

Lesson 14

Questions for the Lesson/What you need to know in this lesson:

What of the May 4th Movement?

What are the causes of May 4th Movement?

What are the effects/significance of May 4th Movement?

How is the May 4th Movement more or less significant than other events in China like the 1911 Revolution?

IB Questions

Significance/Impact of the May 4th Movement

1. To what extent was the May 4th Movement significant in determining the future of China? (M10 Q11)
2. To what extent do you agree with the assertion that 4 May 1919 was one of the most significant dates in Chinese History? (M04, Q17)

Significance/Impact of New Culture Movement (1915-1924)

3. To what extent was the New Culture Movement (1915–1924), which included the 1919 May Fourth Movement, an intellectual revolution that changed the course of Chinese politics? (M13)

Comparing the significance of the May 4th Movement and 1911 Revolution

4. “The May 4th Movement was of greater importance for China than the Revolution of 1911.” To what extent do you agree with this statement? (N05, Q15)
5. “May 4th 1919 is a more significant date in Chinese history than October 10th 1911.” How far do you agree with this statement? (N07, Q12)

Significance of Versailles Treaty for China

6. “The response in China to the Versailles Treaty (1919) was a defining moment in the history of modern China.” To what extent do you agree with this statement? (N13)

A. Overview

The founding of **the Republic had not brought about enough peace, order, and unity**. Instead, the early republican years were characterized by moral degradation. Monarchist movements, warlordism and intensified imperialism. **Obviously, political face lifting through the adoption of republican institution was insufficient to regenerate the nation; something far more fundamental was needed to awaken the country and the people.**

The new intellectuals, Western trained or Western-influenced, advocated a radical change in the philosophical foundations of national life. They called for critical re-evaluation of China's cultural heritage in the light of modern **Western standards**, a willingness to part with those elements that had made China weak and a determination to accept Western science, democracy and culture as the foundation of a new order. At the same time, they launched a campaign to introduce a new literature based on the vernacular language instead of the classical. **This intellectual outburst dealt a shattering blow to Confucianism – including traditional ethos, customs, human relations and social conventions – and ushered in a new iconoclastic attitude towards China's past.**

In terms of depth and scope, the intellectual transformation that resulted surpassed that of the 1895-1911 period – drastic social and intellectual changes were so drastic and fundamental. Thus intellectual revolution was taking place between 1917 and 1923, hailed a New Cultural Movement. A high point of this period was the gigantic student demonstration in Peking on May 4, 1919, which quickly evolved into a nation-wide response. Hence, this period is also commonly known as that of the May Fourth Movement.

B. May Fourth Incident and Movement

May 4th Movement refers to the student demonstrations of that date in 1919, in protest against China's signing of the Treaty of Versailles Treaty.

The Treaty marked the end of WW1 and mostly dealt with the disposition of Germany and Austria in Europe, but it also **transferred Germany's rights in Shandong to Japan**. Most Chinese had expected it to be returned to China. In the wake of the demonstrations, which Beijing's military government tried to suppress, protests spread from the capital to other cities and from the students to other classes, particularly the workers and businessmen of coastal cities. In this sense, **the May Fourth incident refers to the original student demonstrations.**

The May Fourth Movement refers to the strikes and boycotts that followed over the next few months.

The May Fourth Era refers to the revitalization of the public sphere in China in the early 1920s. The movement represents an entirely new type of grassroots politics based largely on nationalist feeling.

The May Fourth was an important evolution of New Culture trends and especially the beginning of a more activist political movement that deliberately sought to appeal to different social groups. The May Fourth did mark a new

scale of public action as May Fourth somehow **concentrated the despair that had been growing for decades over the impotence of the Chinese government**, any Chinese government, to provide efficient, honest, legitimate administration capable of resisting imperialist pressures. **In the May Fourth year, the idea of revolution, briefly discredited by the failures of the 1911 Revolution, re-emerged both broadened to target all the old customs and habits meant by culture and more focused to target warlordism and imperialism.**

