

Imperialist China

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General

Ancient China comprised only the land of the Hans - the land between the Yellow River, in the north, and Yangtze, in the south. To accommodate a fast expanding population and a policy of flooding conquered territories with Han people, China expanded to the north, west and south. China today consists of a large core, which includes Manchuria in the north, territories to the south originally occupied by Thai and Vietnamese tribes, and the so called Autonomous Regions of Inner Mongolia, Ningxia and Gansu, Sinkiang and Tibet (see Map).

Although China, comprised as at present, is three times the size of India, only about 10 per cent of its land is cultivable - this arable land is much less than India's.

The Han People

The Hans are essentially liberty loving, industrious and passive. They are highly cultured. In the Chinese tradition, a young man's education and his later self cultivation was based on four arts - music, chess, literature and calligraphy. They had 'ideals of white slender hands, slow gait and grave calm gaze'. They are guided by the Confucian values of moderation, loyalty, filial piety, chastity and righteousness. Their value to 'balance' is also reflected in the theory that for good health Yin and Yang must be in balance.

Their non aggressive attitude is also reflected in their obsession with walls - their towns, villages, individual houses, temples and the country had protective walls. The God of Walls and Moats was an important deity.

The Hans are justifiably proud of their culture, which is over 3000 years old. They called their land the "Middle Kingdom" to suggest its central and pivotal role in East Asia. They considered the Great Wall as the northern limit of the civilised world.

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They believed the emperors had the 'Mandate of Heaven' to rule. They wove legends around emperors. However, being liberty loving, the people rebelled whenever a dynasty, for whatever reason, lost its ability to rule, surmising that the emperor had obviously lost the Mandate of Heaven to rule. Throughout China's history there have been rebellions.

They have experienced over ages the callous disregard for their lives from their rulers. Millions have died in wars, famines, construction of grandiose projects such as the Great Wall, highways and navigable canals linking rivers. The mutual responsibility, denunciation, the abolition or near abolition of bribery and corruption; the cold humourless efficiency with which the theoretically perfect laws are enforced on a society, inevitably subject to human imperfections are features long known.

This suffering probably made the people pragmatic. Primary obligation of an individual was not to himself, his nation or his government but to his family. This attitude was overwhelmed by a feeling of national patriotism to oust the Western nations which had heaped indignities on the last emperor and then to resist Japan which invaded China. However, it is not unlikely that after the defeat of the Japanese by the Allies, when China became independent, the people, after experiencing the misgovernance of the communists, have reverted to their old attitude.

China does not have a state religion. Most of the Han people are Taoists, Buddhists or Confucianists; none of these religions is exclusive and fanatical. There is however great disparity between the rich and the poor.

The Chinese although very skillful in arts and crafts, have no traditional experience in industrial manufacture. Though credited of having produced gunpowder, canons and canon balls were fashioned by Jesuit priests allowed into China by the emperors. Of course now a number of multinational companies have located factories in China to produce manufactured goods and over a period of time the Chinese, like the Japanese, by reverse engineering, will be able to manufacture various industrial goods themselves. But the

ability to produce sophisticated weapons and equipment will take time. Chinese bicycles and TV sets exported to India in the recent past were found to be qualitatively inferior to Indian goods.

The Emperors

The Han people have developed a culture for over 3000 years. However it was only in 221 BC that a ruler took the title of "Emperor". He belonged to the 'Chin' Dynasty (probably the name 'China' can be traced to this).

The emperors continued in an unbroken line, through different dynasties till the last emperor, a Manchu, who was overthrown in 1911, and China became a Republic.

The first emperor built the Great Wall to protect his empire from the marauding, barbaric tribes to the north. It runs from the coast, north east of Beijing, roughly due west, to a distance, as the crow flies, of approximately 1500 miles. In the eastern section the height of the wall varies from 15 to 30 feet and its width from 25 feet at the base to about 15 feet at the level of the upper platform. Portions are reaching to mountain tops. It is a stupendous feat, which took 20 years and cost millions of lives. This wall was extended and kept under repair by succeeding emperors.

