my heart breaks with anger. For of course you cannot compete with them in war. <sup>this kind of</sup> You are not prepared so to compete with them. You are utterly defenseless, and so, though millions of you have gone out to fight, knowing very well how defenseless you are, for the present the ~~invaders~~ <sup>invaders</sup> militarists prevail.

I ask a question of you -- Why are you so defenseless?

For years ago you and I, talking together in a courtyard or on a threshing floor, or under a roof, dripping with long quiet summer rain, foresaw this very thing. You are not surprised, any more than I, at this war. You knew that one day you would have to go out and fight the invading Japanese. We argued over it a good deal. You said, "We have <sup>won other wars</sup> ~~always conquered~~." I said, "But there haven't been bombs before." You said, "Western nations -- The League -- America -- will help us." And I said, "No one will help you. You are too far away, and they won't see what it has to do with them." In this last I have been right. The Americans are now talking vaguely of a silk boycott. It is too late for that to do much good, if it would ever have done any good. Boycotts should have been begun years ago, not only against Japan, but against every militant nation. And there should be nothing so mild and futile as a silk boycott. Only a complete boycott of everything, trade, credit, and even communication, <sup>s</sup> can <sup>^</sup>

be effective, a boycott so complete that any nation which goes insane with militarism will find itself at once isolated. It would be the only sensible and in the long run the only profitable thing for the world to do. But governments never see so far. They only think of the profits that can be made at the moment from the wild demands of the insane nation, and *of protecting their own business interests at all costs.*

What you are suffering, then, is not unusual.

It is what happens in any country at the hands of conquerors.

Japan is not more wicked than Germany or Italy were in their

recent day, nor Germany and Italy more wicked than those before

them. Why ~~should~~ <sup>will</sup> people be surprised at ~~the way in which the~~ *rape and loot and murder when*

Japanese entered Nanking? Militarists always behave in the

same way in any age. Guns simply make them more effective than

broadswords, and bombing planes than cavalry horses.

No, but why are you so defenseless? You have been mercilessly taxed by your rulers. Why is it, with this war plain

and dark on the horizon so long ago, that when it came at last

you had no navy, few planes and very little equipment, actually, *against the Japanese,*

with which to fight? You have poured yourselves into armies, <sup>armies of</sup> it

is true, armies of warlords as well as the national army, anyone

who would lead you at all. You are used to army life of a sort.

Armies have always been one of the safety valves of your economic

life. In bad years you became bandits, ricksha pullers or soldiers.

You were confident enough, knowing your own courage. But how can

your bare bodies withstand machine guns and cannon and bombs?

You said to me sometimes when we were talking about this war, "We

will pile up our bare bodies until they make mountains against

the Japanese." You have done that literally, but it has not

been enough. Your magnificent spirit has not been enough for the cold material of war. You are losing the war because you are so defenseless.

All that money of yours -- where is it? You have, it is true, new automobile roads which on the whole you do not use very much. How can you when only the rich and <sup>the</sup> government officials can buy cars? Your life income would scarcely buy a car. Even if someone gave you a car, merely to maintain it would mean you had no food. But then you do not need cars. You have lived happily without them. And it is true that the roads make armies more mobile -- unfortunately also Japanese armies, with their tanks and huge guns, such as you have not. On the whole the fine new roads have helped the Japanese more than they have you. But of course a modern nation must have roads. It would look very badly <sup>to</sup> ~~before~~ foreigners if they did not. And your rulers doubtless thought they would manage somehow about the Japanese -- no use crossing Japanese bridges, especially, one of them said to me once, and laughed. So instead of strong defenses they built automobile roads.

Of course other things were built, too -- a handsome mausoleum, for instance, for Sun Yat Sen, who was only a common man. It is ~~said~~ <sup>boasted</sup> to be the second finest in the world. About it there <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ also a fine park and a splendid stadium which <sup>was seldom</sup> ~~is never~~ used. Grass grows up between the seats and over the magnificent race course. It cost a great deal of money. There are mansions, too, private as well as national. Nanking was fast growing into a pretentious capital. Your money was being spent in showy ways, calculated to make a fine impression on visiting foreigners.

Defense for war is not so spectacular.

Other things are not so spectacular, too -- private fortunes, for instance. <sup>Many of</sup> your leaders have grown so very rich so suddenly. ~~For~~ <sup>They</sup> were almost all poor men when they began -- the sons and daughters of widows and ill-paid Christian pastors and Y. M. C. A. secretaries and little business men and farmers. How is it then that <sup>now</sup> ~~that~~ <sup>have such</sup> their vast fortunes? ~~have rolled up until today~~ ~~in foreign banks some of the heaviest depositors are your own~~ ~~leaders?~~ Why are you so defenseless?