C. Reasons for the May Fourth Incident and Movement

Background

This stirring age of intellectual ferment could not have come to pass without certain significant developments abroad and at home. Externally, sentiments of nationalism and democracy were particularly strong during WW1 and the Wilsonian ideals of national self-determination and abolition of secret diplomacy appealed to the Chinese intellectuals. Also, rolling events of epochal significance were occurring in different parts of the world: the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917, the socialist revolts in Finland, Germany, Austria and Hungary and etc. In contrast, China was plagued by chaos and warlordism and the Chinese intellectuals felt deeply committed to revive their strife-ridden and civil war-torn country. The intellectuals approached the task with fiercely nationalistic and patriotic sentiments, stimulated partly by Japan's humiliating Twenty-One Demands of 1915.

(i) Role of the Returning Students

The returned students who had studied abroad, such as in America, Japan and Europe were particularly eager to introduce reforms. Among the most prominent returned students were Ch'en Tu-hsiu and Ts'ai Yuan-pei from France, Kuo Mo-jo and Lu Hsun from Japan and Hu Shih and Chiang Monlin from the US. Ch'en, Ts'ai and Hu rapidly became the guiding spirit of the intellectual revolution. These new intellectuals were product of a transitional period – all thoroughly grounded in Chinese classical studies and yet well acquainted with Western civilization. Liberalism, socialism, pragmatism, science and democracy had left their indelible mark. The intellectuals like Ts'ai and Ch'en had took part in the 1911 republican revolution. When they returned home – Ch'en in 1915, Ts'ai in 1916 and Hu in 1917 – they functioned as leaven in transforming the literary and intellectual personality of China. Their critical evaluation of the national heritage and the introduction of Western thought and ideologies sparked an intellectual revolution (for instance the monthly periodical, called the Youth Magazine/New Youth, founded by Ch'en, was dedicated to arousing the youth of the country to destroy the stagnant old traditions and forge a new culture and it called on the young generation to struggle against the old and rotten elements of society and to reform their thought and behaviour in order to achieve national awakening), which dealt a shattering blow to traditionalism and ushered in the period of a New Cultural Movement. There was an introduction of the plain language, in place of the classical style of writing, and was even adopted for use in schools by the government in 1920. The many magazines published during

this period such as the New Youth and the New Tide, which targeted the youths and attacked traditionalism and encouraged adoption of science, democracy and technology, liberalism and pragmatism meant that for the first time in China important national and social problems were being publicly discussed and debated. The explosive nature of this social and intellectual ferment sparked a massive national outburst.

(ii) Emergence of politically conscious merchant-entrepreneur class

Contributing to the rise of the new nationalism was the rapid emergence of a politically conscious merchant-entrepreneur class and a labour force which numbered between two and three million by 1919 as the WW1 period witnessed an unprecedented expansion of Chinese industry and commerce – especially in the fields of textiles, silk, modern banks and etc.

Domestically, the replacement of the imperial dynasty by a new republic in 1912 marked the inauguration of a new era. No longer did the government regard industrialist and merchants as suspects and no longer did it prohibit the formation of private cliques and associations as under the Qing.

Externally, the WWI period witnesses a rapid decline of Western imperialism in China. The war had so adversely affected European industries and trade with Asia that it created a golden chance for China's native industries to develop unhindered. These new domestic industries and enterprises gave rise to merchant and labour classes, which unlike the old-style apolitical tradesmen and inert peasants, were sensitive to China's predicament and were determined to defend their country's interests. Most of them lived in the cities where they contributed to the expansion of the urban centres and their economy. Peking, Shanghai, Wuhan, Nanking, Tientsin and Canton all became large metropolises which nourished the growth of a new intelligentsia. From 1907 to 1917 at least 10 million members of these classes had received some sort of modern education and were imbued with strong nationalist determination to save their country from the twin scourge of foreign imperialism and domestic disorder.

(iii) Impact of the Versailles Treaty on China

The Versailles Treaty marked a turning point in Chinese attitudes toward the West. In spite of all the humiliations of imperialism and even the perceived threat of racial extinction, leading Chinese had continued to look to Western nations as a model.

