



SECCIÓN DOCTRINA

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS SERVICE IN ANCIENT CHINA AUTOMATIZADA

Institutional Foundations of Diplomacy in the Western Zhou Period (1027–771 BCE)

A.V. Semenov¹

Abstract: The article describes and conceptually explains the genesis of the External Affairs Service in Ancient China based on ancient sources and works by Russian sinologists. This service experienced its greatest development and flourishing during the Western Zhou Dynasty (1027 BC - 771 BC). The article describes the features of the External Affairs Service mechanism, its functionality and personnel. An example of a foreign policy mission and details of ritualized behavior of both the visiting party and the receiving party are given based on the ancient Chinese canon "Yi li". An explanation is given of the reasons for the change in the functioning of the Foreign Relations Service in the period after the Western Zhou.

Keywords: History of Ancient China, Western Zhou Dynasty, External Affairs Service

Introduction

The external function is an important characteristic of a social organism. Through "they," we become aware of our "we," external contacts foster the development of internal functions, and external threats lead to internal consolidation. At various stages in the development of human communities—family, tribe, early state formations, developed nations—the external function of their governing apparatus played a significant role.

¹ PhD in History, Associate Professor. Head of the Department of Oriental Languages Diplomatic Academy of Moscow State Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia. Laureate of the 18th Special Book Award of China (June 2025) E-mail: legatus@bk.ru



In ancient China, the understanding of internal 内 (nei) and external 外 (wai) can be traced back to the 13th-12th centuries BC, when the first hieroglyphic inscriptions were discovered on tortoiseshells and animal bones. The ancients associated internal and external as spatial positions. 内 (nei)—inside: represented the hearth of the home, while 外 (wai)—outside: represented a remote mountain location where the dead were buried. Even at that time, the connotations of the concepts of "internal" and "external" were distinct.

In ancient China, during the Shang-Yin Dynasty (14th-12th centuries BC), a variety of external relations took place, called 外事 (wai shi) - foreign affairs. Under the Shang -Yin rulers, a system of appanage principalities was established, which maintained relations based on the principle of suzerainty and vassal. Furthermore, the Shang-Yin system of external relations included neighboring ethnic tribes and groups. Maintaining external contacts was entrusted to special commissioners 使(shi) – the ruler's envoys.

The development and theoretical formulation of external activities took place during the Zhou Dynasty (11th-3rd centuries BC). The basis for work in the field of external relations at that time was the concept of world order, which began to take shape during the Shang-Yin Dynasty and was consolidated during the Zhou Dynasty. It had a sacred-political character and had a profound influence on the entire history of ancient and medieval China, right up to modern times.

1. Sacred-Political World Order: Heaven, Earth, and Man

In ancient times, the world order was viewed as the interaction of three components: Heaven, Earth, and Man. Heaven was the supreme deity, and the ruler was considered the Son of Heaven and its representative on Earth. He received a signature from Heaven to rule—the "Heavenly Mandate" - 天命 (tianming). He was also a conduit for divine grace 德 (de), the source of which was Heaven. It was 德(de) that beneficent force that gave the ruler the moral right to govern his subjects. The ruler's authority extended throughout the Celestial Empire 天下 (tianxia), that is, the space encompassed by Heaven and contained by Earth [8, pp. 37-46].

In the traditional understanding, the world order in China was an open, hierarchical structure with an internal 内 (nei) and external 外 (wai) circuit. The ruler's beneficent power 德(de) flowed and exerted influence not only within the internal circuit of the early state but also extended to the external circuit and even beyond it, that is, to China's near and distant neighbors.



In the holistic consciousness of the ancient Chinese, the divine power 德 (de) encompassed both the internal 内 (nei) and 外 external (wai) circuits. Internal and external dimensions merged and were viewed as closely intertwined. Maintaining stability within the community and the stability of power were priorities for rulers, and so the internal circuit of the ancient Chinese power structure was the primary one. The external circuit served to ensure the state's internal security through border security. The response of state entities located on the outer edge to incentives from the center served as a feedback loop signaling the effectiveness of the ruler's influence.