But who are these leaders? They are not ignorant men, <sup>E</sup> Except for a few ~~loosely allied~~ war-lords, they are men with degrees from western universities, if that means anything. They are peppered with Ph.D's. But who are they? This is the amazing thing -- they have come from among yourselves. I ~~would~~ ~~blame them for corruption and betrayal except that~~ a generation ago they were you. There is no royal blood in your country. There is not even any pure blue blood. Your blood is mixed all together. Thanks to your <sup>ancient</sup> custom of men taking concubines, good strong peasant blood infuses everyone. You have no authentic governing class, born to rule. Even your emperors sprang from the common people. First emperors in a dynasty were nearly always simply successful warlords, and warlords are always of lowly blood.

The thing that puzzles me, then, is deeper than my question. Obviously you are defenseless because you have been robbed. The money which should have gone for defense has been taken for something else. But there is more than that. Your leaders have deserted you in such numbers as to send dismay not

only to your own hearts, but to the hearts of all those who believe in your way of life and thought. It is not talked of much, because you have so many friends abroad, but it has been published, nevertheless, in daily newspapers that your generals ~~+/~~ too many of ~~them~~ -- have fled to safe places, deserting their troops, and what is more despicable, at least in the eyes of the West, <sup>Too many of</sup> your doctors and your nurses have ~~too often~~ run away, leaving the wounded and the dying. ~~We are not used to this sort of thing.~~ Why were you left defenseless? This is more than mere wasting and spending of money, more even than robbery. This is a failure at the heart of a people. Is there a fundamental spiritual lack, somewhere, in your way of life? You seem to need despair and hardship. For when one of you becomes a ruler, he grows instantly soft and corrupt. It does not take a generation, even. It happens in a few years.

And yet you yourselves are brave. How you have died!

One trouble is, of course, that you do not demand anything of your leaders. You put no checks upon them, such as the people of England and America, the only two large organized democracies, put upon their leaders. I have seen you, as you spoke of a certain well-known figure who takes millions from the opium tax, and of another who takes his ~~part~~ from the salt tax, simply shrug your shoulders and say, "We can't help it." What you do not know is that you can help it. You don't allow your village magistrate to rob you beyond a certain recognized point. If he does, you swarm into his courts and demolish him. ~~Do that,~~ then, ~~on~~ a national scale, <sup>this would be</sup> ~~it is called~~ a revolution. ~~you~~

~~have never had a real revolution -- not a revolution of the people.~~

-- No, but wait. These leaders are your own brothers and sons. What is to keep you from becoming like them if you come into power? Nothing, except the demands of those left behind, that they be not betrayed. You have as yet no legal mechanics for the control of rulers. You do not know how to indict and to impeach. ~~But you still can use other means for the present. You can rise up and kill a man who betrays you. It is effective, as you know.~~

You are defenseless, then, because you have allowed yourself to become so. Your leaders, the moment they left the common ranks, have conscious of their insecurity, thought only of themselves. ~~The~~ <sup>And these are</sup> few of them who have not done so, <sup>are</sup> the very few who have not separated themselves from your way of life, <sup>But</sup> ~~and they are very few - two or three, perhaps.~~ ~~They are almost entirely Communist. You may as well cast aside the others as useless to you and proceed for yourselves.~~

? ~~Proceed where?~~ For you, what next? <sup>yourself, without leaders, and</sup>

For one thing, to fight the Japanese with your own weapons. One way is to go on <sup>with guerilla warfare and</sup> being killed. <sup>If</sup> That is inevitable <sup>what you go on being killed,</sup> if you fight, since you have almost no weapons to match <sup>and every guerilla attack you make is certain to be followed by swift</sup> theirs, and are not likely to be given any. <sup>harsh punishment from the Japanese</sup> But you are able to die. It is one thing you know how to do, being used to it in centuries of recurring famine and flood which even your modern rulers have done nothing to mitigate. If you want to fight, let the Japanese spend themselves killing you. They will expend their strength before you will. With six times as many people as they have, you will outlast them.

*guerrilla*

*conquered territory*

Invent A ~~But if you decide not to fight, you will still win,~~ if you use your innate strength to resist. I say if, but of course



But there is ~~already~~ a vast territory which you have already lost. You cannot carry on even guerrilla warfare there. You will have to submit to <sup>the</sup> Japanese as <sup>your</sup> rulers. They will run your trains, and your post offices, your news services, your police and government. ~~But~~ ~~what~~ ~~have~~ ~~can~~ ~~you~~ ~~do~~. You can endure this only by resistance, the sort of resistance you have given to your own rulers. You can endure this, too. You are used to living under rulers you hate. Still, this will be worse, for <sup>I believe what</sup> you have often said to me, "It does not matter how bad our own rulers are, we prefer them even to good foreign rulers." And the Japanese will not be good rulers, of course, since they will be selfish ones. You will be able to endure them only by resistance, the sort of silent <sup>stun</sup> & immobility you know so well how to maintain. Remember this; you will

you will, because you do it without knowing it. You resist everything with your apparent yielding. You <sup>have</sup> survived national disorder and governmental corruption on a scale unknown in other countries. It is because, blindly, naively, unconsciously, you go on living your own life and maintaining your own traditions.

