NEBOLISA CHIDINMA RITA

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY

IRD 106: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY II

ASSIGNMENT

Discuss the Ancient Chinese Diplomacy

Diplomacy

Ancient diplomacy

Ancient Chinese diplomacy

Diplomacy is as old as man. It has been in existence since the period of antiquity, about the 14th century BCE, with ancient Egypt being one of the ancient societies to practice ancient diplomacy. As we all know, everything is susceptible to change and diplomacy is not an exception. Diplomacy has greatly evolved throughout these periods, which is why there is a huge difference in the way diplomacy was practiced in different eras. During the period of antiquity, diplomacy was strongly connected with forming alliances, warfare, peace, privileges and fulfilling the needs of the ruling institute. Whereas, in the modern era, diplomacy became more advanced, dealing with commercial matters, maintaining bilateral relations with states and obtaining the foreign policy of the state. Therefore, Antololitz defines diplomacy as the set of knowledge and art that is necessary for the conduct of foreign relations of the state correctly. It is considered as the key tool to achieve foreign policy goals of the state.

Ancient diplomacy (period of antiquity) refers to the diplomacy practiced during the ancient periods among ancient societies in respective of their different political arrangements. The knowledge of early diplomacy comes from the Middle East, Mediterranean, Greece, India and China. These different areas all had their different ways of practicing diplomacy. The ancient Chinese diplomacy stands out even more for its distinctive diplomatic practices which make it very different from the diplomatic practices of other ancient societies.

Ancient Chinese Diplomacy simply refers to the inter-state and intra-state,(period of warfare) relations that occurred in ancient China. To understand this diplomacy, a comprehensive study on the political system and structure of ancient China is very necessary.

Ancient China practiced an independent state system as well as an imperial state system. Its diplomacy was recognized during the imperial state system era. It practiced a monarchical system i.e a government headed by an emperor and a royal family; thereby making ancient china an empire. They were ruled by dynasties. This political arrangement greatly influenced ancient china’s diplomacy. The Ancient Chinese diplomacy was heavily rooted on a few ordinances of which two will be discussed in this study; The Middle Kingdom notion (the mandate of heaven) and The Tributary System (kowtowing). In addition, China’s foreign policy aimed at preventing threats of barbarian invaders from the north with the use of an active offense (military expedition) or a passive defense (using the great wall of china) and upholding its status.

**The Middle Kingdom Notion**

Ancient china held a theory of foreign relations which states that the Chinese empire was the celestial dynasty, the center of the world civilization, with the emperor being the leader of the civilized world, ruling by **the mandate of heaven**. All other states were considered tributaries under the suzerain rule of China. It was largely accepted in East Asia. This notion made China consider itself as superior to others; and possibly led to the formation of the tributary system and kowtowing. At several periods, ancient Chinese foreign policy took an isolation tone because of their view that the rest of the world had nothing to offer.

**The Tributary System**

The ‘tributary system’ is a term coined in 1941 by John k. Fairbant and S.Y. Teng in their article “On the Ch’ing Tributary System”. It was the traditional Chinese system for managing foreign relations. It established the rules and controlled the means and symbolic forms by which foreign countries entered into and conducted relations with China. The system was very effective for exacting compliance from neighbouring states and peoples on important political, defensive, economic and diplomatic concern to China ( Roland L.Higgins, n.d).

In this system, tributary states/tributaries (non-chinese states) would be granted permission to establish trade and contact with China on the condition that their ruler/ruler’s emissaries demonstrate their subservience to the Chinese emperor by personally bearing him tributes. The tributes could be in form of a token offering of native products or rare precious commodities. While presenting the tributes, the tributaries were to perform an act of ritual homage known as **kowtowing.** Kowtowing involves three kneeling and nine prostrations/bows of the head to the floor in the presence of the emperor. In return, the Chinese emperor would formally invest the foreign ruler with the nominal status of a vassal. As proof of this status, the ruler was given any object which served as a symbol of legitimacy and acceptance. The tributary states were awarded legal trading privileges and right to render tributes in future. This served as a powerful economic motive making the foreign states trade more with china and accept the inferior status imposed on them. Also, the system helped to reaffirm the Middle Kingdom notion and establish an unequal relationship between China and its tributaries. ( Roland L. Higgins, n.d).

Irrespective of the inequality created by the Chinese empire between them and their tributaries, ancient Chinese diplomacy was characterized by ethical behavior. Zhuangzi advised diplomats to be truthful at all times. According to Menacius, China made herself a state worthy of emulation for other societies to attract them to her. China also participated largely in international trading and was seen as a center of trade. Her Sino-Roman relations serves as a perfect example of her participation in international commerce. They also had arrangement of marriage alliances called hequin meaning ‘peace marriages’

Diplomacy Through the Dynasties

The first records of Chinese diplomacy dates from the 1st millennium BC. By the 8th century, China had leagues, missions and an organized system of polite discourse between their many warring states.

