Lin Biao Incident, 1971
Tiananmen Incident, April 5, 1976
Tiananmen Massacre, June 4, 1989

Lin Biao 林彪 (1907-1971): Military leader of the CCP Red Army who became a hero for his fighting in Manchuria during the Civil War; succeeded Peng Dehuai as Minister of Defense after 1959; a supporter of Mao who helped to create the cult of Mao; responsible for collecting important sayings from Mao into the Quotations from Chairman Mao, also known as the Little Red Book; named to be Mao’s successor in 1969; died two years later in a mysterious plane crash over Mongolia; after the crash he was accused of plotting a coup against Mao.

Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 (1904-1997): Joined the CCP while on a work-study program in France in the 1920s; veteran of the Long March; served as a liaison between the CCP and the Red Army; rises to prominence in the Party in the 1950s & 1960s; headed up the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957; removed from Party leadership during the Cultural Revolution; emerges after the Cultural Revolution as the preeminent head of the Party and the state in the 1980s; responsible for opening up market reforms and the Four Modernizations in the 1980s; also responsible for suppressing the 1989 democracy movement in Tian’anmen Square.

Zhou Enlai 周恩來 (1898-1976): Important leader in the CCP since its early days; participated in the Long March; served as premier from 1954 until his death; considered a moderating force during the Cultural Revolution; helped preserve key people and cultural artifacts during the Cultural Revolution; demonstration honoring him (and expressing support for Deng Xiaoping) on the Qingming Festival on April 5, 1976 led to the Tiananmen Incident.

Jiang Qing 江青 (1914-1991): Third wife of Mao Zedong; left the life of an actress in Shanghai to join the CCP in Yan’an; considered a member of the Gang of Four, and responsible for promoting the Cultural Revolution; responsible for overseeing the creation of the Model Revolutionary Operas (and two ballets).

The Gang of Four: Yao Wenyuan 姚文元 (1931-2005), Zhang Chunqiao 張春橋 (1917-2005), Wang Hongwen 王洪文 (1935-1992), and Jiang Qing 江青 (1914-1991), all of whom were Mao’s closest allies during the Cultural Revolution; they were all Party members from Shanghai; following the Cultural Revolution, these four were blamed for the chaos of the time; they were all arrested in 1976 and their trials were aired on public television in 1981.

Zhu De 朱德 (1886-1976): main military advisor to Mao from the time of the Jiangxi Soviet; served as commander in chief of the People’s Liberation Army; founding member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo.

Hua Guofeng 華國鋒 (1921-2008): Rose to position of premier of China and Chairman of the CCP immediately after Mao’s death in 1976; ordered the arrest of the Gang of Four; edged out of power by Deng Xiaoping in 1980.
May Seventh Cadre Schools: Labor camps established in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution for Party cadres in need of “re-education”; cadres engaged in physical labor and studied the thought of Mao Zedong.

Sent-down youth: Urban middle school and college students sent down to the rural areas to learn from the experience of working with the peasants; many of these youths remained in the countryside for eight to ten years; began as a voluntary program but soon became compulsory; this generation of urban youths often referred to as the “lost generation” since they lost the opportunity to finish schooling.

Shanghai Communiqué: issued on February 28, 1972 that concluded the official state visit of President Nixon to China; called for the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and the U.S.; stated but did not resolve the different positions of China and the U.S. on the question of Taiwan.

Model Revolutionary Operas: 8 “revolutionary operas” created under the supervision of Jiang Qing during the CR; based on a modified Peking opera; these eight operas were among the only forms of entertainment permitted during the CR; made into films.

Four Modernizations: Goals for “socialist modernization” announced in 1978 to develop China’s agriculture, industry, defense, and science & technology; spearheaded by Deng Xiaoping; encouraged opening to the West and the creation of Special Economic Zones for foreign investment in China.

Democracy Wall: a stretch of wall in Beijing where posters calling for China’s modernization were posted in 1979; first encouraged by Deng Xiaoping because it supported his reforms; suppressed when a poster by Wei Jingsheng went up calling for the “fifth modernization” of democracy.

Hu Yaobang 胡耀邦 (1915-1989): protégé of Deng Xiaoping; became general-secretary of the CCP in 1981; dismissed from the post in 1987 due to his leniency toward student protests in 1986; his death in April 1989 touched off the student protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989, which culminated in the June 4, 1989 massacre.

Zhao Ziyang 赵紫陽 (1919-2005): protégé of Deng Xiaoping; became premier of China and general-secretary of the CCP in the mid-1980s; continued Deng’s economic reforms; removed from his post and kept under house arrest until his death due to his support of the student protesters in 1989.

Li Peng 李鵬 (1928- ): Adopted son of Zhou Enlai; Soviet-trained engineer; became premier of China in 1988; considered a hardliner responsible and responsible for the suppression of the student protests in 1989.


Xi Jinping 习近平 (1953-): Current General Secretary of the Communist Party, President of the People’s Republic of China, and Chairman of the Central Military Commission.