

## Sun Yatsen – A Baby Biography

A Chinese revolutionary immortalised as 'The Father of Modern China,' Sun Yat-sen was born in 1866 near Guangzhou into a farm-owning family. He attended an Anglican boys school in Honolulu, where he came under Western influence, particularly that of Christianity. In 1892 he received a diploma from a Hong Kong medical school, and he subsequently practiced medicine there. Thereafter all his activities were devoted to overthrowing the Qing dynasty and establishing a stable Chinese republic.

Sun fled China in 1895 after an abortive revolt, and then toured the world several times to enlist the aid of overseas Chinese in financing his activities. In that period he made an intensive study of Western political and social theory and was deeply impressed with the writings of Karl Marx and Henry George. Sun organized (1905) a revolutionary league, the Tongmeng Hui in Japan and gradually perfected his political conceptions, which were based on the Three Principles of the People: nationalism, democracy, and the people's livelihood (or 'socialism'). Revolution erupted in China, and Sun was elected provisional president of the Chinese republic in Dec., 1911, but two months later he resigned in favor of Yüan Shih-kai. Later, when Sung Chiao-jen transformed the Tongmeng Hui into a federated political party called the Guomindang (GMD), Sun served as its director.

Meanwhile, opposition developed to Yüan's dictatorial methods; in 1913 Sun led an unsuccessful revolt against Yüan, and he was forced to seek asylum in Japan, where he reorganized the GMD. He returned to China in 1917, and in 1921 he was elected president of a self-proclaimed national government at Guangzhou in southern China. To develop the military power needed for the Northern Expedition against the militarists at Beijing, he established the Whampoa Military Academy (now Huangpu Military Academy), with Chiang Kai-shek as its commandant. In 1924, to hasten the conquest of China, he began a policy of active cooperation with the Chinese Communists and he accepted the help of the USSR in reorganizing the GMD.

After Sun's death in 1925, when the Communists and the GMD split (1927), each group claimed to be his true heir. The official veneration of Sun's memory (especially in the GMD) was a virtual cult, which centered around his tomb in Nanjing. His widow, the former Soong Ch'ing-ling, whom he married in 1914, rose to a high position in the government of Communist China.



## Mao Zedong – A Baby Biography

Mao Zedong was born in Shaoshan village in Hunan province in 1893 to a reasonably well-off but hardworking peasant family. From an early age, Mao was a voracious reader. He was close to his mother but did not show his father the filial piety that was traditionally due. At 16 he left home to complete his elementary school training in the Hunanese capital Changsha. He developed an admiration for strong emperors in earlier Chinese history and for certain statesmen including George Washington. Mao watched as China's last dynasty crumbled.

After training as a teacher, in 1918 Mao travelled to Beijing and became caught up in the political activity of the May Fourth Movement. He received a minor post at the Beijing University library where he met Dean Chen Duxiu and Librarian Li Dazhao (both Marxists), becoming with them a founder of the CCP in 1921. He headed the GMD Peasant Movement Training Institute during the First United Front. After the Shanghai massacre of 1927, Mao retreated to Jiangxi, where he developed a base during the late 1920s and early 1930s. In 1934, after the GMD surrounded them, Mao led his followers on the 'Long March', a 6,000 mile journey to northwest China to establish a new base at Yan'an.

The Communists and GMD were again temporarily allied during eight years of war with Japan (1937-1945), with Mao directing communist strategy but shortly after the end of WWII, civil war broke out between them. The Communists were victorious, and on 1 October 1949 Mao proclaimed the founding of the PRC. Chiang Kai-shek fled to the island of Taiwan. Mao's reliance on the peasantry (a major departure from Soviet doctrine) and dependence on guerrilla warfare in the revolution had been essential to the Communist triumph in China. The Communists set about transforming the country. Industry now came under state ownership and China's farmers began to be organised into collectives. All opposition was ruthlessly suppressed.

The Chinese initially received significant help from the Soviet Union, but relations soon began to cool. In 1958, Mao launched the 'Great Leap Forward' aimed at mass mobilisation of labour to improve agricultural and industrial production. The result, instead, was a massive decline in agricultural output, which, together with poor harvests, led to famine and the deaths of millions. Mao's position weakened. In an attempt to re-assert his authority, Mao later launched the 'Cultural Revolution' in 1966, aiming to purge the country of 'impure' elements and revive the revolutionary spirit. One-and-a-half million people died and much of the country's cultural heritage was destroyed. In September 1967, with many cities on the verge of anarchy, Mao sent in the army to restore order.

**Marriages:** In 1921 Mao married Yang Kaihui, daughter of one of his mentors at Beijing University. She was executed by the GMD in 1930. However, since 1928 Mao had lived with a guerrilla girl of eighteen, He Zizhen. They had five children. In 1937 he divorced He and married the actress Jiang Qing who later became one of the masterminds of the Cultural Revolution. Mao loved to swim and wrote poetry for much of his life. Towards the end of his life he appeared strong, but his health was deteriorating. His later years saw attempts to build bridges with the United States, Japan and Europe. In 1972, US President Richard Nixon visited China and met Mao.

Mao died on 9 September 1976.



## Chiang Kai-shek – A Baby Biography

Chiang Kai-shek (or Jiang Jieshi) was born on 31 October 1887 in Zhejiang, an eastern coastal province of China. His father was a merchant. At the age of 18 he went to military training college in Japan. He returned to China in 1911 to take part in the uprising that overthrew the Qing Dynasty and established a Chinese republic. Chiang became a member of the Chinese Nationalist Party (known as the Guomindang or KMT or GMD), founded by Sun Yat-sen.

Supported by Sun Yat-sen, Chiang was appointed commandant of the Whampoa Military Academy in Canton (Guangdong province) in 1924, where he built up the Nationalist army. After Sun's death in 1925, Chiang became leader of the GMD. He spearheaded the Northern Expedition, joined by the Communists in a United Front, which reunified most of China under a National Government based in Nanjing. In 1928, he led the brutal suppression of the Chinese Communist Party.

Chiang oversaw a modest programme of reform in China but the government's resources were focused on fighting internal opponents, including the Communists. From 1931, Chiang also had to contend with a Japanese invasion in Manchuria, in the north-east of China, which he was slow to react to as everything points to his priority being wiping out the Communists.



In 1937, Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China. When the United States came into the war against Japan in 1941, China became one of the Allied Powers. As Chiang's position within China weakened, his status abroad grew and in November 1943 he travelled to Cairo to meet US President Franklin D Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. His wife, Soong Mei-ling, travelled with him and became famous in the west as Madame Chiang. Chiang and Soong received substantial support from the US for their war against the Japanese.

In 1946, civil war broke out between the KMT and the Communists. In 1949, the Communists were victorious, establishing the People's Republic of China. Chiang and the remaining KMT forces fled to the island of Taiwan. One of Chiang's downfalls may have been that he made rash military decisions out of a desperation to defeat the communists as swiftly as possible. He also lacked popular support among the people, and Nationalist soldiers were often recruited by force and treated harshly.

On Taiwan, Chiang established a government in exile which he led for the next 25 years. This government continued to be recognised by many countries as the legitimate government of China, and Taiwan controlled China's seat in the United Nations until the end of Chiang's life.

He died on 5 April 1975.