**Qin Dynasty (221BC-206BC)**

This dynasty was the first dynasty during the Chinese imperial state era. Efforts were put into the unification of the warring states and the emperor was successful; which included the conquering of some barbarian states and the inclusion of some barbarian states into the unified Chinese empire. Emperor Shi Huangdi carried out a sort of reformation in his effort to unify the Chinese warring states. To protect his people from invasions by the nomadic Xionghu of the North, he decreed a wall be built along the country’s boarder. The wall helped to separate China from the barbarians and served as an early version of the Great Wall of China.

**Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD)**

The Han Dynasty served as a remarkable period in ancient Chinese foreign relations. China emerged as the largest, most advanced, best-governed society in the world. The Silk Road was erected during this dynasty which enabled China to carry out many of her interactions with other foreign states (both trading relations and sending of embassies/missions).

The Sino-Roman relations (trade between the Han empire and the Romans) began on an indirect basis. The relations inched closer with the embassies of Zhang Qian in 130 BCE (his travels opened up relations between China and different Asians for the first time) and the military expedition sent to central Asia, until General Ban Chao attempted to send an envoy to Rome, around 100 CE, named Gan Ying. This military expedition was an army of seventy thousand men in a campaign against the Xiongnu. The Romans also sent embassies to China which arrived around the 166 CE. China opened up maritime routes in the 1st century CE which led to Roman-controlled ports in her territories. What drove the Romans to trade with the Chinese was their craze for Chinese silk.

**Sui Dynasty (581-618 AD)**

Prince Shotoku of Japan sent an embassy to China, which was led by Ono no Imoko in 607 AD.

**Tang Dynasty (618-906 AD)**

This dynasty was a remarkable period for Chinese military in terms of conquest. China also established vassal states and foreign relations. Its notion of the middle kingdom continued to prevail in East Asia. Her trade relations extended further to the Arabian peninsula, East Africa and Egypt.

The Guangzhou seaport in southern china became the major seaport of the world, hosting foreign travelers throughout maritime Asia.

The Japanese continued to send embassies to the Chinese empire.

**Song Dynasty (960-1279)**

China engaged in skillful diplomacy. Two envoys were sent as ambassadors of the Song empire to the Liao dynasty to settle boarder disputes. The dynasty also dealt on a basis of equality with the Liao and Jin dynasty.

**Yuan Dynasty (1279-1360)**

The dynasty continued the maritime trading legacy of the previous dynasties. China sent an embassy to the Cambodian Khmer Empire under Indravarman III. The embassy was led by envoy Zhou Daguan and the embassy was sent in 1296.

**Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)**

They conducted enormous maritime tributary missions and expeditions. “They were led by admiral Zheng He. His missions landed at ports in many areas like Borneo, the Malay state of the Malacca Sultanate, Sri Lanka, India, Persia, Arabia and East Africa”. (Wade, 2005, p. 55).

**Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)**

This dynasty concluded a series of treaties with Czarist Russia, beginning with the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689, which delinated the boarders between Russia and China ( Frank1947, p. 267). Following the signing of this treaty were the Aigun Treaty and Convention of Peking in the mid-19th century.

The Western embassies had a huge problem with the act of ritual homage called kowtowing as they found it unacceptable.

China began to adopt European diplomatic practices. As they decreased in strength, their European counterparts increased in strength. Her goal then became “to survive”. Since she possessed a weak army, she resorted to using the international law and conflict between the different European nations to maintain a weak self-existence.

**Periods of Disunity**

Ancient Chinese diplomacy experienced some periods of disunity. This include three periods namely; **The three kingdoms** (220-265 BC). During this period, warfare existed amongst three kingdoms to the Han legacy. **The Jin Dynasty** (265 BC- 317 AD). This dynasty was established at the end of the three kingdoms. It was the war of eight princes. **The Southern and Northern Dynasty** (420-589 AD). This was simply a warfare.

The Ancient Chinese Diplomacy was truly unique. It stood on two main pillars; the Middle Kingdom notion and the tributary system. These pillars directly or indirectly helped China to excel in her diplomatic and trade relations amongst foreign states. Our study on diplomacy through the different dynasties served as proof that their diplomatic system proved to be very effective, even though there were times when warfare occurred and caused slight divisions in the empire. A few traditional practices serve as the foundation of some modern day diplomatic practices in China, one of them being cultural diplomacy which was practiced in ancient china but in an early version.

REFERENCES

1. Wade, G. (2005). The Zheng He voyages: a reassessment. *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, *78*(1), 37–58. https://doi.org/10.2307/41493537.
2. Frank, V. S. (1947). The Territorial Terms of the Sino-Russian Treaty of Nerchinsk, 1689 *Pacific Historical Review*, *16*(3), 265–270. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3635997>.
3. Wertz, R. R. (2017). *Relations during imperial China*. Exploring Chinese History. https://www.ibiblio.org/chinesehistory/contents/03pol/c05s01.html
4. Cizmic, D. (2017). *Diplomacy in Ancient China*. Prezi. <https://prezi.com/p/gwtq6oz43ze2/diplomacy-in-ancient-china/>
5. Roland L. Higgins. (n.d). The Tributary System. Retrieved from <https://olemiss.edu/courses/pol337/tributar.pdf>.
6. Mark, J. J. (2020). *Qin Dynasty*. Ancient History Encyclopedia. https://www.ancient.eu/Qin\_Dynasty/