



The Paradox of the Ming Dynasty - the Result of the Abandonment of Sea Power

¹Ioseb Manjavidze, ²Tamar Kiknadze

¹Student of Doctorate Program in Political Science, Caucasus International University, Georgia

²Doctor of Political Science, professor, Georgian Technical University

Abstract: In this article, we tried to clarify the relationship between scientific and technical progress and maritime civilization. In this regard, a parallel is drawn between the destruction of the "Golden Fleet" created by Zhu Di, the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty in China, the process of degradation of the Chinese state, and Britain's rise thanks to the formation of a maritime civilization.

In our opinion, the genesis of modern digital technologies should be sought precisely in the peculiarities of maritime civilization, which creates an appropriate normative base not only for the introduction of scientific and technical discoveries and public progress but also for successfully using them to achieve geopolitical dominance. **Key words:** South Caucasus, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, integration.

Keywords: Ming Dynasty, Maritime Civilization, Industrial Revolution, Aukus, Taiwan.

INTRODUCTION

The Paradox of the Ming Dynasty

Perhaps, it is difficult to find in human history such an inexplicable, irrational act as that of the second emperor of the Ming dynasty, Chang Gaoshi, in the 15th century.

China's "Golden Fleet" was created by the order of Emperor Zhu Di, father of Chang Gao.¹ There was nothing like it in the world at that time. The size, number, and technical perfection of the ships were amazing for that era. The expeditions under the command of the legendary Admiral Zheng He, in which more than 250 merchants, military and auxiliary ships participated, left an indelible impression on the Asia-Pacific world, which was the demographic and economic center of the world at that time.

It seemed nothing could stop the Chinese Empire's quest for world domination. But here began a process that the Chinese have figuratively described as the dragon's decision to fold its claws—with his very first decree after his father's death in 1424, the newly ascended to the throne,

¹ Brook, Timothy (1998). "Communications and Commerce". *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 8: The Ming Dynasty, 1398–1644, Part 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-0-521-24333-9.

Chang Gaoshi, halted the construction of new ships. The legendary admiral Zheng² was deposed, and the captains and admirals of the "Golden Fleet" were humiliated and even repressed. During the reign of the next emperor, Zhu Chanzi, another expedition of the "Golden Fleet" was conducted, but after his death, the fleet was burned, and drawings, maps, and documents were destroyed. Since 1500 construction of ships with more than two sails was considered treason. 50 years later it was forbidden to go to sea. Migration of the population from the coastline to the mainland of China began.

Destroying one's naval power, and refusing to develop it, as seen from the perspective of modern man, was not the whim of the emperors or a few people close to them. The Chinese elite had well understood the motives of their actions. They knew that the nature of the sea, and maritime trade, on the one hand, encouraged private initiative, but on the other hand, weakened the control of the central government. The formation of a rich merchant class in the coastal zone weakened the strict hierarchy of the Chinese empire and the divine power of the emperor. The Chinese imperial court would not even consider any compromise with the merchant class entering the stage of strengthening and destroying this process in the bud. It was a classical terrestrial civilization's reaction to the expected consequences. If we look at history, the development of maritime trade on the one hand leads to the development of the merchant bourgeoisie and political changes, which can be seen even in the examples of England or Japan. On the other hand, there is a great danger of the central government losing control over its subjects and the sovereignty of the colonized territories, which we saw in the example of the relations between the Spanish, French, and British empires with overseas territories. The emperor, who considered taking care of his subjects as his divine duty, could not allow such an opportunity, as well as the imposition of political demands by merchant capital. historian Stephen Pincus in his excellent monograph "1688 - The First Modern Revolution" clearly showed how the increase in the income of the merchant class because of maritime trade led to a political revolution in England.³ Rich people are not disposed to tolerate absolute government and strive to make it controllable. This resulted in revolution and the loss of real power by the king, which was taken over by the third layer - the new bourgeoisie. Naturally, such a scenario did not appeal to the emperor's court and they avoided its implementation, although it resulted in China's degradation and in a very short time the danger of its destruction.

Interestingly, this threat to China came from England, a country that the first emperors of the Ming Dynasty had never heard of and which, in terms of its population and production, as well as its fleet and weapons, looked rather weak compared to the "underworld".

"I appreciate the desire of my son George to become my subordinate, but I don't know why we need these crude things that he offers us as a gift, our craftsmen make much more perfect things" - this is how the Emperor of China responded to the request of the British Embassy to open the Chinese market to English merchants. - This is how the Chinese emperor responded to the request of the British ambassadors to open the Chinese market for English merchants. "Son of Heaven" could not have imagined that in a short period of time, a series of actions directed against China by the young British Empire would begin, which started with the Opium Wars and was followed by the capture of Beijing by the British-French Expeditionary Corps. Here it is necessary to mention that France was an epigon in this expedition. The British Empire was the real actor whose footsteps were followed by other colonial states.