But May Fourth marked a moment of disillusionment. **The international context was key to the radicalization of Chinese politics.** The idea of national self-determination preached by Wilson had been designated to compete with the appeal of Lenin's anti-colonialism but both presented critiques of colonialism. As many Chinese, about 200 000 of them had participated in the war effort as replacement labour in Europe and hence Allied victory in Nov 1918 was greeted with enthusiasm. It was in part in part China's victory and, not Wilsonian rhetoric alone but also moral

debts seemed to augur good treatment of China at Versailles. In fact, Liang Chi Chao had argued that China should enter the war on the side of the Allies precisely to obtain favourable treatment after the war. The Chinese had, therefore, logically looked to Wilson for support in their struggle against imperialism and in particular Japanese imperialism in China, especially with his rhetoric on the importance of open diplomacy and respect for the wishes of national peoples.

But from the point of view of the Powers, Shantung was a small question, but Versailles provided a test which Wilsonian liberalism flunked. From Wilson's point of view China was one of the many difficult issues facing the peace conferences and clearly of less importance in comparisons to matters pertaining to Europe itself. The spread of Bolshevism alarmed Wilson as much as it did the other Allied powers and with the destruction of previous empires like Austria-Hungary a new world order was emerging. But nations under European or imperialist domination were protesting about their status – including China. In addition, the war had damaged the West's posturing as the font of civilization. The West's own self-confidence was also damaged.

One of the Powers' most important tasks in 1918 was to find a place for Japan, which both criticized the old European order and was eager to join it. Japan's role in the war was relatively minor but its military presence in the Western Pacific was major. Its diplomacy had been instrumental in convincing the Beijing regime to declare war on Germany and Japan was intending to inherit not just Shantung but also the German islands scattered over the Pacific. Japan had joined in the invasion of Siberia. Unscathed by much actual warfare, Japan's economy and military had benefitted enormously from WW1. Not only had Japan sold ammunition to the Allies but it had also signed many secret treaties with Britain, France and Italy in 1917 whereby these countries agreed to support Japan's claim to Shantung. Japan made these secret treaties public at the Peace Conference opened in 1919. They came as a shock to the Chinese people, and put additional pressure on the US not to upset what had already been agreed. In addition, Wilsonian liberalism was anathema to nations with colonial empires to refurbish in the post-war period, and the US was not prepared to press these principles.

Also, China's indebtedness to Japan compromised its position at Versailles. In 1917 Japan's policy was to influence the government of Duan Qirui through financial aid. Duan received the Nishihara loans, eventually totalling 145 million yen, of which only 5 million yen was ever repaid, in return for important concessions. Japan was granted the right to station troops in northern Manchuria and Mongolia, provisions were made for military cooperation and Japanese began to train the Chinese army and navy. The deal helped Duan consolidate his control of the parliament and governmental administration and beef up his military resistance to the southern warlords and Sun Yat-sen. As well, Shandong railroads had been mortgaged in return for Japanese loans and Ambassador Zhang Zongxiang (later beaten up by students on 4 May 1919) wrote in September 1918 that the Chinese government "gladly agreed" to Japanese demands to station troops in the Shantung cities and along the province's railroads. These were among the documents Japan made public at Versailles.

Wilson saw Shantung issue as a way to mollify the Japanese for not supporting Japan's demand to endorse the concept of racial equality. Wilson also wanted Japan to join the League of Nations and also USA's trade with Japan was far larger than its trade with China and hence while China was strategically and economically important for Japan, it was not for America. Ironically, Japan did return Shantung to China just 3 years later in 1922.

Thus in one way, in the 1920s, the Open Door policy was more or less honoured and the situation remained fairly stable with no major grabs for territory until the end of the century. (Imperialism to Wilson meant colonies and spheres of influence; economic relations could not by definition constitute imperialism. Loans and foreign ownership of China's railroads, mines, factories and the like were as opposed to imperialism in the open door tradition. But on the ground in China, foreign ownership of mines and railroads and the stationing of foreign troops around the mines and along the railroads came as a single package)

Consensus Building

The May Fourth Movement reflected a sophisticated analysis of the situation; **problem was domestic; both structurally and in terms of leadership. Thus the students chanted "Externally resist the powers; internally throw out the traitors.** In 1919 the traitors were clearly Chinese. Also, within the political realms, in the face of failures of 1911, if organizational breakthroughs took some time to work out, radicals none the less realized that they had to bring the masses into politics, to carry politics to the streets.