2. The Center–Periphery Model in Shang-Yin and Early Zhou

Thus, the world order in ancient China during the Zhou Dynasty was a complex centripetal structure, at the center of which stood the ruler—the Zhou Wang (周王)—and the lands belonging to the House of Zhou. Next came the holdings of the appanage princes 诸侯 (zhuhou), who were mostly close or distant relatives of the Wang, as well as lands awarded to officials for their service, with the size of the appanages depending on the owner's title. Further down were lands not directly under the control of the House of Zhou. These lands were inhabited by non-Chinese tribes, considered barbarians. They were divided by cardinal directions 四方 (si fang) - southern barbarians (蛮, or Man), northern barbarians (狄, or Di), eastern barbarians (夷, or Yi), and western barbarians (戎, or Rong).

The hierarchical world order of China, in which the grace of 德 (de) spreads through the Son of Heaven, like the rays of the sun or moon, in all directions and over all distances, meant that all who came under the influence of 德 (de) were required to respond by appearing at the court of the ruler, Wang, showing respect and presenting gifts. All vassal princes were required, according to the established ritual, to periodically send envoys demonstrating their respect, and once every three years to personally come to the Son of Heaven with gifts. Moreover, upon ascending the throne, each prince had to receive confirmation of his title and appointment from the universally recognized Son of Heaven. This was the procedure within the boundaries of the inner circle.

The outer circle, beyond which the barbarians lived but upon whom the ruler's grace flowed, also had to demonstrate a reciprocal relationship with the ruler of the Celestial Empire. They were obliged to attend an audience with the Son of Heaven at a designated time with tribute to demonstrate their



respect and reverence. If they resisted the established order, the Son of Heaven would send troops and punish them for their disobedience.

The leaders of non-Chinese tribes received a charter of rule, a title, and a signature seal. The ruler presented them with rich gifts, which were not equivalent to the tribute he received. For the Son of Heaven, symbolic confirmation of his suzerainty was important. Sending his envoys and personally attending an audience with the princes of Zhou (zhuhou) and the leaders of foreign tribes was a demonstration and recognition of their vassalage to the Wang of Zhou. This was the basis of political power in ancient China [4, pp. 28-35].

The Chinese world order originated at the center and radiated outward, like ripples on a pond. Schematically, it looked like a center-periphery diagram, operating on the principle of stimulus-response. The boundaries between the center (inner circuit)—the House of Zhou—and the periphery (outer circuit)—the barbarians—were fluid.

The incorporation of barbarian territories into the inner circuit, either peacefully or through conquest, extended the outer circuit to new lands, whose populations were integrated into the Chinese world order.

A characteristic of the origin and development of foreign relations 外交 (wajiao), which later came to be interpreted as diplomatic ties, was the close interweaving of kinship, intertribal, interethnic, and inter-state contacts based on vassalage predetermined by tradition². The "Center-Periphery" world order, based on the ideological concept of "The Celestial Empire versus the Barbarians," and the unequal relations of "suzerain and tributary vassalage" were established during the early Shang-Yin states, flourished during the Zhou Dynasty, consolidated during the Qin and Han Dynasties, and persisted until the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)³.

² Predetermined vassalage - term by O. Nepomnin [9]

³ Soviet and Russian scholarship has identified two trends in the construction of world order in China. One trend is world-building—one of predetermined tributary vassalage. The other is the trend toward equal relations, which the Chinese elite viewed as a concession or defeat due to the weakness of the state. Both trends, however, originated in ancient China. Within the framework of this world-building model, an isolationist concept was also applied, according to which the world-building core remained inviolable for internal use, while in foreign relations, a stratagem policy was employed to sow discord and weaken the enemy in order to avoid equality in interaction [9]. Russian sinologist S.N. Goncharov synthesized these trends. If history is viewed not as a series of isolated periods, but as a life-giving process developing over millennia, then all the trends described by Russian scholars were manifested in the course of this process. In our opinion, the concept of world order through predetermined vassalage, which originated in the early states of ancient China, became the dominant feature of Chinese civilization until the 19th century, when it encountered the Western world order based on the concept of metropolis – colonies [3].



To ensure the functioning of the so-called internal service of foreign relations **内政外交** (neizheng waijiao) and external interaction, the Wang rulers had special representatives who carried out assignments on foreign affairs **外事** (wai shi). Although the most important matters of war and peace were decided directly by the leaders of state entities among themselves and with the leaders of foreign tribes on the territory of ancient China, all preparatory work was carried out by special officials. This is how professional activity in the field of foreign relations arose, the formation of which took place during the reign of the Western Zhou Dynasty (11th-18th centuries BC).