The wall however did not prevent invasions from the north. It only delayed the invaders. The emperors then had to think of other ways to protect their territories. Measures adopted were, conquest of enemy territories to the north, north west and west, bribery, making the enemy tribes fight each other, giving the rulers of the tribes Chinese princesses in marriage etc.

The empire has at times waxed and at other times waned. Some emperors ruled over only half of the territory between the Yellow and Yangtze rivers. At its maximum, the empire included Korea, Manchuria, parts of Siberia and Mongolia, Central Asia upto Lake Balkash and the Pamirs, Sinkiang, Tibet and Vietnam.

The emperors had great visions. Besides the Great Wall, they built wide highways and 40 feet wide navigable canals interlinking

rivers. These tasks were at the callous disregard for the millions of lives lost in the process. The emperors were considered to be of divine ancestry, and they together with the nobility were sole possessors of political power. There was considerable nepotism and corruption in the administration at various levels.

The Communists

Towards the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century European powers, the USA and Japan, lured by the wealth of China, and taking advantage of its military weakness, imposed humiliating treaties on the emperor. Britain took Hong Kong on a 99 years lease. This angered the Chinese people, who revolted and removed the emperor. China became a Republic.

The Japanese seized Manchuria, and invaded Jehol, north of Beijing (1931-33). It attempted to expand its conquest. In July 1937 the war of aggression began in earnest. The Japanese were opposed by the Nationalists Kuomintang (KMT) under Chiang Kai Shek and the Communists Party (which was formed in 1921). They harassed the Japanese by guerilla type operations. Chiang Kai Shek considered the Communists a greater danger than the Japanese and tried to destroy them. This cost him the popularity with the people. Ultimately the Japanese withdrew after being defeated by the Allied Forces in 1945. The Communists, under Mao Dezong, overwhelmed the Nationalists thus taking possession of mainland China. The Nationalists then withdrew to Taiwan. Mao declared China as the Chinese People's Republic on 1 October 1949.

Mao Dezong and other Chinese Communist leaders had imperialistic ambitions. They planned to not only incorporate the non Han territories which were part of the last Chinese empire, but also change their demographic pattern by settling Hans there.

In line with the traditions of the emperors, Mao, initiated the 'Great Leap Forward' designed to produce steel at the village level. This turned out to be a complete flop, as the steel produced was thoroughly useless. His conservative outlook and opposition to bold economic reforms alienated the intelligentsia and the educated, including the large Chinese diaspora. To discipline this opposition

he launched the 'Cultural Revolution' in 1966. This enthused millions of radicalised youths - the Red Guards - who went to anti-right excesses and even bombed each other's campuses. Those from peasant or worker backgrounds who were trying to rise within the party hierarchy cried out against those from highly educated families who dominated the university entrance examinations and slipped into the lucrative jobs. Well connected students struck back to protect themselves and their families good names. They were joined by those from the landlord and KMT background who had been prevented from having any party career. Probably half a million people died as a direct result of the Cultural Revolution. Mao was getting more and more discredited, and reacted more autocratically. In January 1975 Peoples Congress promulgated a new constitution, replacing the Constitution of 1954 which had declared China a 'Peoples Democratic state' to a 'Socialist State of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat'. Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Dezhong thought was the theoretical basis guiding the thinking of the nation and the commune was to be considered the basic form of political and economic organisation. The Congress deleted the various clauses in the earlier constitution granting freedom to engage in scientific research and literary and artistic creation, and freedom of residence and movement. In September 1976, Mao died. The 'Gang of Four' led by his wife took over power, but were removed within a few weeks by a counter faction who returned Deng Xiaoping, dismissed earlier by Mao to power.

Deng was a liberal and favoured economic reforms. He gave full latitude to entrepreneurs and even allowed Provinces to get investments from abroad. The term 'market socialism' was coined. There was an upsurge of economic activities. However this also led to greater corruption. The difference between the rich and poor grew. The rural poor were neglected. In 1990 there were 25,000 people charged in lower courts for bribery and corruption. This was a 44 per cent increase over 1989. As far as the Party was concerned, 79,000 members were expelled for corruption in 1990 and another 260,000 disciplined.