D. The May Fourth Movement, 1919 – 1921

On May 1919, some 3000 students confounded the police by assembling at Beijing's Gate of Heavenly Peace (Tiananmen) and taking to the streets. The well-organized demonstration was targeted at both the Powers that still seemed bent on carving up China and the Chinese politicians who cooperated with them.

Students from 13 local universities demanded that Chinese negotiators at Versailles repudiate any treaty that failed to restore the Chinese sovereignty over Shantung. They also resolved that they would encourage Chinese in Paris to protests; that they would try to awaken the Chinese masses and hold a mass meeting in Beijing and that a permanent Beijing students' association would be established. The students distributed leaflets to bystanders and carried flags with slogans. Only a small number of student representatives were allowed into the Legation Quarter, heavily protected since the Boxer uprising, but they found that the American, British, French, and Italian ambassadors all out. Letters were left. Several hours passed in the meantime and relations worsened between Chinese police and the demonstrators. After a debate, some students decided to march on the house of the traitor – Cao Rulin.

Smaller student groups had from the beginning evidently planned to turn the demonstration into a more pointed affair. Their goal was to directly attack the pro-Japanese officials in the Chinese government, namely Cao Rulin, a cabinet member who had been a Qing official and an aide to Yuan Shikai. Cao had conducted most of the negotiations with Japan over the Twenty-One Demands, worked on the

Nishihara loans and was reputed to be a Japanese agent. At Cao's house, a small riot broke out and 5 students broke into the house and smashed the furniture and ultimately set the house on fire. They beat up Zhang Zongxiang, China's ambassador to Japan. Cao however managed to escape.

Meanwhile skirmishes broke out between students and police in other parts of the city, though most of the demonstrators soon disappeared. By evening 32 students were under arrest and Martial Law was declared around the Legation Quarter.

The demonstration started with just 3000 marchers, but they represented China's future intellectual elite. Police on the whole was restrained and it may be that high-level police authorities had no fondness for Cao and it is even more likely that ordinary, like nearly all Beijing citizens agreed with the students' demands. The demonstration had been orderly, even on the way to Cao's house. However, the arrests of students also turned May Fourth into a spark. The arrested students attracted support from a wide range of Beijing citizens and protests spread to all other major cities.

The following two weeks saw numerous student meetings, demonstrations, petitions drives, and street speeches. The students publicised the case of the students who were arrested and a student union was established. In Shanghai, radical teachers and students began organizing when the new from Beijing reached the city on May 6th and a Shanghai Student Union was also formed on 8th May. The anti-Japanese cause proved extremely popular, including throughout the 29th century. Students garnered immediate support from the educational establishments as well as chambers of commerce, lawyers' associations and other professional groups around China. Workers soon followed, becoming especially important in Shanghai. Demonstrations and strikes spread to yet more cities throughout May.

Direct anti-government activity was temporarily quieted as the movement shifted to anti-Japanese actions. The student union publicly burned Japanese goods. Across the country, new protest organizations sprouted and Japanese goods were boycotted. However, the government attempt at restricting the protest movement continued. The trial of the 32 arrested students occurred on 10th May and they refused to plead guilty and demanded that Cao Rulin and the other "traitors" be put on trial instead. Public opinion tended to agree. Since the government lacked legitimacy, its appeal to the law rang hollow. A national student strike began on 19th May. Students took to the streets and also began sending liaisons to merchants and worker associations. Further demonstrations and arrests at the beginning of June brought merchants and workers fully into the struggle.

