

The Qing Dynasty Empire

Posted on October 2, 2018

Political and Military Foundations of the Qing Dynasty

The Qing dynasty was the last imperial dynasty to rule China from 1644 to 1912. The form of governance was then changed to the Republic of China and remains so till today. This empire was founded by a clan in Manchuria led by Jurchen Aisin Gioro. Not only did this empire rule China for nearly three centuries, but it was also the fourth-largest empire ever recorded in History.

Preceding the Ming Dynasty, the Qing Dynasty adopted its system of governance, and most of the power was concentrated on the Manchu clan. In terms of military and defense, the Qing Dynasty had one of the best armies in the world. The emperor owned fighters who were loyal to him, along with banner troops and bannermen. The leaders and emperors of this particular dynasty are known to have led the army troops themselves because the dynasty's legitimacy depended thoroughly on its ability to defend itself, protect its boundaries, and expand its existing territories.

Soldiers in the Qing Dynasty cannot be credited with any new war gear inventions, but the fact that they started using longer swords helped them stab their enemies more easily. This helped them win more wars and increase the loot or wealth that would be circulated through China. The foot soldiers wore lighter armor so that they could easily carry their body weight on the battlefield (Waley-Cohen). Even though China had discovered gunpowder a few years before the rule of the Qing Dynasty, it wasn't up till the ruling period of this dynasty that the first machine gun was invented; the invention of these types of firearms changed the way they formed their battle strategies. Undoubtedly, the military was an aspect that was given a lot of attention in terms of fundamental values as a dynasty.

Manchu Rule, Identity, and Social Regulation

Leaders of the Qing Dynasty were successful in maintaining their own image as well as in being foreign Chinese rulers. Their influence as foreign leaders was so strong that they were able to ban intermarriages with the Chinese. Other than this, they were able to rule over the Chinese from their homeland in Manchuria. The Chinese were dominated in several ways, such as the fact that Manchu troops were separated from Chinese troops in order to maintain a stronghold in terms of power. Politically speaking, official state documents were not made available to the Chinese.

Apart from politics and the military, they passed laws supporting certain dress codes for the Chinese (Garrett). Chinese men were supposed to wear Manchu-style clothes and queues as well as shave

their heads. Even though this particular ruling was eliminated in 1668, Chinese women were not supposed to bind their feet. From the years 1644 to 1912, Confucianism was the dominant religion of the Chinese Qing Dynasty. Since this religion was officially sanctioned, all the emperors visited various alters and made significant sacrifices. The most important sacrifices were made at Beijing's Altar of Heaven, while other sacrifices were made in honor of the ancestors of the emperors. It is important to understand that even though Confucianism was the dominant religion, several other religions existed and were tolerated at varying degrees. However, Buddhism and Daoism were also given official recognition, which made the people of these faiths grow in importance as well (Berger).

Peace, Trade, and Cultural Achievement

Even though the Qing Dynasty placed a number of regulations on the Chinese, their ruling period was very peaceful. There was prosperity and growth in all sectors, allowing international trade and commerce to rise. The people were given freedom in terms of taxation, as they were not charged with heavy taxes, especially if there was a famine period. The prosperity in trade and commerce led to an increase in art and culture. More people invested themselves in learning and other forms of expression or art. For example, porcelain production used to be only in shades of blue, but with the intervention of the Qing Dynasty, they developed new colors such as red, yellow, and black (Kerr).

It is important to note that within their rule, the Qing emperors learned a lot from European influences, such as their ideas about art and paintings. European missionaries were given access to China for the first time to spread their enlightened views about the science of that day and age. Philosophical thought was also brought to light, such as the idea of Legalism. This focused on the notion that those people who followed the law and showed obedience to the legal system should be rewarded while the traitors or disobedient people should be punished.

One main achievement of the Qing era was the compilation of Chinese literature as well as the addition of major encyclopedias (Liu). These books comprised numerous volumes and covered vast topics. Even though these encyclopedias were written during the 1700s, they are still applicable today in terms of history, literature, geography, and politics. Some of the greatest novels of that time period were written during the years of the Qing Dynasty, such as Dream of the Red Chamber and The Story of the Stone. The Qing Dynasty surpassed all previous dynasties in terms of printing and publications. The scale of printing reached new proportions as new techniques and methods of printing were being rapidly developed, such as block printing.

Expansion, Prosperity, and Literary Development

The greatest years of prosperity fell into the reigning period of Qianglong because he was able to extend the borders of China more than any other emperor could, more land came within their reach, which also contribute towards the increase in trade and commerce between people. However, the

peace was short-lived, as internal political problems began to rise. A string of uprisings were orchestrated against the leaders of the Qing Dynasty and influenced a number of mass supporters. Even though the government was successful in thwarting these uprisings, they could not reverse the damage that they had caused (Hung). Other internal rebellions, such as the T'ai P'ing rebellion, caused severe problems.

Another Qing emperor, Kangxi, proved to be a very competent and intelligent leader. He was swift in his strategic military tactics and used the people of the Han clan to serve his purposes (Reed). This particular emperor was also responsible for spreading Chinese influence in neighboring countries. In terms of literature and arts, he compiled a very detailed dictionary, something that Chinese people use even today. This dictionary contains around 47000 characters and has served many generations. A rhyming dictionary, *Peiwen Yunfu*, was also published in 1711.

As literature evolved and more people started taking an interest in it, Qing poetry became a proper field of research. People interested in literary works and knowledge associated themselves with Chinese women from the opera, and thus, women also contributed to the literature that was circulated through the Qing Dynasty (Brokaw). Poets and writers from different backgrounds, as well as languages, emerged and outlined new heights for the culture and art of this particular dynasty. For example, some of the greatest operas written were *The Peach Blossom* and *Kong Shangren's Opera*.

Foreign Pressure, Internal Decline, and the End of the Dynasty

Other than the days of peace and prosperity, China saw a time that drastically changed its progress into failure. Britain became interested in China for its tea and silk and wanted to establish a trading relationship with them. However, Britain had nothing that China was interested in, which is why Britain commenced trading opiate substances with China. Many Chinese people quickly became addicted to opium, causing a sharp fall in productivity levels. The food and agriculture market was deeply affected because the land that was used to grow crops was being used to grow more opium (Wong). However, after reviewing the negative consequences of allowing opium imports, the trade ended in 1839. Historians term this time as the 'Opium Wars' because ending the trade resulted in Great Britain going to war against China. The war came to an end with an official agreement to re-open European trade and give Hong Kong to Great Britain as per the contents of the agreement.

Japanese aggression was aggravated through massive internal rebellions in China. On the other hand, Russia decided to ensure a trade relationship with China in order to increase commerce-related activities. The profits gained from these kinds of relationships could not overcome the struggles that China was facing as a whole. The ruling of the dynasty fell into the hands of the empresses and advisors because the emperors who came into power were of a very young age.

The most powerful empress who had control of the Qing Dynasty was uneducated and was strictly

against modernization (Susan). This way, China did not grow economically or even politically. Any form of opposition to the empress met the consequence of execution, which is why the revolutionaries could not take control sooner. After her death, the ruling emperor was a two-year-old, which inevitably marked the end of the dynasty in 1911. This highlights the incompetence of leaders towards the end of the Qing Dynasty. The Chinese Qing Dynasty undoubtedly had a number of achievements, but the most significant one was building a solid foundation for what the Republic of China now stands on.

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