

CHINA'S REFORM AND THE TRANSITION FROM NATIONALISM TO MODERNISM DURING THE DYNASTIC PERIOD

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Abstract

China is a multi-millenary civilization that has survived throughout its troubled history demonstrating that tradition and culture reinforce the national values and keep alive the social body. The paper analyzes the period of the Chinese dynasties, which reformed the management system and influenced the economic development, but without taking into account the human and natural potential of the country. The Chinese leaders' desire to impose their power and domination over the native population generated an undemocratic society and influenced the mentality of the people who accepted tyranny quite easily.

Keywords: *China, dynasties, reforms, economic development*

1. Introduction

Multi-millenary China, known as the “cradle of universal civilization”, was periodically reformed by dynasties that reigned throughout its history. They induced tenacity and industriousness to the Chinese people, specific features that made it overcome the difficult moments from its evolution. To make an objective assessment of China's history, it takes courage, patience and energy because of its economic and cultural changes happened at a large scale. Currently, the economic reform in China has reached a stage of maturity with the clear aim of developing a socialist market economy system. It is an ongoing process that has been taking place for over a quarter century and which has been trying to separate the macro- and microeconomic mechanisms.

2. The hallmark of the main dynasties in China's reform and development

The first epoch in the history of China was certainly marked by the **Xia Dynasty** (2205-1766 BC), during which “a settlement defended by a rammed rampart, 1.5 km long and 3 m high, but whose 9 m base showed that it could be much higher.” [1] During it, the supremacy of the state began to be felt and Ancient China benefitted from tranquillity and stability throughout its territory.

The Shang Dynasty (1766-1122 BC) was formed in the northwest of China as a still primitive monarchy, relying on a social system which would be outlined in the 9th century BC and which had the king as the ruler of the state cult. During this period the first cities fortified in order to avert possible attacks from the neighbouring tribes began to be built, although they were not of economic importance.

Agriculture played an important role during this period, the main crops being the grains. The development of the bronze industry highlights the very varied production techniques.

The Shang state was the first Chinese state with a well-defined political and cultural form, which has exerted its influence beyond the national borders, being nearly impossible to trace its borders. It collapsed because of the internal social movements, but also as a consequence of the pressure of the Zhou tribes, that shaped the **Zhou Dynasty**, which formed the “*classical epoch*” of China.

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In agriculture cropland was expanding and thanks to the progress of the agricultural tools, it evolved significantly. The land ownership represented the basis of the hierarchical system of social relations of production.

In the second half of the eighth century BC, the Chinese political and social system began to enter a crisis. *“The immeasurable opulence of the royal courts, the intrigues and the murders, the barbaric mores of the nobility accelerated the decay of the ruling class.”* [1]

The result of this chaos, which lasted 260 years (the Warring States Period – 479-221 BC), marked the beginning of a new historical stage in which China became a unitary state for the first time, thanks to the **reforms** imposed by the Qin military state (255-206). It abolished the feudal system, it introduced the compulsory military service, it established a unified legislation, it standardized the units of measurement, it unified the monetary system and the calendar, and it intensified the silk trade. The **Qin Dynasty** also reformed the educational system, prohibiting the freedom of thought and the private schools. Furthermore, in 212 BC all the books that were not consistent with the policy and ideology of the Qin system were destroyed.

The place of the Qin Dynasty was taken by the **Han Dynasty** (208 BC-220 AD), as a consequence of a civil war. The territories of China today were reunited for the first time and divided into provinces, rigorously controlled by the state power. Numerous inventions have revolutionized the economic and social life (porcelain, paper, ink and brush writing).

The Han emperors gave great importance to the urban trade and development, increasing the money supply. Agriculture was also supported and enriched with vines and hemp and the overtime of the peasants was more relaxed. The basins of the great rivers began to be used for agriculture, the agricultural workshops were developed and those for processing iron objects, using the hydraulic force. [2]

However, the state has seized the sale of timber, wine, salt or water distribution, monopolizing the trade with these products.

Mutilation penalty was abolished in the year 167 BC and the criminal laws were reformed in the year 130 BC.

In the year 9 AD a program of reforms which mitigated the major social contradictions was introduced: [3]

- the State is the sole owner of the land;
- the prohibition on selling slaves;
- stabilizing the prices for some products;
- the monetary reform.

The Sui Dynasty (581-618) reformed the fields of justice and finance, and the field of constructions was its strength. The reconstruction of cities, the enhancement and construction of roads, and the reorganization of the monetary system made possible the communication between distant areas favouring the development of trade and industry. That was also the period when exams were introduced for the selection and recruitment of officials. Agriculture also developed as a result of the land re-division policy, which resulted in strengthening the position of the Chinese population in society.

