

II. Economic History of China "Before Liberation"

A. The Imperial Dynasties -- 1 week

Lecture Notes:

Film: **Legacy**

China's Imperial Dynasties includes a period of 2132 years, from 221 BCE – 1911

You have studied the major dynasty names:

Early Empire: Qin/Han, 221-207 BCE / 206 BCE – 220

After this came the Three Kingdoms, the Western Chin, and the Northern and Southern Dynasties

Middle Empire Sui/Tang, 589-617 / 618-906

After this came the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms

Late Empire:

Song (Northern and Southern), 960-1275

Yuan (Mongol), 1276-1367

Ming, 1368-1644

Qing (Manchu), 1645-1911

There is also history before the imperial dynasties:

Yangshao Culture, circa 5000-3000 BCE – village societies along Yellow River, with well-refined pottery

Longshan Culture, circa 2500-2200 BCE – formation of intervillage aggregates, with economic, political and military links

Legends of Culture Heroes, especially the Yellow Emperor, 25th Century BCE, who is said to have invented writing and brick, and fixed the calendar

After the Bronze Age and its advance in military technology came the

Three Ancient Dynasties:

The **Xia**, circa 21st – 17th Centuries BCE, who arose from the Longshan culture in Henan & Shanxi, had a ruling family that used military force and ritual to enforce authority and create cultural cohesion.

The **Shang**, circa 17th – 11th Centuries BCE, from Shandong, who gradually came to dominate the Xia, had a well-developed bronze technology, chariot technology, and expanding cities. They are known for using “oracle bones” which show early examples of Chinese writing.

The **Zhou**, from Shaanxi, which conquered the Shang around 1040 BCE (100 years before King David), and which led a feudal system of vassal states run by the children of the rulers, a literate nobility, the well-field system, and corvee labor. Social status also hardened into the Shi-Nong-Gong-Shang, and many cities grew to 70,000 or more households.

- Broken into the Western and Eastern Periods, separated by the sack of their capital Hao (near Xian) in 771 BCE, and its removal to Luoyang.
- Though the Zhou developed the Son of Heaven doctrine, in the Eastern Zhou they became ceremonial rulers of independent kingdoms.
- The Chinese began to expand from the North China Plain (the middle kingdom), but had continuous fighting with the Xiong-Nu tribes.
- The early Eastern Zhou is called the Spring and Autumn Period, the time of the “Hundred Schools” of Kong Fuzi, Laozi, Mozi, Mengzi, and many others.
- The late Zhou was the Warring States, which ended with the destruction of the Zhou and the unification of China under the Qin King from Shaanxi.

The **Qin Dynasty**: Qin Shi Huangdi and his son. Legalist philosophy – terror on a massive scale, books destroyed, aristocracy eliminated; unification and standardization of roads, language, and measures; the creation of a centralized and bureaucratic state; massive building projects, including the Great Wall (current version was built by the Ming), roads, and Qin Shi Huangdi’s tomb. Son overthrown by peasant revolts.

The **Han Dynasty**: Established by the Liu Clan, capital in Chang’an (Xian), the home of the Qin. Much more lenient but built on foundations of Qin. Rise of new aristocracy to collect taxes and reward support, but primogeniture eliminated to undermine their power over time. Economic expansion, new canals, irrigation, textiles, mining, pottery, et cetera. Drought-resistant rice, crop rotation, intertillage, terracing, use of bamboo, development of seismograph, paper, the identification of sunspots, et cetera. Empire grew out to Korea, Guangxi, and Gansu. Population grew to 50-60 million by 1 BCE. Silk road well developed, envoy to Rome, many tributary states, exports of silk, handicrafts, pottery. Han brought down by a revolt of absorbed nomads.

Under the Han, **Confucianism** becomes official imperial philosophy. Emphasis on this world, not next. Maintenance of traditional order. Man is inherently good, but needs education, models to follow. Social obligations, hierarchy, five traditional relationships. Scholar as the moral force .

We begin to see the **Dynastic Cycle**: power struggles, weak emperors, rising populations and falling land/labor ratios, poverty, rising revenue needs, aristocracy shielded from taxes, free peasants become slave labor or tenants, rising tax rates, peasant rebellion, chaos, falling population.

The **Sui Dynasty** reunified China through military conquest, re-established some of the repressive measures of the Qin, redistributed land, and launched expensive military campaigns to Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Also built the Grand Canal system, which could ship goods from the Yangzi to the Yellow River. The Sui Emperor lost mandate of heaven when his generals killed him.