Deng was followed by Jiang Zemin. He was a moderate and compassionate person, but keen on self preservation and therefore

a follower of the Communist Party line. He kept a tight rein on freedom of speech and writing, the Party having noted that 'perestroika' and 'glasnost' had brought about the fall of Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). Jiang had no military experience and therefore was a little nervous of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). He tried to form an armed police force to counter-balance the PLA, but did not succeed. Hu Jintao who has recently taken over in 2002 from Jiang is young and belongs to the fourth generation. He seems a moderate man and is likely to follow Jiang's policies, with the thrust on economic progress.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) however is likely to follow the traditional imperialistic policies of the emperors. Invasion and annexation of Tibet in 1950; attack on India in 1962, to teach India 'a lesson' and impress Asian countries; claim to large parts of India and reluctance to solve the boundary dispute; attack on Viet Nam in 1979 to 'teach them a lesson'; strengthening Pakistan militarily to maintain a threat to India and hamper India's economic growth; defence pact with Bangladesh with the same aim and claim to the Spratley Islands, which are very far from the Chinese mainland, being nearer to Viet Nam and the Philippines, are all indicative of their imperialistic attitude.

The CCP with its alien Marxist dogmas and autocratic rule has curbed freedom of thought and action. They have tried to kill the 'soul' of China. This is resented by the freedom loving people. Protests such as the one at Tianmen Square in 1989, and movements such as the Falun Gong cult, indicate the growing disenchantment with the strict anti religious communist regime.

The Non Han Territories

Manchuria. After over 250 years of Manchu rule, the Manchurians and Hans have got fully integrated culturally. Hans have also migrated in large numbers to Manchuria which is now an integral part of China.

Inner Mongolia. The Mongols are mainly Buddhists. Hans have been settled there and today the Hans outnumber the Mongols more than 10:1. However it has been given the nomenclature of an 'Autonomous Region'.

Ningxia and Gansu. This is also designated an 'Autonomous Region'. The people are mainly Turkmen of Central Asian origin, but have been swamped by the Hans.

Sinkiang. This is also an 'Autonomous Region'. The people are Uighurs of Central Asian origin, converted to Islam. The Hans settled there now constitute 25 per cent of the population. The Chinese government is having problems in curbing fundamentalist Islam related uprisings.

Tibet. What we call Tibet is actually Western Tibet. The eastern part (four million Tibetans) was incorporated into the Chinese province of Qinghai long ago. The Tibetans are Buddhists. Tibet was invaded by the Chinese in 1950, and the Dalai Lama had to flee to India. Today in Tibet out of a population of 2.44 million, the Hans number 50,000. Tibet is a very inhospitable area with tenuous road links with Sinkiang, Qinghai and Yunnan which are over high mountainous terrain. It would be difficult for China to maintain large forces to conduct major military operations there. A Tibetan uprising in 1959 was brutally suppressed. It was declared an 'Autonomous Region' in 1965. Protests and bombings became frequent from the late 1980s.

Yunnan. Yunnan is to the south of Han China. It was populated by Thai tribes. It has been assimilated into China. It has a sizable Muslim population which can pose problems.

The so called Autonomous Regions are autonomous only in name. Mao had instituted a repressive policy towards minorities. For Tibetans, Uighurs and many other groups visits by the Chinese Premier and other officials are little more than visits of a distant ruler from a foreign land. Resentment against the Chinese is fuelled further by the Chinese policy to give preferential treatment to the settlers in getting jobs and business opportunities.

These areas are all bleak and inhospitable and do not contribute to the Chinese economy - in fact they are a drain on the economy. However, Imperialist China is unlikely to give them freedom. The US is trying to put pressure on China in respect of independence for Tibet.