After the fall of the Shang-Yin Dynasty in the 11th century BC, the Zhou tribes, who belonged to the **华夏**- Huaxia ethnic group, came to power. They are considered the ancestors of modern Chinese. The Zhou Dynasty's reign is divided into two historical periods: the Western Zhou (11th-18th centuries BC) and the Eastern Zhou (18th-3rd centuries BC). During the first period, the Zhou rulers' power was built on a rigid hierarchy and controlled from the center. The second period was characterized by the weakening of the Wang's authority, the shrinking of Zhou's territory, and the strengthening of centrifugal tendencies among the appanage princes. Special commissioners for foreign relations maintained vertical contacts between the Wang and the princes—in the first period, and horizontal contacts between the princes, who became independent of the Wang, although they retained a symbolic and sacred connection to him.

The purpose of this work is to consider the mechanism of external relations, its structure, functionality and activities. Due to the fact that external relations were closely connected with the ritual **礼** (li) - the rules of the relationship between the ruler and vassal princes, developed in Zhou, therefore the main sources of this article are the ancient canons "**礼记**" (Liji) - "The Book of Rituals" (IV-I centuries BC) Chapter on the Minister for Judicial Affairs; commentary to "Liji" - **礼记正义** (Liji zheng yi) - "Correct Interpretation of Li ji", (VI - early 7th century), compiled by Kong Yingda, as well as **仪礼** (Yi li) - "The Book of Ceremonies and Etiquette"⁴ chapter **聘礼** (pinli) - "Etiquette of a Visit"; **诗经** (shijing) – "Book of Songs and Hymns" (11th-6th centuries BC).

In Soviet and Russian sinology, the Zhou Dynasty period was examined from the perspectives of archaeology, political, and military history. Russian scholars are interested in the specific features of Chinese traditional ideas and the ideological problems of this period [3; 4; 5; 6; 8; 9].

⁴ According to tradition, the compilation of this book is attributed to Zhou Gong (11th century BC). Some believe that the text was written during the Warring States period (475-221 BC). The text was edited during the Han Dynasty (3rd century BC - 3rd century AD).[7]



Chinese authors began to delve into the specific mechanisms for implementing Zhou-era foreign policy after 2000 [14; 15; 16; 17] The Chinese Scientific Papers Database (CNKI) contains approximately 100 general and specialized articles devoted to the development of foreign relations during the Zhou Dynasty. Nevertheless, the topic of the mechanisms for implementing ancient China's foreign policy concepts requires further and in-depth study. The author of this paper would like to, to some extent, fill in the gaps in our understanding on this issue.

3. Administrative Structure of the Western Zhou State

The power structure during the Western Zhou Dynasty (11th-18th centuries BC) was a cone-shaped structure with several functional levels, linked vertically by the administrative apparatus. The structure was similar to the Temple of Heaven 天坛 (Tiantan) in Beijing.

At the very top sat the ruler, the Zhou Wang. The domains of the appanage princes (zhuhou) extended outward in circles from the center. Beyond the boundaries of the princes' territories lay the lands of the non-huaxia tribes—barbarians.

Within this structure was the administrative apparatus. Just as the Temple of Heaven's roof rests on four central columns, symbolizing the four seasons, so the Zhou Wang relied on four officials, whose positions were also associated with the seasons: 春官 (Chun Guan), the official of Spring; 秋官 (Qiu Guan), the official of Autumn; 夏官 (Xia Guan), the official of Summer; and 东官 (Dong Guan), the official of Winter. But the most important among them were 天官 (Tian Guan), the official of Heaven, and 地官 (Di Guan), the official of Earth⁵.

