

Letter from Dr. Mabel Lee to New York Chinese Baptist Church members

(dated July 3rd, 1925)

Note: This letter is located in the archives of the New York Chinese Baptist Church. It illustrates the deep concern that Chinese Christians in the United felt about developments in China in 1925. Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) had died on March 12. China was internally divided and unable to fend off foreign domination. Frustration and unrest led to a major labor and anti-imperialist movement, known as the May 20th movement [五卅運動]. The incident that sparked the movement occurred when Shanghai Municipal Police officers fired into a crowd of student protesters in the International Settlement on May 30, 1925. The demonstrators were angered by the previous arrest of several students who were on their way to the funeral of a fellow activist. The shootings left several demonstrators dead and nation-wide anti-foreign demonstrations and riots erupted. The May 30th movement received international censure. Many within the movement turned against Christianity and renewed its identification with Western imperialism. For a generation, mainline Chinese Protestants had claimed that Christianity was the key to democracy and modernization. They pointed to Sun Yat-sen, the establishment of the Republic, and key leaders in an emerging China who professed faith as evidence. But this new turn put many Chinese Christians on the defensive. In Dr. Mabel Lee's letter to her congregation, she is sympathetic towards the May 30th movement, but continued to defend Christianity as "the salvation of China." — Tim Tseng (Dec. 12, 2013)

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July 3rd, 1925

Dear Fellow-Members;

As I am sitting down to write this letter to you I can hear some friends of mine discussing the situation in China and their earnestness makes them quite oblivious of even my typewriter going on near them.

Yes, I think all Chinese are very much absorbed in the daily news we receive from China; and not only the Chinese, but all our friends who are interested in our country. We all hope that this may prove an opportunity for the restoration of some of our rights enabling us make further progress in gaining for China her rightful place among the nations.

Of course we feel that we have been deeply wronged by various governments, that we must protest against their attitude, that we must make them understand we will not tolerate such treatment. And we feel this so strongly that some are willing to advocate even very serious measures, ready to sacrifice their lives if it will help the cause.

And on the other side there are governments and peoples watching us with cold calculating eyes, not willing to yield an inch if it can be avoided. They still feel that it is their "burden" to overrun other nations weaker than they, because it is to advance their civilization.

Needless to say that it is such covetous attitudes which cause all the trouble and has always caused troubles between nations as well as individuals. And not only on the part of foreign governments and their agents, but on the part of our own people who have given foreign powers their chance by their betrayal of our country. Attracted by individual gain and profit they forget all their fellow-countrymen.

And all this leads to the thought that we need Christianity more than ever. It is the need of the whole world, as well as the particular nations and peoples. And it is the need of every one of us as individuals. For after all, a nation is only the sum of its individuals. We can never have a fine country if we do not have the right kind of citizens in it.

Thus even at this time of excitement there is not only time for a gathering of Christians, but special need that we should thus come together to renew our faith and trust, and resolve anew that we will each be more worthy disciples in winning more to the gospel and spreading Christ.

We might blame foreign governments and people, we may protest, and we may even shed blood. But China can never be strong unless she has the right kind of citizens. It is not only the enemy without. The enemy within is ever more dangerous. And the only way we can really conquer is through the heart, by putting Christ within.

It is not the nationality which counts. Not all Chinese are to be trusted, and not all foreigners are anxious to crush us. We have many foreign friends who are very anxious to help us win our rights. The difference lies in the fact that they have Christianity in their hearts. And in some foreign governments, the citizens are so much interested in seeing that we have fair play, that they have persuaded their governments to reflect and sponsor their individual opinions.

Let us therefore not forget the significance of our work in the Mission. It may seem very small, but the influence is very vast. Every little we put in counts. "We must be militant" as your chairman once said to me, in our work. That we because of new realization rededicate ourselves to our tasks, that every boy who comes into the Mission will be made to know Christ.

Christianity is the salvation of China, and the salvation of the whole world. Nationality does not divide us for we are one at heart. Let us pray that China will be for Christ.

I have been writing this letter just as the thoughts came to me, and now I feel guilty for having taken so much of your time. I feel I am missing a great deal not to be able to be present with you all to have the inspiration which your presence give. But I hope you will write me when you have time to do so. (Mail will have to be addressed to my home address 548 Riverside Dr. where it will be forwarded to me as I have not yet a steady address.) And I find encouragement in even the thought alone of knowing of your meeting.

Real summer is here with July and August. I hope you will all not work too hard, but have some rest and recreation during this hot weather.

With my best regards to you all.

Faithfully yours,
Mabel Lee