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Imperial China had a long tradition of foreign relations. From the Qin dynasty until the Qing dynasty, Chinese culture had influenced neighbouring and distant countries, while gradually being transformed by outside influences as well. Ancient China is a historical state whose modern-day successor is the Peoples Republic of China (Under the Communist Party) and the Republic of China (Taiwan). Ancient China has a history that covers 4,000 years Ruled by Numerous Dynasties and Emperors.

In premodern times, the theory of foreign relations of China held that the Chinese Empire was the Celestial Dynasty, the center of world civilization, with the Emperor of China being the leader of the civilized world. This view saw China as equivalent to "all under heaven". All other states were considered to be tributaries, under the suzerain rule of China. Some were direct vassals. Theoretically, the lands around the imperial capital were regarded as "five zones of submission", - the circular areas differentiated according to the strength of the benevolent influence from the Son of Heaven.

The first records of Chinese and indian diplomacy date from the 1st millennium BCE. By the 8th century BCE the Chinese had leagues, missions, and an organized system of polite discourse between their many “warring states,” including resident envoys who served as hostages to the good behaviour of those who sent them. The sophistication of this tradition, which emphasized the practical virtues of ethical behaviour in relations between states (no doubt in reaction to actual amorality), is well documented in the Chinese classics. Its essence is perhaps best captured by the advice of Zhuangzi to “diplomats” at the beginning of the 3rd century BCE.

He advised them that “if relations between states are close, they may establish mutual trust through daily interaction; but if relations are distant, mutual confidence can only be established by exchanges of messages. Messages must be conveyed by messengers [diplomats]. Their contents may be either pleasing to both sides or likely to engender anger between them. Faithfully conveying such messages is the most difficult task under the heavens, for if the words are such as to evoke a positive response on both sides, there will be the temptation to exaggerate them with flattery and, if they are unpleasant, there will be a tendency to make them even more biting. In either case, the truth will be lost. If truth is lost, mutual trust will also be lost. If mutual trust is lost, the messenger himself may be imperilled. Therefore, I say to you that it is a wise rule: “always to speak the truth and never to embellish it. In this way, you will avoid much harm to yourselves.”

This tradition of equal diplomatic dealings between contending states within China was ended by the country’s unification under the Qin emperor in 221 BCE and the consolidation of unity under the Han dynasty in 206 BCE. Under the Han and succeeding dynasties, China emerged as the largest, most populous, technologically most advanced, and best-governed society in the world. The arguments of earlier Chinese philosophers, such as Mencius, prevailed; the best way for a state to exercise influence abroad, they had said, was to develop a moral society worthy of emulation by admiring foreigners and to wait confidently for them to come to China to learn. Once each succeeding Chinese dynasty had consolidated its rule at home and established its borders with the non-Chinese world, its foreign relations with the outside world were typically limited to the defence of China’s borders against foreign attacks or incursions, the reception of emissaries from neighbouring states seeking to ingratiate themselves and to trade with the Chinese state, and the control of foreign merchants in specific ports designated for foreign trade. With rare exceptions (e.g., official missions to study and collect Buddhist scriptures in India in the 5th and 7th centuries and the famous voyages of discovery of the Ming admiral Zheng He in the early 15th century), Chinese leaders and diplomats waited at home for foreigners to pay their respects rather than venturing abroad themselves. This “tributary system” lasted until European colonialism overwhelmed it and introduced to Asia the European concepts of sovereignty, suzerainty, spheres of influence, and other diplomatic norms, traditions, and practices.

There were several periods when Chinese foreign policy took on isolationist tones, because of the view that the rest of the world was poor and backward with little to offer. Nevertheless, China was a center of trade from early on in its history. Many of China's interactions with the outside world came via the Silk Road. This included, during the 2nd century AD, contact with representatives of the Roman Empire, and during the 13th century, the visits of Venetian traveller Marco Polo. Chinese foreign policy was usually aimed at containing the threat of so-called "barbarian" invaders (such as the Xiongnu, Mongols, and Jurchen) from the north. This could be done by military means, such as an active offense (campaigns into the north) or a more passive defence (as exemplified by the Great Wall of China). The Chinese also arranged marriage alliances known as heqin, or "peace marriages." Chinese officers distinguished between "matured/familiar barbarians" (foreigners influenced by Chinese culture) and "raw barbarians". In many periods, Chinese foreign policy was especially assertive. One such case was exemplified by the treasure voyages of Admiral Zheng He during the Ming dynasty .

**SOME PREVIOUS DYNASTIES**

Qin Dynasty

Although many kings of the Shang and Zhou dynasties ruled beforehand, in 221 BC, the ruler of the Qin state, Ying Zheng (Qin Shi Huang), was the first to conquer the different vassal states under the Zhou dynasty, as well as other non-sinicized states. He was able to transform these different states into a relatively unified and uniform empire, the Qin Empire. Under his leadership and a society modelled around strict adherence to legalist philosophy, his once backwater western frontier state conquered all of the rivalling Warring States in ancient China. The Chinese domain was also extended into Inner Mongolia and Manchuria to the north, and with naval expeditions sent to the south, the indigenous Baiyue of modern-day Guangdong and northern Vietnam were also quelled and brought under Chinese rule.

