

Mao Zedong (1893-1976):
Major Events in the Life of a Revolutionary Leader

Glossary

Comintern (Communist International or Third International): Founded in 1919 by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Comintern was dedicated to organizing an international socialist movement. Comintern agents were deployed throughout the world, promoting revolution, socialism, and organizing communist branch organizations abroad.

Dynastic System: Prior to the February 1912 abdication of the last Qing emperor and the subsequent founding of the Republic of China, China was ruled by a succession of dynasties since approximately the mid-16th century BCE. At the head of the dynastic government sat the emperor, a position passed down from one generation to the next through the male lineage, meaning that each dynasty represented a single line of imperial descent. Dynasties were periodically overthrown, however, so there is no single dynastic lineage across Chinese history.

Guomindang (GMD) (also written Kuomintang or KMT): Also known as the Nationalist Party, the Guomindang was led by SUN Yat-sen until his death in 1925. In 1928, CHIANG Kai-shek, who had taken over leadership of the party, became President of the Republic of China. After the CCP defeat of Guomindang forces in 1949, the GMD fled to Taiwan, hoping to one day again reclaim Mainland China. To this day, the GMD is active in Taiwan, and Taiwan's official name is the Republic of China.

Imperialism in China: Starting with the Opium War (1839-42), first Western powers and then Japan gained rights in China at the expense of Chinese sovereignty. The Opium War, fought between China and Britain, was triggered in 1839 by the Chinese confiscation of British opium in Canton. Britain defeated China, and China signed the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842 to end the war. This treaty, together with the Treaties of Tianjin (1858) and Shimonsheki (1895) collectively form the pillars of what came to be called the unequal treaty system. Under this system, the Chinese government lost the right to set its own tariffs, had to extend extraterritoriality to foreign residents of China, paid large indemnities, and granted most-favored-nation status to all treaty signatories. This last made it impossible for China to negotiate terms with individual countries: the clause demanded that any right gained by one signatory be extended to all treaty signatories; consequently, China found it could not escape the weight of the unequal treaty system. While the treaties focused on economic issues, they also affected the social realm — the treaties established missionary rights, setting the stage for cultural imperialism, and extraterritoriality weakened China's ability to govern effectively. The country was not able to escape semi-colonial status until the mid-20th century. Economic and cultural imperialism brought gains to treaty signatories but fueled hostility toward foreigners and stoked nationalist sentiment on the part of the Chinese population.

May Fourth Movement/Period: Refers both to the protests on May 4, 1919, as well as the cultural and political developments that followed. The actual protest was sparked by anger over the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, the treaty that ended WWI and allowed Japan to take over the special rights that Germany had formerly held in Shandong Province. Roughly 3,000 students gathered in Tiananmen Square to voice displeasure over the Chinese government's plan to sign the Treaty. The Beijing students' actions resulted in sympathy demonstrations around the country and calls for a general strike. As outrage spread to other sectors of society and a strike threatened to economically paralyze Shanghai, the Beijing government met the students' demands and refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles. This success inspired students, intellectuals, and many concerned with China's future to pursue cultural and political change through activism. The May Fourth Movement addressed the question of women and their place in society, the radicalization of labor, and mobilization of students to the nation's cause.

Korean War (1950-1953): In the aftermath of World War II, the Allied Powers agreed to divide Korea temporarily into northern and southern occupation zones to facilitate the removal of the Japanese from the country. Administration of the North was given to the Soviet Union, which supported the creation of a communist state, and the United States backed the creation of a capitalist regime in the South. There were talks of reunification, but relations between the new Korean regimes quickly deteriorated. In 1950, North Korean forces invaded South Korea. The United States intervened on behalf of the South Korean regime and the PRC intervened on behalf of the North Korean regime. The war ended without a clear victor. The peninsula remains split between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north and the Republic of Korea in the south.

Politburo: Short for "Political Bureau," a Politburo is the governing body of a political party (usually communist parties) — in this case, the Chinese Communist Party.