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| May Fourth Movement |
| 五四运动  Wu Si Yun Dong |
| The May Fourth Movement (五四运动, Wu Si Yun Dong) was a Chinese anti-imperialist and anti-feudal movement which protested the Chinese *Beiyang* (北洋) (Warlord) government’s inability to effectively manage domestic affairs and imperialist foreign powers. The term ‘May Fourth Movement’, which can refer particularly to the student demonstrations in Beijing on May 4, 1919, or generally to the New Culture Movement (新文化运动) between 1915–1921, was triggered by the Chinese government’s perceived failure at the Paris Peace Conference (1919), whereby Japan’s possession of a former German colony in Shandong Province (山东省) was formally recognized in the Treaty of Versailles, rather than being returned to China, as had been anticipated. This diplomatic failure, often called the Shandong Problem, antagonized domestic university students and intellectuals, who began demonstrating in Beijing on May 4, 1919 and incited nationwide protests. |
| The May Fourth Movement (五四运动, Wu Si Yun Dong) was a Chinese anti-imperialist and anti-feudal movement which protested the Chinese *Beiyang* (北洋) (Warlord) government’s inability to effectively manage domestic affairs and imperialist foreign powers. The term ‘May Fourth Movement’, which can refer particularly to the student demonstrations in Beijing on May 4, 1919, or generally to the New Culture Movement (新文化运动) between 1915–1921, was triggered by the Chinese government’s perceived failure at the Paris Peace Conference (1919), whereby Japan’s possession of a former German colony in Shandong Province (山东省) was formally recognized in the Treaty of Versailles, rather than being returned to China, as had been anticipated. This diplomatic failure, often called the Shandong Problem, antagonized domestic university students and intellectuals, who began demonstrating in Beijing on May 4, 1919 and incited nationwide protests. Important figures in the movement were Hu Shi (胡适) (1891–1962), scholar and writer; Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培) (1868–1940), president of Peking University; Chen Duxiu (陈独秀) (1879–1942) and Li Dazhao (李大钊) (1889–1927), leaders of New Culture Movement and the key founders of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (中国共产党); and Luo Jialun (罗家伦) (1897–1969), the leader of the Beijing students’ demonstration and the author of ‘Beijing Declaration of Academia’*,* a pamphlet distributed on Tiananmen Square on May 4, 1919.  The most salient outcome of the May Fourth Movement was the rejection of traditional Chinese values and norms in favour of Western ideals of modernism, especially liberal democracy and science. Concurrently, Marxism began to spread. The May Fourth Movement was also a turning point for Chinese literature. Xinwenxue (新文学, new literature) was promoted during and after the movement. Many writers began to advocate for *baihuawen* (白话文), the vernacular literary language, as opposed to the classical literary language *wenyanwen* (文言文); they also began to write in a realist vein. *Baihuawen* was championed by celebrated author Lu Xun (鲁迅) (1881–1936) who wrote *The True Story of Ah Q* (阿Q正传) (1921), *Nahan* (呐喊) (1922), *Panghuang* (彷徨) (1924) and *Yecao* (野草) (1927). Other famous writers of the movement were Shen Yanbing (沈雁冰) (1896–1981), Guo Moruo (郭沫若) (1892–1978) and Yu Dafu (郁达夫) (1896–1945).  Historical and political interpretations of the May Fourth Movement vary significantly, chiefly between CCP and Kuomintang (KMT) party (国民党) perspectives. In particular, CCP views the movement as a significant union between China’s old democratic revolution (旧民主主义革命) and China’s new democratic revolution (新民主主义革命), and regards the spread of western modernity in a favourable light. However, the KMT line, espoused by KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek (蒋介石) (1878–1975), criticizes the movement for the decline of Chinese traditions, especially Confucianism. Chiang maintained that embracing western ideals rendered China ‘less Chinese’. The New Life Movement (新生活运动) was launched by KMT in 1934 attempting to promote Confucianism and to counter both the influx of western values and communism in China. |
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