The First of the Six Officials – Tian Guan (天官) – an official of Heaven according to the Six Codes of Zhou⁶, was, among other duties, responsible for Zhou's foreign affairs: governance, tranquility, harmony, peace, pacification,

⁵ According to the Zhou Li (Book of Etiquette of the Zhou Dynasty), the Zhou government was in the hands of six ministers: the Official of Heaven (天官) - 冢宰 (zhongzai), who was responsible for personnel and was the chief minister; the Official of Earth (地官) - 司徒 (situ), who was responsible for finances; the Official of Spring (春官) - 宗伯 (zongbo), who was responsible for matters of cult and ritual; the Official of Summer (夏官) - 司马 (sima), who was engaged in military affairs; the official of Autumn (秋官) - 司寇 (sikou), who was responsible for judicial affairs, and the official of Winter (冬官) - 司空 (sikong), who was responsible for public and irrigation works[11].

⁶ Zhou Dynasty Six Codes of Laws: 治典 Code of Royal Administration, 教典 Code of Education and Training, 礼典 Code of Etiquette, 政典 Code of Internal Service, 刑典 Code of Punishments, 事典 Code of Service.



and the wealth of small and large principalities⁷.

In the Wang's government bodies, the area of foreign affairs was under the direction of the Official of Autumn –**秋官司寇**(Qiuguan Sikou), who was responsible for judicial affairs. His staff included officials with the rank of **行人** (Xing ren) – literally, "person moving on the ground."⁸

4. The Guest Reception Service行人(Xing ren)

The position of **行人**(Xing ren) effectively served as a reception service for guests from small and large states **邦国**(banguo) and maintained constant contact between Zhou and its vassal domains and states through the exchange of representatives. The ethical and ideological basis of this service's activities was the ritual **礼**(li)—special rules of preliminary vassalage that all states that came into contact with the Zhou were required to observe.

The assignment of the foreign affairs service to the official in charge of domestic judicial affairs and the subordination of the ritual **礼** (li) to the law **法** (fa) were explained by internal reasons.

In the early period of the Zhou Dynasty, when the territory of the Shang-Yin state and its vassals had recently been seized, the police and punitive functions of the government were in greater demand. The fight against the remnants of the disobedient Yin people required the use of harsh measures. The establishment of the vassalage system and the distribution of new lands among the Wang's relatives and his viceroys, as well as the establishment of contacts with foreign peoples, required constant inspection and control. The combination of the two functions—ceremonial and police—at the beginning of the Zhou Wang's reign was the optimal solution to the issue of state security and stability. After Zhou's position in the unified governance mechanism of **礼** (li) plus **法** (fa), emphasis was placed on overseeing ritual observance to maintain balance in the entire vassalage system.

The service of receiving guests included two senior official positions **大行人** (da xingren), occupied by officials with the rank of **中大夫** (zhong da fu),

⁷ The text contains the characters **邦国** (bang guo), which are translated into the Great Chinese-Russian Dictionary as "large and small states." In his article on the semantics of **邦**(bang) and **国** (guo),

A.T. Gabuev believes that translating the communities of that time with the modern term "state" is incorrect [2].

⁸ The concept of **行人** (xing ren) had a deep meaning and semantically covered a whole range of functions of this position: **行**(xing) as behavior (**行为**) associated with ritual and ceremonies when receiving official guests; **行**(xing) as the execution (**施行**) and implementation (**执行**) of the ruler's instructions; **行**(xing) as an inspection tour, etc.[17]



and four junior official positions 小行人 (xiao xingren), occupied by officials with the rank of 下大夫 (xia dafu)⁹.

The duties of senior officials -大行人(da xingren), according to the Liji canon, were as follows: they were "responsible for the ceremony of receiving high and important guests - princes (zhuhou). In the spring, the princes came to the Wang for an audience to plan affairs in the Celestial Empire; in the fall, they visited the Wang to compare the merits of their small and large states; in the summer, the princes came to the Wang so that he could inspect how affairs in the Celestial Empire were planned; in the winter, the princes visited the Wang so that the latter could help resolve their doubts. At periodic congresses, the Wang disseminated prohibitions ¹⁰(against disobedient ones) among the states. At general audiences, the Wang gave instructions on governance in the Celestial Empire¹¹. During the princes' periodic visits, the Wang showed them his favor and friendship. During the visit of the envoy (instead of the prince), the Wang rooted out the evil intentions of states large and small.¹²

Welcoming and serving distinguished guests—the princes of Zhuhou and their prime ministers—required knowledge of etiquette and ceremony to organize a reception in accordance with their titles and ranks. This responsibility fell to the senior officials—大行人(da xingren).

