

# May 4<sup>th</sup> to June 4<sup>th</sup>: Youth and Protest in Modern China

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# Wealth and Power

- Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century: decline of Qing (Ch'ing) dynasty (1644-1911, led by Manchus) *plus* humiliating military defeats by Western and Japanese imperialists *plus* devastating internal civil war (Taiping 1850-1864)
- → how can China recover its unity, autonomy and greatness?
- Where does it look for ideas, models, goals?

# May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement

- After establishment of Republic of China, 1/1/12, country fell apart into warlordism.
- High hopes of people, esp. urban youth, for a modern republic, were dashed by this chaos on top of continued system of *extraterritoriality*, whereby foreigners enjoyed all sort of rights and privileges on Chinese soil and were not subject to Chinese law

- Students had traditional elite status as future members of scholar-official class which led the country, staffed the bureaucracy and set moral example for masses
- With collapse of Confucianism-based civil service system, students were learning modern science and technology to help lead China's rejuvenation

- Many went abroad, especially to Japan and U.S., and many studied in new schools established by Western missionaries in China
- Work and study program in France
- Center of new thinking at Beijing University (*Beida*) then located northeast of Forbidden City
- Attacks on Chinese tradition and advocacy of new ideas from outside

- May 4, 1919: patriotic students assembled at Tiananmen (southern gate of Forbidden City) to attack pro-Japanese officials after learning government had let Japan take over German positions in Shandong after end of WWI despite President Wilson's advocacy of self-determination
- Student subsequently became highly politicized

- Many left confines of elite universities to mobilize merchants, workers, girls, etc.
- “May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement” refers to period ca. 1917-1921 of unprecedented mass mobilization, intellectual ferment, exploration, experimentation.
- Included introduction of Marxism-Leninism, influence of Bolshevik Revolution, establishment and example of Soviet Union

- To this day, important symbolism of May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement as spark behind linking of Communism (CCP established 7/1/1921 in the midst of it), nationalism, rejuvenation



# June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1989

- Indelible images of extremely complex series of events
- Important to remember that took place before, during and after commemorative events of 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement – 1989 presented by protestors as part of this honored tradition

- Students saw selves in traditional sense of meritocratically selected elite entitled to inherit leadership of CCP and country
- Had patriotic duty to point out to leadership serious flaws in system at present: double digit inflation, corruption, betrayal of communist ideals

- Some wanted transformation of system in direction of western-style democracy (“Goddess of Democracy” statue) while others wanted purification of CCP which had become corrupt during post-Mao reforms
- As in original May 4<sup>th</sup> era, post-Mao China had experienced a period of intellectual inquiry, openness to outside world, exposure to new ideas and experience of other Asian societies, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea

- After era of Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when Mao had mobilized Chinese youth to purge the CCP and follow his dictates, in reform era the CCP backed off from its efforts to control all aspects of people's lives and gave them more space to think on their own and take some control over their own lives