The Beijing government, like most warlord regimes, did not want to persecute popular students, but neither could it cave in to student demands and prosecute its own officials for treason. Diplomatic pressure from Japan was strong; its formal protests demanded the suppression of anti-Japanese activities. However, neither threats nor persuasion placate the students. After a month of dithering, the Beijing government moved in early June to stamp out student street-lecturing; many bystanders and students were beaten and arrested. By 4 June, temporary jails were

overflowing with more than 1000 detainees. The news was soon telegraphed to Shanghai.

From the beginning of the movement, Shanghai's educated elites including the President of Fudan University had numbered among the protesters. Student organizing and petition drives marked much of May and a vast student strike involving up to 20000 students ensued on May 26. The students, deliberately and with considerable success, made a patriotic appeal to the entire cit. they assembled to swear an oath to "relieve and save China from danger and destruction." They paraded through the city, gave out leaflets and pasted up posters. They also travelled to the major cities in central and southern China to convey their public relations knowhow to students of those cities. Their intense seriousness – the students policed them quite strictly to ensure that none of their member turned to anarchy or took advantage of school closure – impressed the citizens. Soon the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce, bent to popular pressure, and the success of various anti-Japanese boycotts from 1919-1923 throughout urban China was due to the support of the bourgeoisie. In fact, Shanghai's Merchant-dominated native place associations have been participating in patriotic activities since February, when several petitioned the Beijing government to resist Japan's demands at Versailles. These associations played a key role in in disseminating nationalist ideas and mobilizing support.

At the same time, workers' strikes finally shut down trade with Japan, In Shanghai, some 60000 workers went on strike in June. Dockhands removed to load or unload Japanese ships and Japanese owned textiles factories were struck and the strikes spread to create a total of almost 5 days of shut down.

The strike finally ended on June 12, when the Beijing government dismissed the "three traitorous officials" whom students blamed for giving in to Japan. In France, under intense pressure from Chinese students and workers there, the Chinese delegation to the peace conference ended by deciding, against instructions from Beijing, not to sign the treaty. The Versailles Treaty was thus concluded on June 28 without official Chinese endorsement. The students had won a victory. However, Japan still got to keep Shantung and warlordism was just entering its most virulent phase.

E. Significance of the May Fourth Movement

(i) Politicization of the Chinese Public

On May 1919, about 5000 students in Peking held a huge demonstrations against the verdict of the Versailles Peace Conference on Shantung. It was an explosion of public anger, an outburst of nationalism, a deep disappointment in the West and a violent indictment of "traitorous" warlord government in Peking. So powerful and so far-reaching was this incident that it evoked an immediate response and pressured the Chinese delegation at Versailles to reject the peace treaty. **Nationalism, public opinion, and mass demonstrations had emerged as new forces in Chinese**

politics and some historians hailed the May Fourth incident as the first genuine mass movement in modern Chinese history.

As such, the popularity of the May Fourth movement and the respect given to students had everything to do with imperialism. **The movement brought political and policy question once reserved for elite discussion into popular urban discourse. The students managed not only to shake the government, but also to introduce China to a new kind of politics. Streets politics also expanded the old political world dominated by literati, warlords, administrators, and professional politicians. Simply by moving political considerations into wider view, both the older and new generation of students acted as radicalizing forces. The May Fourth self-consciously turned to “the people” in 1919, even Kang Youwei – by now generally conservative – praised the students nothing that “No real public opinion or real people’s rights have been seen in Chin in the early eight years since the establishment of the Republic 1912; if they exist today, it is due to the students’ actions in this incident.”** The excitement and danger in 1919 were far greater than in the relatively sedate protest of 1895. Young literati demanded to be heard in 1895, but the idea of citizenship was seized in 1919. Fifteen-year-old girls claimed the right to discuss policy and to speak in the name of the nation. Public speech was a right, not a privilege.

(ii) Multi-class student movement

In China’s major cities, students took to street preaching; this was a highly organized movement of reaching out to the urban populace. Group of students were assigned to exhort merchants and urban populace. Group of students were assigned to exhort merchants and shoppers to boycott Japanese goods. In Shanghai, at least, students moved to enforce the boycott of Japanese goods. Not all Chinese businessmen benefitted from the boycott; many shopkeeper lost sales and had to be convinced not to cheat. The students feared violence since it would bring a sharp reaction from the foreign police forces, and they tried very hard to maintain order. Having preached hatred for the Japanese, students then had to dissuade crowds from attacking Japanese nationals, as sometimes happened.