The duties of junior officials 小行人 (xiao xingren), according to the Liji canon, included the following functions: they "were responsible for the book of rituals for guests of high and low rank from small and large domains¹³ and received envoys from all adjacent lands. They encouraged princes (zhuhou) to come (to court) in the spring with tribute¹⁴ and to report on their achievements in the fall; the Wang personally received them and treated them according to the etiquette of each state's records of merit¹⁵. Every zhuhou who traveled to

⁹ During the Zhou period, the ranks of officials included 卿 (qing) - minister (chancellor), 大夫 (da fu) - dignitary-advisor (had three ranks): 上大夫 (shang dafu) - adviser of the highest rank, 中大夫 (zhong da fu) - adviser of the middle rank, 下大夫 (xia dafu) - adviser of the lowest rank), and 士 (shi) - servant, which also had three ranks - 上士 (shang shi) - servant of the highest rank, 中士 (zhong shi) - servant of the middle rank, 下士 (xia shi) - servant of the lowest rank[11].

¹⁰ The Wang has a right of nine types of intervention in the affairs of large and small states – 九伐之法 (jiu fa zhi fa).

¹¹ According to tradition, once every 12 years the Wang would tour the vassal states on an inspection tour, but in those years when he refused to make long visits, general audiences princes (zhuhou) with the Wang were held.

¹² Failure to appear for an audience was considered a sign of disobedience and a deviation from the rules of etiquette. Such behavior was usually severely punished by the Wang.

¹³ The names, titles and positions of the visiting guests were recorded in the ritual book.

¹⁴ Tribute was presented to the Wang from six strips of vassal domains 六服 (lufu) each 500 li wide (Note: 1 li equals 0.5 km).

¹⁵ Princes' achievement reports.



visit the Wang was met at the border of the capital lands¹⁶ and greeted (in accordance with etiquette). They expressed gratitude to him, accommodated him at an inn, helped with gifts, and provided any necessary assistance. From among the envoys of all domains, high-ranking guests¹⁷ were escorted to the Wang, while gifts were accepted from low-ranking guests¹⁸ and their reports were heard." According to tradition, the princes of Zhou were obliged to send their officials to the Wang of Zhou with tribute and reports as follows: an official with the rank of 大夫 (dafu) advisor - once a year; an official with the rank of 卿 (qing) minister (chancellor) - once every three years; the prince himself (zhuhou) was supposed to visit the Wang once every five years. The hieroglyphs that denoted official visits of the above three categories also differed:

- 小聘 (xiao ping) small visit - for a dignitary 大夫 (dafu);
- 大聘 (da ping) large visit - for a minister 卿 (qing) minister;
- 朝 (chao) audience visit - for the prince 诸侯 (zhuhou).

During a visit, according to the Liji canon, rulers were entitled to assistants 介(jie). Their number depended on the ruler's title: a senior prince 上公(shang gong) had 9 assistants 介(jie); a marquis 侯 (hou) and a count 伯 (bo) had 7 assistants; and a viscount 子 (zi) and a baron 男 (nan) had 5 assistants¹⁹. All assistants participated in the ceremonies for receiving the mission.

Junior officials - 小行人(xiao xingren) - ensured that distinguished guests followed proper etiquette and that arriving envoys had the necessary credentials 使(shi) or 使者 (shizhe)²⁰.

Credential plates 符节(fujie) served as proof of authority.

¹⁶ The lands in a belt of 500 li around the capital of Zhou.

¹⁷ The high-ranking guests are the princes (zhuhou) and the prime ministers – 卿 (qing).

¹⁸ The low-ranking guests are officials with the title 大夫 (dafu)

¹⁹ Gong (公), Hou (侯), Bo (伯), Zi (子), and Nan (男) are the titles of the Zhou aristocracy that persisted throughout China's long history. In Western Sinology, these titles have been given approximate equivalents: Gong (公) – prince or duke, Hou (侯) – marquis, Bo (伯) – count, Zi (子) – viscount, and Nan (男) – baron.