China developed economically, politically and militarily, strengthening its position during **the Tang Dynasty** (618-907). *“The central government was organized in six ministries, the system of exams for the state officials was improved, the peasants were given land, but the great landed property also multiplied.”* [4] The State built workshops, in which the individual industry was developed and the rural economy recorded a great progress. The fields of shipbuilding and metallurgy also developed, as well as the hydraulics and communications ones. The Tang Empire reached the peak of power and prosperity, managing to make China the largest and most civilized country on earth. After the removal of the Tang Dynasty there was a troubled period (“the Five Dynasties”), during which the military anarchy led to the formation of **the Song Dynasty** (960-1279). During this dynasty, the

statute labours were replaced by a personal tax, the trade was nationalized, pensions were granted to the elderly, to the sick and to those who did not find work, the monopoly on tea was also abolished. The development of the rural economy and the land deforestation were also concerns of the Song Dynasty. Due to the imperial policy the political unification was necessary in order to organize bureaucratic state system with centralized power and authority.

During 1279-1368, China was conquered by the Mongols as a result of Genghis Khan's invasion. **The Yuan Dynasty** was founded, during which the Mongolian population became the privileged class who used the land for their own interest. Thus, under this dynasty, China did not develop economically. The garrison farms appeared, the farmers were forced to give away their horses and animals to the army and to perform numerous statute labours. The class contradictions and the despotism of the officials increased, generating losses in administration with a direct impact on the Han population. The Han Dynasty disappeared under a bloody peasant war.

During 1368-1644, China was restored by the **Ming Dynasty**, which promoted an autocratic policy and which separated the political function from the military one. During this dynasty the peasants were freed from the Mongolian oppression, they were exempt from taxes and received the necessary seeds for farming. The lands were divided into *the public's*, which belonged to the state, and *the people's*, belonging to the private owners. The trade relations with countries overseas were developed; the state put a monopoly on the foreign trade and limited the internal trade. The land taxes and all the contributions that the peasants paid were unified by a tax measure. Taxes, increasingly higher, and the natural disasters hindered people's lives, and they organized an insurrection, founding the **Qing Dynasty** (1644-1911).

During the Qing Dynasty, the political power remains centralized and it repressed any idea considered as anti-Manchurian. The Chinese had been allowed to keep their traditions, but the Manchu language had become, along with the Chinese language, the official language of the court. The mining industry experienced a strong growth, favouring the creation of mining companies, some operated and funded by the state. A series of reforms were initiated, aiming at the education system, revising the criminal code, the administration and the finances. Regarding the foreign trade, a series of treaties with European countries were signed, which favoured the growth of their economic and political pressure on China. European colonialism caused a stagnation of agriculture and crafts, and boosted the development of trade, making China a huge market for the European products, but also a source for obtaining the raw materials.

After several failed attempts to reform China which resulted in high casualties in 1911, the Revolutionary League of China, under the leadership of Sun Yat Sen ended the Dynasty epoch and proclaimed it a republic governed by *the three principles of the people: nationalism, democracy and prosperity*.

3. Conclusions:

A special feature of the Chinese civilization is that it appears more like a permanent natural phenomenon rather than a conventional nation-state.[5] With several centuries ahead of Western Europe, in terms of economy and technology, China nevertheless regressed, up to the stage of medieval country, because of several factors. The closing against the outside world not only prevented further advancement, but it also meant that the existing discoveries had become unused. In fact, technological leadership is a process, not a state, demanding the drastic opening towards all that is foreign.[6] The rigidity towards the outside generated unstable situations in the trade relations, as long as the history of these relations clearly shows that the world has always moved either towards greater freedom or towards greater protectionism, which is called by international trade experts the "bicycle theory."

Consequently, if the Chinese dynasties had applied a development model that took into account the human and natural potential of the country, in which the power of the state

developed the economic liberalization and not its centralization simultaneously with the promotion of an isolation policy, the course of Chinese history would have been much smoother, and the development would have also been much earlier. Undoubtedly, national prosperity is based on economic growth, and this requires commercial expansion, both domestically and externally, as it also happened with China after 1979. The important fact is that, despite these tough times, full of profound changes that China faced over its history, the Chinese people developed a certified cultural heritage, explained archaeologically and historically as well. This was undoubtedly China's development architecture nowadays and it demonstrated the superiority of the civilization of the Chinese people.

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