Overall the movement was peaceful and disciplined, even solemn. Student demonstrations were dedicated to the memory of martyrs killed by the police and students swore to save the nation. The appeal of the students lay in their message and also in their conduct. Their claims to be acting selflessly was critical to their legitimacy. This was thus a politics of purity as well as a new kind of street politics. The great difference between the multiclass student movement and the machination of warlords and politicians was thus clear. Students reinforced their sense of purpose by taking oaths and creating rules for themselves and sacrificed their lives. The Chinese populace could admire their sincerity even if they disagreed with some of the students’ tactics and demands.

This sort of politics had precedent. Students strikes, demonstrations and mass meetings were rooted in the anti-Manchu movement from the beginning of the century. More fundamentally, the students’ sense of their own righteousness stemmed from the same tradition of literati dissent and responsibility for governance

that had motivated Kang Youwei. If we compare the role of students in 911 and the role of their role in 1919, it may thus seem that little has changed.

But quantitatively the May Fourth movement involved unprecedented numbers: tens of thousands of students and workers and thousands of students and workers and thousands of merchants across China's major cities. And qualitatively the May Fourth Movement led to a new basis for political activity. Perhaps this reflected the changes in Chinese society in the first two decades of the century more than it did a growing maturity of political understanding, though this too played a role. **For if the 1911 Revolution saw a temporary alliance between radical intellectuals and students, provincial leaders and military bosses, the May Fourth movement created a multiclass political agenda based on anti-imperialism and opposition to venal Chinese administration.**

(iv) Impetus for formation of political parties

The influx of diverse foreign ideas and ideologies caused the emergence of two opposing views on social reconstruction and national regeneration: the pragmatic, evolutionary method expounded by Hu Shih and later partially accepted by the Nationalist Party and the Marxist revolutionary approach adopted by the Chinese Communist Party. The contemporary history of China from 1921 onward is primarily a story of the struggle between these two parties and their different approaches.

And May Fourth set the pattern for future protests as it trained future leaders. Strikes continued periodically through the next three decades; student mobilization was permanent, and huge reservoirs of sympathy for the students were maintained. **The May Fourth movement brought thousands of people to treat policy questions as personally important. Some of them doubtlessly did not stay politicized, but many did.** They had to move from away from pure protest movements, which by their very nature are of the moment. **Of particular importance was the independent political party, not attached to a warlord faction but dedicated to overthrowing the entire system of militarism. The Nationalist and the Communist parties could not have emerged without the May Fourth movement (as argued by Peter Zarrow.) The 1920s saw a process of not just of politicization but of political professionalization.** Professional politicians – the old parliamentarians – were to the May Fourth movement nearly as despicable as the warlords. **But a new kind of politician was emerging, one devoted to a cause and representing the expansion of politics. The new kind of politicians were not revolutionary conspirators in the 1911 model; rather the new Party members and was dedicated to the long-term quest for principled power.**

(v) Failure of May Fourth Movement to create new systems of thought

Yet, in historical perspective, for all its bombastic characteristics, the intellectual revolution succeeded primarily in introducing Western thought and destroying Chinese traditionalism, rather than creating new systems of thought and new schools

of philosophy. The avowed purpose of forging a new culture through a critical re-evaluation of Chinese and Western civilization stirred up a series of debates and polemics without really creating a new culture as such. **Street demonstrations were a potent but ultimately limited technique. One might influence the government but only to shift its stance on a specific policy or to implement specific, minor reforms.**

The purely political approach of the 1911 Revolutions had failed to reform China fundamentally, the purely cultural approach of the 1915 New Culture movement had failed or was too slow. **May Fourth merged cultural and political issues and strategies. But due to its limited nature it had to wait for the rise of the nascent Nationalist (evolutionary route) and Communist Parties (revolutionary route) in 1920, although these parties owe their formation to the enthusiasm kindled by the May Fourth explosion.**

Consensus building

Nonetheless a foundation had been laid to adapt foreign ideas and institutions creatively to the Chinese situation. Whether by the evolutionary or revolutionary route, the ultimate goal remained the same: national salvation through the creation of New China- thoroughly modernized, yet distinctly Chinese.