²⁰ The name of these characters has been known since the Shang-Yin dynasty. Their etymology is linked to the ideogram of a man holding a flag. The character 使 (shi) – messenger – consists of two parts: the character 人 (ren) – person and the character 吏 (li) – official – and has the meaning of urging an official to action. In one of the first character dictionaries, "the Shuowen", 使 (shi) is explained as 伶 (ling): the character 人 (ren) – person and the character 令 (ling) – order, instruction, that is, the person who received the order. Etymologically, 使 (shi) - messenger, later envoy and 大使 (da shi) - high-ranking messenger - ambassador - have the same historical root with the hieroglyphs and concepts: 吏 (li) - official, which is the messenger; 事 (shi) - affairs that officials dealt with, or 大事 (da shi) - great affairs that were dealt with by high-ranking officials - ambassadors - 大使 (da shi); and the hieroglyph 史 (shi) - history, historiographer - an official who was obliged to record all the affairs of officials serving within the state or who were on a mission abroad [19].



For states located in the mountains, envoys were given a tablet depicting a tiger 虎节(hujie); for states located on the plains, a tablet depicting a man 人节(renjie) was used; and for states with many rivers and bodies of water, the envoy carried a tablet depicting a dragon 龙节(longjie). All tablets were made of bronze and were small for ease of carrying. Credential tablets were used for travel within large and small domains and for entry and exit from cities. For transporting gifts (valuables and textiles) within the Wang's domains, a special tablet with a seal 玺节(xijie) was issued.

For travel by road, envoys were given a credential flag 旌节(jingjie). During the early Western Zhou period (11th-8th centuries BC), credential flags were a symbol of authority for officials of the inner regions 乡大夫(xiang dafu) and officials of the outer regions 遂大夫(sui dafu), who belonged to the House of Zhou.

Credential flags had their own distinctive features. If a mission led by a local ruler (zhuhou) was sent to the Wang, the flag bore the state emblem of that ruler. If an envoy 使 (shi) was sent to the Wang, the credential flag was a standard road flag and consisted of a bamboo pole with a red wool bunch, edged with fringe. When passing through border outposts, the credential flag served as a pass into the territory of another state.

Junior officials, 小行人 (Xiao xingren), also oversaw the confirmation of authority for Princes (zhuhou) arriving for audience with the Wang²¹.

During these visits, guest reception officials, 行人 (xing ren), coordinated their work with several Zhou government departments:

1) The ceremonial service, in which guests were instructed in the rules of etiquette for an audience. It was headed by the master of ceremonies 司仪 (si yi). The service included officials of etiquette and ceremonies – 8 people of the rank of 上士 (shangshi) – a high-ranking official, and 16 people of the rank of 中士 (zhongshi) – a middle-ranking official; couriers 32 people of the rank of 下士 (xiashi) – a low-ranking official; archivists 府 (fu) – 4 people; historiographers 史 (shi) – 8 people; secretaries 胥 (xu) – 8 people and officials for minor assignments 徒 (tu) – 32 people [13];

2) the security service. It was headed by an official responsible for the reception of guests and their security 環人(huanren). His duties included meeting and seeing off guests at the border of the Zhou Wang's domain,

²¹ The Liji canon lists the attributes of power of the Zhou nobility: when receiving honored guests, the wang used a jade scepter 璚圭 (zhengui), the title 公(gong) had a double (branched) jade scepter 桓圭 (huangui), the title 侯(hou) had a jade scepter with a straight human figure 信圭 (xingui), the title 伯 (bo) had a jade scepter with a bent human figure 躬圭 (gonggui), the title 子 (zi) had a jade disk with an image of ears of corn 谷璧 (gubi), the title 男 (nan) had a round flat jasper with a hole in the middle and patterns in the form of bundles of reeds 蒲璧 (pubi).



providing them with a credential to pass through outposts without delay, accommodating them in inns en route to the capital, providing night guards, and protecting the guests' belongings and equipment. The service included security officials - four people of the rank of 中士(zhongshi) - a middle-ranking official; historiographers 史(shi) - four people; secretary胥(xu) - four people; and officials for minor assignments 徒(tu) - 40 people[13];