The **Tang Dynasty** quickly replaced him. Very cosmopolitan, trading by land and sea, powerful military. Role of women quite prominent. Capital was Chang-an (Xian). Buddhism dominant religion. Great prosperity, craft guilds, et cetera. Population rose back to 53 million by 754. Dynastic cycle, gradual collapse.

After 50 years, the **Song Dynasty** reunified China. It was a relatively weak state, but also China's greatest age. The first Song emperor reduced powers of generals, replacing them with a gentry created by a new civil service examination system, and afterwards dynasties stopped collapsing from internal forces. In 1125 the Qidan conquered the north and the Song moved their capital from Kaifeng to Hangzhou. In the Southern Song, they fought against the Ruzhen, who had conquered the Qidan with Song help, until the Mongols – united by Genghis Khan – eliminated the Xi Xia and conquered both the Ruzhen (again, with Song help) and, finally under Khubilai Khan, the Song itself. The Mongols also conquered Russia and the middle east, attempted to conquer Japan, and almost invaded Europe.

Under the Song, **technology** was far ahead of Europe's in almost all categories, and the state itself was much more advanced in its ability to govern. In 1078, China had coal-burning blast furnaces, and produced twice as much pig iron as England would produce in 1778. Taxation switched from a land tax to salt and trade taxes. China had highly developed war technology (gunpowder, grenades, catapults, et cetera) but lacked nomadic soldiers and depended on mercenaries. China traded with the India and the Arabs, and the silk road carried goods to Europe. China developed paper money, and not surprisingly the world's first hyperinflation under the Southern Song. Population rose to 100 million people in 1124, the year before the capital of the Northern Song was conquered.

The Song also developed **Neo-Confucianism** as official state philosophy, which was very conservative but incorporated some aspects of Buddhism. Reform efforts now became a means to maintain order and support the Emperor and the state. As a side effect, it would eventually come to undermine science.

The **Yuan Dynasty**, under Khubilai Khan and his successors, would rule using the Song bureaucracy and became very Sinicized. A capital was built in Beijing, and the Grand Canal was extended to it. The Chinese were thoroughly conquered, but some scholars argue that they learned to maintain a balance of inner hatred and outward obedience. The Yuan became weak and collapsed easily by 1368.

The **Ming Dynasty** was established by Zhu Yuanzheng, a former monk. It was very centralized, very xenophobic, and ruthless, but the Ming was a period of relative peace. Population rose back to 65-80 million people in the re-unified empire by 1400, and kept rising. The Ming Emperor usually took a direct role in governance, to reduce power of gentry and bureaucracy, but this made governance less effective and responsive. Military power was focused on preventing another Mongol invasion, though Mongols had declined, and the Great Wall was rebuilt beginning in 1474. The Capital was moved from Nanjing to Beijing by the third emperor.

In the very early 15th Century (1405-1430), Admiral Zheng He, known as the three-jeweled eunuch, took three voyages with huge ships and huge convoys, past India

to Africa and Arabia. Voyages were shut down due to scholar opposition and cost, and records of the voyages were burnt.

The Ming faced problems raising taxes due to local corruption and inability of government to address the problem. Under the “single whip” tax consolidation, the land tax became dominant again. They also mismanaged the money supply, silver was forbidden and coinage was inadequate for economic growth, counterfeiting was common, and paper money was printed excessively. Silver flowed in anyway from Japan and Europe to pay for Chinese goods, and raw bullion was inefficiently used as money even though it was not officially allowed. Government eventually learned to tolerate it, and China depended on inflow to provide money for the expanding economy.

Europeans arrived in 1500s, Portuguese in Macau, but had difficulty opening up trade. Around 1600, Japanese pirates began harassing coastal trade, and under Hideyoshi they invaded Korea and the Chinese coastal areas. The Ming responded by halting international trade and drew the population inland. Silver inflow stopped, silver price began to rise, which made the land tax harder to pay (in real terms, it tripled). This caused famine and peasant unrest. In Sichuan, Zhang Xianzhong led a rebellion that murdered over one million people, and many more died of famine. Revolutionaries under Li Zicheng marched on Beijing, the last Ming Emperor hung himself, and the Manchus were allowed to come through the Great Wall in 1644. Once they suppressed the rebellion, of course, they failed to leave.