The Military

The emperors had very large armies - of over 250,000. But apparently they had no cavalry. They were never able to pursue the nomadic, horsed tribes of Central Asia, and destroy them. Even till today they have no experience of mobile warfare, using tanks and air power.

They have considerable experience of waging guerilla operations, having conducted these, successfully, against both the Japanese and the Nationalists. Neither the Nationalists, who were better armed than the communists, nor the latter were able to defeat the Japanese in any set piece battle.

The PLA was thoroughly indoctrinated by communist ideology. In fighting, the army, as per Mao's thoughts, relied not on weapons and techniques but mainly on politics, on the proletarian revolutionary consciousness and courage of the commanders and fighters. This theory was thoroughly disproved in Korea in 1950. There the PLA poured hundreds of thousands of men into senseless attacks that repeatedly failed. Ultimately the slaughter began to tell, the Chinese battered, bloody and in retreat initiated action in the United Nations (UN) asking for a cease fire in Korea. This experience in Korea and analysis of recent wars in Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan, has forcibly brought home to the Chinese the need to modernise its army. However to equip a two million army with modern weapons and equipment is a monumental task requiring very considerable finances; also sophisticated weapon systems are not going to be made available to the Chinese by the technologically advanced powers.

In Korea the Chinese communist's traditional lack of respect for human life was also shown in the lack of arrangements the PLA made for care of their own sick and wounded and of their prisoners. Chinese brutality is fully documented in the interrogations of thousands of their officers, political cadres and soldiers who surrendered to UN forces. Many of these prisoners eagerly volunteered to return to the front lines to fight their former comrades. 12,000 Chinese prisoners of war chose not to return to their country. Compare this with the patriotic fervour of the Chinese soldier when

fighting the Japanese invader in China. Reporters observed 'The average Chinese soldier gives an astounding exhibition of patience, indifference to suffering and pain, cheerfulness, endurance and calm courage in the face of inevitable disaster'. Can the Communist Party rely on the soldiers to fight in non-Chinese territories as stoutly as they would in defence of their motherland?

The PLA has entered into commercial activity. From 1985 to 1992 the army expanded quickly into business sectors as diverse as property, health and telecommunication, ostensibly to compensate for falling budgets. By 1993 the 20,000 PLA firms made total profits estimated at between US \$ two to three billion, amounting to addition of as much as a third to the official defence budget. Such commercial activity is bound to adversely affect the professional training and efficiency of the army.

As regards its maritime past, Chinese ships did not venture out beyond sight of land; they hugged the coast even when trading with countries of south east asia, South Asia and the Middle East.

Soon after withdrawal of the Nationalists to Taiwan, the Communists attempted to capture two small Nationalist controlled islands just 15 kilometres or so from the mainland, but failed, having to suffer about 20,000 casualties. Their threat to assault Taiwan, 112 miles from the mainland, in the face of the air and naval strengths of Taiwan and the US seems sheer bombast. It needs stressing that the Chines Navy and the Air Force have no practical experience of war, and would be incompetant to assault a strongly held bastion 112 miles away from the mainland (Hitler was nervous about attempting to cross the English Channel just 22 miles wide). The Chinese cannot therefore pose a threat to India from the sea.

Conclusion

China, extended as at present, is too large to be effectively controlled by a central authority. The CCP however will not give up any part of the empire easily. It is in our interest to have a peaceful northern border. For this Tibet should at least be genuinely autonomous and able to deal directly with India. We, with US help, must continue our efforts in this direction, and keep the flame of Tibetan aspirations burning.

The Chinese people are by nature peaceloving and democratic. The Communists are losing support. They have already had to change their policies to encourage entrepreneurship and prosperity for the people and jettison their socialist dogmas. There is therefore no danger of any Chinese attacks on India to claim the 'disputed territories'. But in their imperial tradition, the Communist Party, or whoever replaces them, will continue to keep India weak as far as possible - by means such as militarily strengthening India's neighbours and measures to hamper India's economic progress and developing into a super power which may rival China.

One should not underestimate an adversary but neither should one over estimate its capabilities.

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