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- ² Church, Sally K. (2005), "Zheng He: An Investigation Into the Plausibility of 450-ft Treasure Ships", *Monumenta Serica*, **53**: 1–43, [doi:10.1179/mon.2005.53.1.001](https://doi.org/10.1179/mon.2005.53.1.001), [S2CID 161434221](https://www.jstor.org/stable/41434221)
 - ³ Church, Sally K. (2005), "Zheng He: An Investigation Into the Plausibility of 450-ft Treasure Ships", *Monumenta Serica*, **53**: 1–43, [doi:10.1179/mon.2005.53.1.001](https://doi.org/10.1179/mon.2005.53.1.001), [S2CID 161434221](https://www.jstor.org/stable/41434221)

Reasons why Britain became a powerful naval empire.

Unlike the Ming Empire, the United Kingdom did not, or could not, prevent the enrichment of the bourgeoisie from ocean trade for several historical-geographical reasons. Enumerating these reasons would take us far from the topic of our work and is the subject of a separate monograph, although in this connection we cannot fail to recall the conquest of England by Wilhelm the Conqueror and the unprecedented centralization of power. Wilhelm forbade the newly formed Norman elite to build fortresses so that they would not have the ability to resist the king's army. He provided a system of itinerant courts and obliged the nobles to appear at the king's court once a month. In addition, incessant marches across the Channel caused dissatisfaction. All of this led to the consolidation of the elite and the "Great Charter of Freedoms", which was a forced step taken by John Lackland and played a decisive role in the entire subsequent history of England. In general, it was in England that an aristocracy was formed and developed with remarkable stability, for which commercial activities did not represent something that undermined their dignity. At the same time, island location and isolationism, over the centuries, undermined the mechanism of common European Catholic unity, which finally manifested first in Puritanism, and then in the formation of the Anglican Church.

The destruction of the Great Armada was the decisive stage of this religious conflict. England began to turn from the affairs of Europe to the ocean. Its spaces, new lands with undefined riches, and tropical islands with unknown and exotic tribes attracted the inhabitants of misty Albion like Andaman.

It was in England that the decisive turn from the land man to the seaman took place. At the same time, we should distinguish land-sea and land-ocean dichotomy from each other. The latter has a global character, and therefore, Robin George Collingwood's opinion that we should consider the development of civilizations in time according to the challenge-response scheme is correct in this case.⁴ The global challenge needed its answer, and it came with the industrial revolution. It was England's eventual turn to a global maritime civilization that led to the Industrial Revolution. It should be noted here that the first coke oven was invented in England in 1735, 1740 - steel was smelted industrially, 1768 - the steam engine was created, 1769 - the first modern factory was in Nottingham, 1770 - the first knitting loom, 1786 - the first mechanical knitting loom, 1865 - the first steam engine. These and many other facts prove that the great industrial revolution took place in England, which has been the forge of the world since the 19th century.

What was the historical situation on this island at that time? England was an island that broke away from the European continent in the 16th century and took the first steps towards a purely maritime existence. From a historical point of view, this is the most important. Everything else is the superstructure. Whatever external event we choose as the final step towards a purely maritime existence - Cromwell's capture of Jamaica in 1655, the final expulsion of the Stuarts in 1688, or the European peace at Utrecht in 1713. The main thing is that one European. The people ceased to consider the island on which he lived as part of the European land and realized the importance of existence as a purely maritime country and the basis of naval dominance over the oceans.

From the 16th century, England entered the era of great geographical discoveries and began to seize colonies of Portugal, Spain, France, and Holland. It defeated all its European rivals, not because of moral or force superiority, but simply because it had taken a decisive and irreversible step from solid land to open sea. In such a situation, the reconquest of land colonies was ensured. It is this mental attitude, this unique historical path along with the global challenge, that became the main

⁴*Robin George Collingwood.*; the idea of nature. Oxf., 1945; P 55

reason for the formation of England as the first global maritime empire. Karl Schmidt in his famous work "Planetary Tension between the West and the East - the confrontation between the West and the East" - the emergence of the phenomenon of scientific and technical progress is taken out from the formation of the global maritime civilization.

"The transition to a purely maritime existence already in itself and its direct consequences carries the emancipation of technology as an independent and self-sufficient force. Any development of technology in the previous periods of terrestrial existence never gave rise to such a principle as absolute technology. At the same time, it should be emphasized that coastal and inland maritime culture forms do not yet mean a transition to a purely maritime existence. Only in mastering the ocean does the ship become the true antithesis of the home. Unconditional faith in progress (understood as technological progress) is a sure sign that the transition to a maritime existence is complete. In the historically, socially, and morally infinite space of marine existence, a chain reaction of an infinite succession of discoveries naturally occurs. Here we are not talking about the difference between nomadic and land-owning peoples, but between the land and the sea - the contradictions of two opposite elements of human existence. Therefore, it is wrong to talk about "sea nomads" and equate them with nomads riding horses, camels, etc. It is not correct to equate terrestrial conditions with marine elements. The living space of humanity in its supernatural, historical sense is radically different in all parameters - external and internal - depending on whether we are talking about land or marine form of existence. From whatever position we look at this difference - from sea to land or from land to sea - it manifests itself in a completely different structured civilizational and cultural field;⁵

Here we can recall the words of Arnold Toynbee, which Karl Schmidt also considers correct. Arnold Toynbee, in his famous work "The World and the West", contrasts the West with the whole world, as the title suggests. He sees the meaning of the October Socialist Revolution in the fact that the East began to arm itself with Western technology freed from the Christian religion, and he calls this technology "a piece of European culture that broke off at the end of the 16th century".⁶ According to Toynbee, the West has been conducting its industrial-technical expansion towards the East for four and a half centuries in four main directions: Russia, the Islamic world, India, and East Asia. Toynbee believes. Toynbee believes that aggression is carried out through a technique freed from the norms of the Christian tradition (entfesselte Technik). The fact that today's East itself has begun to use this technique widely, for Toynbee, is a forced defense of the East against Western aggression.