Han dynasty

The time of the Han dynasty (202 BC–AD 220) was a ground-breaking era in the history of Imperial China's foreign relations, during the long reign of Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141–87 BC), the travels of the diplomat Zhang Qian opened up China's relations with many different Asian territories for the first time. After his travels, the famous land trading route of the Silk Road leading from China to the Roman Empire was established. Yet Chinese trading missions to follow were not limited to travelling across land and terrain. During the 2nd century BC, the Chinese had sailed past Southeast Asia and into the Indian Ocean, reaching India and Sri Lanka by sea before the Romans. This sea route became well travelled not only by merchants and diplomats, but also Chinese religious missionaries in search of further Indian Buddhist texts to translate from Sanskrit to Chinese.

8Han dynasty

The first diplomatic contact between China and the West occurred with the expansion of the Roman Empire in the Middle-East during the 2nd century, the Romans gained the capability to develop shipping and trade in the Indian Ocean. The first group of people claiming to be an embassy of Romans to China is recorded in 166, sixty years after the expeditions to the west of the Chinese general Ban Chao. It came to Emperor Huan of Han China, "from Antun (Emperor Antoninus Pius), king of Daqin (Rome)". Although, as Antonius Pius died in 161, leaving the empire to his adoptive son Marcus Aurelius (Antoninus), the convoy arrived in 166, and the both Emperor being "Antonius" the confusion arises about who sent the embassy.

Sui dynasty

The Grand Canal was completed during the Sui dynasty, enhancing indigenous trade between northern and southern China by canal and river traffic. One of the diplomatic highlights of this short-lived dynastic period was Prince Shōtoku's Japanese embassy to China led by Ono no Imoko in AD 607.

Tang dynasty

The Tang dynasty (618-907) represents another high point for China in terms of its military might, conquest and establishment of vassals and tributaries, foreign trade, and its central political position and preeminent cultural status in East Asia. Chinese trade relations during the Tang dynasty was extended further west to the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, and Egypt. Many contemporary writers from foreign countries described Chinese ships, Chinese goods brought to foreign ports, as well as Chinese seaports. The seaport at Guangzhou in southern China became one of the largest seaports in the world, hosting foreign travellers throughout maritime Asia. At the time, Guangzhou was a major port along the maritime silk road and involved in heavy trade with Japan.[4] The Tang capital city of Chang'an became well known as a multicultural metropolis filled with foreign travellers, dignitaries, merchants, emissaries, and missionaries. Although the 9th century was politically turbulent, the economy of China actually continued to thrive, bolstered still by foreign trade. The Japanese were sending embassies to the Tang Empire as late as 894, which was finally halted by Emperor Uda by the persuasion of Sugawara no Michizane.China gave birth to one of the four greatest ancient civilizations of the world and has a recorded history of about 4,000 years. In feudal times the Chinese created a civilization that led the world, but China lagged behind the West after the Industrial Revolution. In 1840 Britain launched the Opium War and forced open the door of China with its warships and cannons. After that, other Western powers such as France, Russia, Japan, Germany and the United States also invaded China successively, and as a result the country lost almost all of its national sovereignty. Statistics show that between 1840 and 1949, the imperialist powers had forced 1,175 unequal treaties on China. The history of China's diplomacy in that period of more than a century was full of humiliation.

In the past two decades and more, great changes have taken place in China and the world, and the Chinese Government has accordingly adjusted and developed the basic principles of its foreign policy. In short, China pursues an independent foreign policy of peace. The basic objectives of this policy are to safeguard China's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, promote friendly exchanges and cooperation with other countries, work for a better international and peripheral environment for the country's reform, opening up and modernization drive, maintain world peace, and promote common development. This policy includes the following:

1. Follow the principle of independence. In all international affairs, China decides its own stance and policy in the fundamental interests of the people of China and the world and according to the merits of issues concerned, it will not succumb to any external pressure, and it will not ally itself with any large country or any group of countries.

2. Oppose hegemonism and maintain world peace. China pursues a foreign policy of peace, and it will not go in for any military bloc, arms race or military expansion. China holds that countries should resolve their disputes and conflicts peacefully through consultation, no country should resort to the use or threat of force or interfere in the internal affairs of other countries on any pretext, and no country should, using its strength at will, bully, invade or subvert any other country. China has never forced its social system or ideology on any other country, nor will it allow others to impose their social systems or ideologies on itself. China will never seek hegemony.

3. Establish and develop relations of friendship and cooperation with all other countries on the basis of the five principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

China has worked energetically to develop good-neighbourly relations of friendship with neighbouring countries, following the principle of good-neighbourly relationship and good partnership and the policy of promoting a neighbourhood of amity, stability and prosperity. China has established or resumed normal relations with all its neighbours, and solved problems left over from the past with most of the neighbouring countries. The Chinese Government has scored great achievements in pursuing its independent foreign policy of peace. By September 2004, China had established diplomatic relations with 165 countries and consular ties with the principality of Monaco; it had joined 135 inter-governmental organizations in the world, engaged in economic and cultural exchanges with over 220 countries and regions, and established scientific and technological cooperation relations with 152 countries and regions. China now exerts a great influence on and enjoys a high prestige in international affairs.

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