*You will survive even Japanese rule, too.*  
I laugh at the idea of the Japanese being able to do anything with you. I have seen people trying to make Communists out of you, and Christians, and a great many other things. You always amiably agree with everything and you remain what you are. You don't mind talking like something else for awhile if it is expedient but inwardly you are what you have always been. I wish, however, that now you would not think of expediency. I wish you would openly resist, simply by being Chinese under Japanese rule. You will probably be killed for this now and then, but I repeat, you know how to die, and there are millions of you hastening to be born. Nothing can stop your army of the newborn. What you have to face is that your future is dark except as you yourselves are able to lighten it. You know by now that no one is <sup>likely</sup> going to help you. It is as well. No nation helps another for nothing. Moreover, it is perfectly true that you yourselves as a nation also never help anybody. You prefer isolation, and if there is the advantage that an isolated nation need not become involved in other's troubles, it is true also that no one comes to its aid in need. Indeed, you have had more aid <sup>of a sort</sup> from abroad than falls to the lot of most peoples -- famine relief, schools, hospitals, which if <sup>abused</sup> <sup>upon you</sup> used as religious propaganda, have nevertheless helped you -- perhaps spoiled you a little and taught you to expect something for nothing. At

*Chinese  
Jap. rule*

*Indeed*

least these schools and hospitals educated a good many of your faithless leaders and your touchy, over-sensitive intelligentsia who have done nothing for you either, and have, besides, alienated those who are your friends by their unjust and jealous criticisms. Western education has not benefitted you very much, I am afraid.

But it does not matter. Nothing matters now except that you go on being yourselves. Resist the world if need be, but *you own traditions, your own way of thinking and living. That is, do not give up* do not give up yourselves. For though you do not know it, you are fighting more than your own war. You are fighting the war of human life -- the right of democracy against fascism, of the peace loving against the militarist, of the individual against the ~~mob~~ *mob*. The central problem of our time ~~is~~ *is* being fought out between you and the Japanese militarists. ~~My bets are all on you.~~ You will set fire to your own houses, perhaps, but you know the scorched earth is still there, and you will come back to it *and plough it and sow it to seed again.*

*omit?*

~~I wish I could stand with you physically as well as spiritually and fight that war. But it is no use. I am a foreigner, and you want no foreigners. Long ago I learned that however pleasant and kind you are, at heart you dislike all foreigners. You deny it, perhaps you even believe your own denial, but consciously or not, you hate us all. That is part of your natural isolation and you cannot help it. Many a foreigner has learned that however he identifies himself with you, you cannot, in your secret heart, accept him. For the sensitive who cannot live happily in this atmosphere, withdrawal is the only course. But withdrawal does not mean loss of intense interest and sympathy. It simply means complete understanding and acceptance of you, as you are.~~

You must go your way alone, then, and so you will

go. Some day you will build a real national government, out of your own lives, not shaped by western policies and education. It will be a sturdy, native thing, an enlargement, perhaps, of that best part of your national life, your local self government. Village by village, you know how to govern yourselves better than any people in the world. The spirit of self government is in you, and you have only to develop its form. Meanwhile you have to go on as you have done, ~~without it.~~

Years ago, I remember, I once sat with you <sup>at</sup> ~~over~~ supper. It was an evening in June, and you had been busy all day, men and women, planting rice seedlings. I had done nothing much except watch you and hand you the bundles of seedlings now and then. But in the evening we fell to talking of the future and of this very war now upon you. You were confident, ~~but I maintained~~ ~~sturdy pessimism.~~ <sup>But</sup> I knew you were no more ready for bombs and cannon than was your straw-thatched mud-walled house in which we sat. My pessimism shook you a little. I could always talk frankly to you, and did, and you never resented it, knowing my heart was deeply with you. The suet candle on the table guttered and you leaned to <sup>trim</sup> ~~cut~~ its <sup>g</sup> red wick. Then you said,

"Do you think, <sup>truly</sup> ~~then~~, that the Japanese will win?"

And I answered what I said then and would say again today,

"They will win the war, but if you stay what you are, they ~~will~~ <sup>can never</sup> ~~not~~ conquer you."