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Discuss Ancient Chinese diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy can be referred to as an art, the art of representing and conducting negotiations for a State, for the better cooperation and peaceful coexistence between it and other States. Diplomacy is important and required for trade, social relations and peace. It predates the 1st millennium BCE as city-states and societies which had the attributes of a 'State', had some form of interaction amongst themselves, this was normal for trade relations and for negotiating trade regulations. Different nations of the world are endowed with different resources and potentials, according to Adam Smith. Therefore, for these resources to be gained by a society lacking them, diplomacy is needed. Nevertheless, diplomacy in ancient times and still today is a means for States to promote their foreign policy backed by national interest. Ancient diplomacy has been recorded in a few ancient cities, States and empires like Egypt, China, India and even medieval Europe. In these examples mentioned, diplomacy firstly occurred within it. For instance, China consisted of autonomous city States that usually warred amongst themselves.

ANCIENT CHINESE DIPLOMACY

In ancient China, diplomatic and foreign relations were established with mission trips taking place and an organised system of polite discourse amongst these States. There were also resident envoys who resided in a different city-state apart from their own, to represent their own. According to the ancient Chinese, States with distant relations can only establish mutual confidence by exchanging messages and the conveyors of these messages are diplomats or ambassadors. These ambassadors followed certain ethical behaviours, in other words, protocol and to them, the goal was to make China the 'ideal' so the foreigners will come into China to acquire its knowledge. In other words, Chinese diplomats operated what is known as Cultural diplomacy, the exchange of ideas and information among cultures to encourage mutual understanding. With this, it can be affirmed that to a certain degree, there were diplomatic activities going on in ancient China.

However, diplomatic dealings within China ended after the unification of the Chinese city States under the Qin dynasty. This was because the Qin emperor found a way to conquer these Cities and expand his territory. Thus, all diplomatic dealings were done under the emperor's authority and on behalf of all conquered cities within his territory, China. Chinese diplomacy at this time was mainly to ensure peace and protect China's borders. Ancient China was ruled by different dynasties and all contributed to the formation of its foreign policy and Diplomacy style.

The second dynasty was the Han dynasty (202BC–AD220). China's foreign relations began to expand to different Asian territories for the first time. A key notable diplomat at this time was a man called Zhang Qian. According to his philosophy, negotiations should always be done on the basis of truth, to him "if the truth is lost, mutual trust will also be lost". It was also at this time that the trading route from Rome to China, also known as the "Silk Road" was established. The Silk Road was more of a network of trade routes connecting the Middle East with Asia, most especially and China was a nation that benefited from the trade route as Chinese traders could market Silk which was on high demand in Rome and other cities. Thus, Chinese trading missions and trade negotiations had to occur. There was also a sea route across the Indian ocean that was well travelled by merchants and diplomats. It was during China's rule by the Han dynasty, that China had its first diplomatic contact with the West.

Ancient China's diplomacy moved the next step when the Japanese embassy was sent to China in AD 607 in the era of the Sui dynasty. This firmly united China-Japanese relationship. In the fourth dynasty, the Tang dynasty, Chinese trade and diplomatic relations were furthered to Eastern Africa, Egypt and the Arabian peninsula and the seaport in China became the largest in the world, thus, Diplomacy was largely accepted in East Asia as China was seen as the political centre.

There were also many diplomatic missions sent to China during the Song dynasty, from foreign countries. Diplomats which were famous statesmen were equally sent out as ambassadors, most times to settle land disputes. Under the Yuan dynasty, China had its embassy (a temporary delegation representing China) sent to the Cambodian Khmer Empire from the years 1296–1297.

In later years during the Ming and Qing dynasty, it was seen in China numerous and great diplomatic highlights. China continued to have relations with the West, however, the nation gradually became weak due to technological power of the west, China's wealth accumulation became less compared with its counterparts and later on, the period of disunity. Thus, diplomatic negotiations on the part of China became more of settling than actually being fair. China could not exert its authority as it used to as it was not seen as the 'centre of the world' anymore.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, ancient Chinese diplomacy evolved over dynasties as it is seen in China's history. Chinese diplomats followed and based their dealings on the principle of truth. Diplomacy in ancient China began in the first millennium BC and operated within China as China was made up of autonomous cities. After its unification, diplomatic dealings were done between other Asian countries and subsequently the West after the Silk Road was established. China was able to influence its neighbours and even the west with soft power (economic and cultural diplomacy), ancient Chinese foreign policy was assertive due to its economy and other factors. However, gradually, Europe became the epicentre because of its technological and industrial innovations. Thus, China could not exert its influence on a large scale like it used to. Nevertheless, it is clear that diplomacy operated in ancient China and diplomatic activities operated on morality and truth, and was necessary for providing China peace as well as an economic advantage.

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