Instead, they established the **Qing Dynasty**, and spent the next decade suppressing (sometimes brutally) the efforts of Ming loyalists to re-establish the previous dynasty. Once in power, the Qing retained Manchu tribal military institutions and maintained a separate Manchu cultural identity, but adopted the Chinese method of governance, and otherwise largely continued the policies of the Ming. Under the Qing, China expanded the empire as far as Xinjiang (Turkestan) in the northwest, Yunnan and Tibet in the southwest, Taiwan in the southeast, Mongolia, Korea, and what is now the Russian far east (e.g., Vladivostok). For two hundred years, the Qing dynasty – especially under the long-lived Kangxi and Qianlong emperors – was a stable and prosperous period in China’s history. By 1770, China’s population rose to 270 million, and by 1850 to 410 million.

However, after the mid-1800s, a period marked by the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion, China under the Qing dynasty began a marked decline. By 1893, China’s population had fallen to 385 million, and the Chinese *laobaixing* (the “old hundred names,” or the common people) were increasingly impoverished. China became known as the “Sick Man of Asia.” The Qing were able to hold on to power until 1911, partly as a result of European intervention, but they failed to turn this situation around.

How did China feed so many people? Farming tools, irrigation methods, and other aspects of agricultural technology showed little change over the centuries, and there is little evidence that the average Chinese farmer had any better access to tools in 1850 than in 1400. The expansion of the empire was primarily for the purpose of controlling threats to Chinese security, and did not add much additional fertile land. Still, the amount of cultivated land more than doubled between 1400 and 1770 as a result of terracing, reclamation, and infill, and rose by another third by the end of the Qing dynasty. Yields

per unit of land also rose significantly between 1400 and 1850, as a result of (1) more labor per unit of land, (2) improved seeds (including drought resistant grains and an early-ripening Champa rice that the Chinese called the “rice seed dropped from Heaven”), (3) new cropping patterns (double-cropping, for example, and a modest substitution towards rice where rainfall allowed), and (4) new crops. Under the Han, millet was the dominant grain in the north and rice in the south, and for the next 15 centuries only three new crops (tea, cotton, and Kaoliang) were introduced in China. As a result of the discovery of the new world, four new crops were introduced in the 16th Century alone, including corn and sweet potatoes, but the Chinese were slow to adopt these. Still, estimates of multifactor productivity showed very slow rates of improvement, and scholars believe that China was producing near the maximum output per unit of land possible under a labor-intensive, pre-modern technology.

The Coming of the Europeans : Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, China’s experience of foreigners was mostly limited to nomadic tribesmen, Arab traders, and southeast Asian tributary states. Europeans – first the Portuguese, then the Dutch, and then the British – arrived under the Ming, but contact was relatively limited. The Portuguese were allowed to settle in Macau, and the British and others were allowed to do business in Guangzhou (Canton) through a corrupt Chinese monopoly of traders known as the Cohong, and administered by a government official known as the Hoppo.

The Chinese never fully understood the motivations of these new arrivals. In 1726, the Yongzheng Emperor wrote on the subject of Catholic missionaries and other Westerners:

"The distant barbarians come here attracted by our culture. We must show them generosity and virtue."

When Lord MaCartney attempted to negotiate the presence of an envoy or ambassador in Beijing, and otherwise open up equal trade relations, the Qianlong Emperor said:

“Swaying the wide world, I have but one aim in view, namely, to maintain a perfect governance and to fulfil the duties of the State; strange and costly objects do not interest me. If I have commanded that the tribute offerings sent by you, O King, are to be accepted, this was solely in consideration for the spirit which prompted you to dispatch them from afar. Our dynasty's majestic virtue has penetrated unto every country under Heaven, and Kings of nations have offered their costly tribute by land and sea. As your Ambassador can see for himself we possess all things. I set no value on objects strange or ingenious, and have no use for your country's manufacturers. This then is my answer to your request to appoint a representative at my Court, a request contrary to our dynastic usage, which would only result in inconvenience to yourself. I have expounded my wishes in detail and have commanded your tribute Envoys to leave in peace on their homeward journey.”

The Needham Paradox – What Fairbank calls the Paradox of Growth without Development:

Needham's 1954 work, *Science and civilisation in China*, 5 volumes. Begged the question, how could China be so advanced for so long, and yet become a poor third-world country by the end of the Imperial period? Why did China, which invented so many technologies before the West, never take off?

- Land tenancy and sharecropping theory
- High-level equilibrium trap (involution)
- Government policy towards commerce – supporting, extracting, repressing, and neglecting
- Neo-Confucianism and the role of the court and gentry in suppressing change and innovation
- Lack of merchant independence (civil society), corruption
- Lack of capitalist institutions – legal, property, financial
- Fairbank also cites footbinding and the suppression of women