F. Conclusion

The intellectual revolution of 1917-23 represents China's third stage of response to the Western impact. The first stage – the Self-strengthening Movement from 1861-1895 – saw superficial attempts at diplomatic and military modernization, and the second – the era of reforms and revolution from 1895-1912 – witnessed the acceptance of Western political institutions. The intellectual awakening of 1917-23 marked a further shift away from the traditional Chinese base toward complete Westernization. By 1929 China was very much a part of the modern world.

Appraisals of the significance of the New Cultural Movement varied according to different viewpoints. Regardless of these different viewpoints, the fact remains that the **May Fourth Movement was essentially a socio-politico-intellectual revolution aimed at achieving national independence, individual emancipation, and creation of a new culture through a critical and scientific re-evaluation of the national heritage and selected acceptance of foreign civilization.** Leaders of the movement regarded a radical change in the "thought base" as a prerequisite to successful modernization and national regeneration. Old ethics, customs, literature, social relations, and economic and political institutions came under disparaging attacks to make way for the new.

Nonetheless, three main achievements are indisputable. First, the literary revolution led to the establishment of the Plain Language in 1920 and the rise of a new literature in vernacular style – based on humanitarianism, romanticism, realism, and nationalism. Literature now assumed a didactic role of instilling social consciousness in the public – from literary revolution to revolutionary literature.

Japanese control over Shantung and Manchuria, employment of Japanese advisers in Chinese political, financial, military and police administration as well as the purchase of at least 50% of China's munition from Japan were these demands. These demands inflamed the Chinese public. Yuan Shi Kai accepted the most of the demands under the pressure of a Japanese ultimatum and signed a treaty with Japan. In protest, groups of Chinese students in Japan returned home and merchants in China organized a widespread boycott of Japanese goods. The Twenty-One Demands had an unexpected effect of precipitating a fear of imminent extinction and a consequent outbursts of nationalism.

The May Fourth Movement, 1919

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The Chinese delegation had come to Versailles hoping to seek for the recovery of Shantung and the complete abolition of the unequal treaties. Unfortunately, the Allies bound by secret treaties to support the Japanese position and unwillingness to accept Japan's demand for racial equality, and as the West wanted to include Japan in the League of Nations, the peace conference adjudicated the Shantung question in favour of Japan.

When news of the Paris decision reached Peking, Chinese faith in Wilson and the tenets of his idealism was shattered. Enraged by what they saw as Western betrayal, students vowed to defend Shantung by blood. On May 4, several hundred returned students met to discuss what they could do in this period of national crisis and humiliation. They decided to send telegrams to the Versailles to urge the rejection of the treaty of the terms on Shantung was not revised. It also resolved to stage a mass

demonstration and to present petitions to the foreign legations for transmittal to Paris. The demonstration was joined by large groups of students from the 13 universities and colleges in Peking, swelling the number to 5000. The orderliness of the parade evaporated when it passed the house of Ts'ao Ju Lin, who was seen as a traitor, and the students broke into it and burnt his house and attacked Ts'ao's houseguest, who was the Chinese minister to Japan who had gladly agreed to the 1918 pacts. With the belated arrival of the police, only 10 demonstrators were arrested. The immediate response to the arrest was a general strike by all students in Peking and the resignation of Ts'ao as the chancellor of Peita. The strike quickly spread to students in other major cities and was joined by shopkeepers, industrial workers and employees in commercial establishments all over the country. A concerted boycott of Japanese goods also followed. Under increasing pressure from the students, the Peking regime released the students on May 7. Meanwhile, thousands of telegrams were sent to the Chinese delegation at Paris, asking them to reject the treaty and threatening them with punishment if they did not. The Peking warlord regime, confused and unable to make a decisive stand, left the decision of signing to the delegation itself.