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ACTUALIZATION AND HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF THE COUNTRIES COMPETITIVENESS AROUND THE WORLD

The search for the causes of the wealth of nations has been the driving force of economic science throughout almost its entire history. Within the framework of modern economic theory, the reasons contributing to the study of the international competitiveness of countries and its factors were considered and analyzed. Considering the increasing mutual influence and interdependence of countries occurring against the background of globalization processes, the relative positions of countries are coming to the fore, having been expressed in competitiveness ratings most clearly.

Before moving on to presenting modern approaches to the international competitiveness of countries, it is necessary to examine the origins of this concept. The theory of international competitiveness can be considered as a continuation of the principles of two sections of economic theory: theories of international trade and division of labor, as well as the theory of economic growth. This phenomenon was also directly influenced by the theory of competition, institutional and evolutionary approaches in economics.

In the early stages of the development of political economy, the main research was conducted within the framework of mercantilism, an economic doctrine of the 16th-18th centuries, emphasizing the role of international trade as a source of economic growth. Foreign trade was considered as the main source of replenishment of the treasury, being the only channel for the influx of monetary metal for most European countries. National wealth, one of the central concepts of mercantilism, was associated exclusively with the quantity of gold of a nation. According to this approach, the accumulation of gold was the main goal of the state and a means of increasing wealth. Trade policy was based on stimulating exports, often through subsidies, and reducing imports of finished goods through quotas and high duties. Among the mercantilists, there was a theory of the static nature of world resources, as a result of which the accumulation of wealth by one nation occurred at the expense of its reduction in another (trade as a “zero-sum game”), which led to a policy of aggressive exports and active protectionism [3].

Another important aspect of competitiveness, according to mercantilism, was the low cost of producing exported products due to low wages. This approach does not fully correspond to modern concepts, however, similar approaches are still used by developing countries to achieve success in global competition. However, already within the framework of mercantilism one can find the origins of modern views on the importance of the human factor.

The views of mercantilists on the competitiveness of the national economy formed the basis for further research into the reasons for the growth of national welfare, revealed the importance of foreign trade for economic development, determined the role of the state in foreign trade and described the trade balance. Further analysis of the role of foreign trade for economic growth was aimed at finding the advantages of countries over trading partners in the world market. The development of the theory moved from absolute advantages to relative ones, then to the concept of factor advantages, and from them to the competitive advantages of countries [2].

Models of international competition, built in the 18th – early 19th centuries by the founders of classical economic theory, Adam Smith and David Ricardo, are the basis for the modern understanding of these processes. In Smith's scientific works, the leading place in the regulation of production and exchange is occupied by competition, which he calls the “invisible hand” of the market. His concept gives a new look at the sources of economic growth. What comes to the fore is not the accumulation of gold (as in mercantilism), but the increase in production potential and labor productivity. The benefits of foreign trade, according to Smith, stem from the absolute advantages of countries in the production of certain goods. The country that produces a certain product with the least labor costs per unit of production has an absolute advantage, that is, it is cheaper for itself. Thus, trade turns out to be mutually beneficial due to the ability of each trading partner to purchase goods at lower costs than if they produced it themselves. To a certain extent this approach is adopted by the modern theorist of international competition, Michael Porter, who recognizes productivity as the basis of competitiveness [1].

David Ricardo significantly developed the idea of mutual benefit of free international trade, showing that trade can take place even if a certain country does not have an absolute advantage in any of the goods. The nature of production in this model is determined by comparative advantages. Countries export those goods in the production of which local labor is used relatively efficiently, and import those products for which the costs of this labor are relatively inefficient. Trade between countries is recognized as mutually beneficial, because it expands the possibilities of national consumption, and is presented as an indirect method of production, that allows exchanging exports for imported goods, which would be produced at high costs without trade [3].

David Ricardo's model occupies an important place in the modern analysis of foreign trade relations, but it has a number of shortcomings. For example, foreign scientists Maurice Obstfeld and Paul Krugman note a number of factors that Ricardo's model does not take into account: the practical effect of trade on the distribution of income within the country (it is assumed that the countries that participate in trade will fully benefit), differences in the resource potential of countries as reasons for trade between them and economy of scale production. In addition, this model assumes an extreme degree of specialization, which does not occur in practice. Despite the above-mentioned shortcomings, which were observed by theorists of the international economy of the 20th and 21st centuries, the validity of Ricardo's model which stresses that countries export goods for which they have relatively higher productivity is confirmed by a number of studies.

The concept of international competitiveness was formed, to a large extent, under the influence of the theories discussed above. Traditionally, an important place is given to international trade relations and the place of the country in the world market, although this factor has long ceased to be considered as a single factor. Technological progress, innovative component and institutional development as the basis of balanced economic growth play an increasingly important role in the assessment of national competitiveness. From a methodological point of view, the influence of the evolutionary approach (relations of subjects in conditions of uncertainty of the external environment) is perceived, as well as the focus on the long-term period and the identification of the reasons for the wealth of countries and the differences between them (dominant theories of economic growth).

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EVOLUTION OF APPROACHES TO DETERMINING THE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES OF COUNTRIES

In the conditions of globalization of production and capital, the competitiveness of the national economy is of particular importance. Firstly, it is necessary to emphasize the interdependence of the economies of almost all countries around the world. Many foreign economic barriers between domestic and foreign markets are abolished. In this regard, the world market turns into a single field of competition, and only a country that is able to ensure high competitiveness of its products can occupy a worthy place on it. Secondly, an important factor in the strengthening of competition under the conditions of globalization is the acceleration of the international movement of capital, the development of the activities of transnational corporations. Thirdly, the number of countries actually participating in global competition has increased. At the beginning of the post-war period, the USA, European countries and Japan were the traditional suppliers of industrial products to the world market. Later, new industrialized states joined them. Today, such giants in terms of population as China, India and other Asian countries, as well as the most developed regions of Latin America, have entered the world market.

Thus, national competitiveness is extremely important for any economy. Today, in the conditions of intensifying competition in most countries of the world, great importance is attached to the problem of increasing the competitiveness of the national economy. This problem is especially relevant for countries that, as a rule, export less competitive products and import more expensive products [2].

The concept of competitiveness has its own specificity. In the hierarchy of concepts of competitiveness, the basic concept is the "product competitiveness", which can be considered for its various types. Enterprises, industries, regions, and states that compete for consumers, markets, production factors, and investments act