Arnold Toynbee published this work in 1953. In Eastern resistance, he primarily meant the Soviet Union and its allies. At that time, the communist bloc formed by the USSR also included China. In today's situation, when China has become the main opponent of the West, and Russia is considered a junior partner, one cannot fail to appreciate Toynbee's foresight.

The development of Britain's global maritime empire, and its unique character, created contradictions not only in continental states - Britain could not avoid the process, which the Chinese were so afraid of - the problem of controlling overseas territories.

Many British historians call the separation of North America an irreparable disaster for the British Empire and blame it on King George's mental disorder.

The formation of the US as a maritime empire, its turning towards the oceans, turning it into a concrete concept of the pursuit of global maritime power, took place in parallel with the creation of the American technological zone. It would be more accurate to say that, as in the case of

⁵ Carl Schmitt "La tensión planetaria entre Oriente y Occidente y la oposición de Tierra y Mar" *Revista de Estudios Políticos* . June 1955-P 8-9

⁶ *Arnold J. Toynbee, The World and the West* (Oxford University Press 1953 P 40.

Britain, it was the turn to global ocean power that made possible the amazing scientific and technological progress we have been witnessing since the end of the 19th century. Carthage, established in a more favorable environment, overtook Tyre, carrying the code of the Phoenician maritime civilization, which allowed this city-state to create and implement advanced technologies for that time in the fields of city planning, shipbuilding, and military technology. It dominated much of the Oikumene at the time and challenged Rome to the struggle for world domination, as well as the division of Britain.

In general, the history of technological discoveries shows us that they happened everywhere and all the time, and that they did not have an upward trend in time at all.

The discoveries of the Indians, Chinese, Germans, French, or Russians were in no way inferior to the achievements of the English and their divisions. The point is that these discoveries are effectively implemented in real life if they fall into the system of appropriate norms. In the conditions of maritime civilization, technical discoveries are not limited to a fixed system of norms, which is characteristic of terrestrial civilizations. Absolute, bare technology, an industry that immediately turns technical discoveries into weapons, is the result of the emergence of global maritime empires, which would automatically be followed by a chain reaction of land empires, as Arnold Toynbee rightly pointed out.⁷

From the Industrial Revolution to the present day, we have watched the global maritime empires strive for planetary dominance. It can be said that almost every technological achievement, starting with the machine gun and the airplane, ending with the conveyor belt, the aircraft carrier, and the atomic bomb, was first introduced into the world, which today we call Anglo-Saxon, and which is united before our eyes precisely by the sign of belonging to the code of their maritime civilization in the "Aukus" block.

As we mentioned, technical discoveries, their rapid implementation, and their use as weapons are characteristic of maritime civilization.

The greatest invention of the 20th century, the Internet, is no exception to this pattern, which is a product of American military studies and their implementation in practice. According to some data, such studies were conducted earlier in the Soviet Union. Americans, with the practice of commercializing military products, on the one hand, contributed to its development, and on the other hand, they did not lose control of this invention and its use for state interests, thereby achieving a dominant position in the field. Dominance in the digital world is a continuation of the Industrial Revolution and the development of the secular world. This is a feature of the existence of maritime empires.

In the Punic Wars, which were of world importance to the Oikumene at that time, in the struggle against the maritime civilization of Carthage, the land civilization - Rome - was forced to create a battle fleet, which ultimately brought it a victory.

China gave up naval power during the Ming Dynasty. As a result, China received the heaviest blows from Britain, the first global maritime empire in the history of mankind which even threatened its existence.

Today it, like Rome in its time, is preparing for a decisive battle against the naval power of the Anglo-Saxons in the Asia-Pacific region, which it once gave up preserving its code. At the same time, we are facing the outlines of an alliance like the Stalin-Mao alliance with a weakened Russia, which is already in the role of a younger brother.

⁷ Arold J. Toynbee „The World and the West “(Oxford University Press 1953) P. 43

It is in this context that the overcoming of the Western paradigm by the Chinese ruling elite can be considered, which was manifested in the transfer of emperor-level power to Xi Jinping. Also, the steps were taken by China concerning Russia, Iran and the Arab world, Africa, and Latin America. Historical revenge can start in Taiwan - it is the central place of this historical geopolitical struggle. The amazing strengthening of China and its dominance in Eurasia will put humanity in front of completely new challenges, unprecedented in form and scale. A grandiose, digitally saturated, and powerful China does not look attractive to the liberal democracies established in the heart of Western civilizations.

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