

The background of the may fourth movement in china

[History](#)



The May Fourth Movement that shook China in May 1919 in its significance equals, if not exceeds, the other important political revolutions of the 20th century. But in order to fully understand its background, the May Fourth Movement should be studied in the context of political and cultural developments in China in the first decades of the 20th century.

In general, the May Fourth Movement was engendered by a mixture of nationalistic aspirations, both in relation to Chinese cultural identity and the international role of China, and the concrete historic circumstances that triggered the concentrated mass protests against what was perceived as injustice towards China. Indeed, in the WWI China had joined the allies against Germany, and after the war demanded that allies end the occupation of the Chinese territories, but such demands were ignored in the Versailles Treaty. Frustration and indignation of the Chinese escalated and lead to student demonstrations on May 4, 1919 in Beijing, which quickly expanded to other main cities. The disappointment over the West instigated many Chinese to search elsewhere for help. Still, while the May Fourth Movement grew on the base of the student protests, it had a deeper historic background that contributed to it. In fact, the roots of the May Fourth Movement, also called the New Cultural Movement, can be found in China already around 1916, when Chinese intellectuals began to spread disdain for the traditional Chinese culture, blaming it for turning China into a secondary international player. So, it is no wonder that the controversy over the Versailles Treaty lead to the explosion of popular outrage, and amplified appeals to much needed " new culture" and the need to return to China its due international role. Moreover, at the same time the government of the

Northern Warlords, the militant sovereigns and ruling groups, submitted to the foreign powers and significantly increased taxation, which made the population suffer. On the other hand, during WWI the national industry grew in strength, and the New Cultural Movement stimulated people to actively engage in patriotic activities, so that many began to believe that the solution for China's problems was to take over the Western ideals of democracy, instead of the Confucianism with its obedience and hierarchy in relations. All these factors laid the ideological foundation for the emergence of the May Fourth Movement.

The period that preceded and followed the May Fourth Movement was also important for the development of Chinese parties. The Kuomintang, the national people's party, was formed in 1912 under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen to promote principles of parliamentary democracy and moderate socialism. In 1913, when in the first national assembly the Kuomintang had majority, the president of China Yan Shih-kai depressed the party. The Kuomintang set up unacknowledged revolutionary governments at Guangzhou in 1918 and in 1921, and even sent to the Versailles Peace Conference its delegation. Sun would later accept support from the USSR, and since 1923 Comintern agents helped reorganize the Kuomintang.

On the other hand, in the course of The May Fourth Movement a disunity developed among its leaders, with some being impressed with the success of the Russian Revolution of 1917. By 1920 people working with the Comintern were trying to create Communist groups in China, and in 1921 in Shanghai the first congress of the Communist Party of China (CCP) took place. In 1923 the CCP formally united with the Kuomintang, so that by 1925 Communists

had many top positions there. However, Chiang Kai-shek, the Kuomintang's leader, initiated a diminution of Communist influence in 1926, with the CCP still keeping the alliance on the demand of the USSR. In April of 1927 Chiang Kai-shek executed many Communist leaders and by July the CCP went underground to start the long fight with the Kuomintang, that would end with Communists taking control of the mainland China in 1949.

Thus, the May Fourth Movement was not an isolated historic phenomenon, but rather a manifestation of a complicated nature of the political and cultural life in China in the first decades of the 20th century. The events that accompanied the process of parties development in China was another such manifestation, which was tightly interconnected with the factors that had lead to the May Fourth Movement, and with the movement itself.

References:

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