3) the guest accommodation service. It was headed by an accommodation official 掌客(zhangke). He was responsible for conducting the animal sacrifice ceremony and organizing meals for guests during their visit to the Wang. He also accompanied the Wang during his inspection tour of the vassal states and was responsible for preparing provisions and holding feasts in honor of the sovereign's arrival. The service included three administrative officials of the rank of 上士(shangshi) - a high-ranking official, and four officials of the rank of 下士(xiashi) - a low-ranking official; one archivist府(fu) - two historiographers史(shi) - two secretaries胥(xu) - two officials for minor assignments 徒(tu) - 20[13];

4) the escort service. It was headed by the escort official掌訝(zhangya). He ensured the guests' visit to the Wang from beginning to end. He was the first to greet distinguished guests at the border, arranging for rest, meals, and protection of property en route to the capital. During their stay in Zhou, he assisted guests with all domestic and official matters. He participated in their preparation for an audience with the Wang. He organized the guests' escort to the state border. He worked closely with other departments. Each distinguished guest had their own escort: the princes of Zhuhou had a first minister卿(qing), the first minister had an adviser大夫(dafu), the adviser had a serviceman 士(shi), and the serviceman was also assigned an escort. The service's staff consisted of escorts—8士(shi) - middle-ranking officials, 2 archivists 府(fu), 4 historiographers 史(shi), 4 secretaries胥(xu), and 40 officials for minor assignments 徒(tu) [13];

5) an interpreter service. They handled external contacts with non-Chinese tribes in the south, north, east, and west. They participated in the reception of envoys from foreign states, conveying the Wang's words to them, and explaining the Zhou ritual. Ceremonies of meeting and seeing off, the presentation of gifts to the ruler, and the exchange of speeches were indispensable without them.

Interpretors held the rank of one 上士(shangshi) - high-ranking official, two 中士(zhongshi) - middle-ranking officials, eight 下士(xiashi) - low-ranking officials, and 20 徒(tu) - minor official positions [13].



The arrival of vassal state rulers, governors of the sovereign's fiefdoms, and envoys from foreign rulers was a significant event in the life of the Zhou. Many officials and departments of the Wang's government participated in the reception. Officials of the guest reception department, 行人(xingren) - guest reception officials, were responsible for coordinating all the work.

The Guest Reception Service was also active on the external borders of the Zhou state. External relations were considered to be relations with vassal principalities located within 500 li of the Zhou capital, outside the lands belonging to the Wang. This included educating vassals within the established rules of 礼(li), overseeing the observance of ceremonies and etiquette, studying the political and economic situation in dependent territories, and collecting information on the state of mind of their subjects.

The Guest Reception Service was responsible for sending missions to the princes (zhuhou) and non-Chinese peoples.

5. The Model Diplomatic Mission (Yi li. Pin li canon)²²

Based on the historical source 仪礼.聘礼 (Yi li. Pingli) – "Ritual of Etiquette. Ritual of Visit," this summary of the model for visiting a vassal state at that time is provided.

The decision to appoint envoys使(shi) was made by the emperor and three ministers of rank 卿(qing). Envoys were usually chosen from high-ranking dignitaries—ministers卿(qing).

The chosen dignitary bowed twice and expressed his refusal. The emperor did not accept the refusal, and the dignitary agreed to serve as an envoy. The same procedure was followed for appointing a deputy envoy. This was usually a dignitary of the rank of councilor 大夫(dafu), who was responsible for matters related to ceremonies and etiquette. Next, the prime minister ordered the military official 司马(sima) to appoint four junior officials 士(shi) as assistants to the envoy, who had no right to refuse.

Preparing gifts for the mission was also part of the envoy's appointment ceremony. First, the Prime Minister compiled a list of gifts and ordered the official of court protocol 宰夫(zai fu) to organize his assistants in preparing the gifts. On the evening of the day before departure, the gifts were presented for approval. Typical gifts included the skins of wild animals, such as deer hides, and lengths of black and scarlet silk.

²² Yi li (The Ritual of Etiquette) is one of the 13 books of the Confucian canon, considered part of the canon 礼记"Li ji" - The Book of Rituals.[11]



The Wang and all leading officials participated in the gift approval ceremony. The Chief Historiographer太史(taishi) read the list of gifts recorded in the register and verified their availability. The Prime Minister takes the register and reports to the Emperor that the gifts for the mission are ready, then hands it to the envoy, who hands it to his deputy. The accompanying persons then load the gifts into the carriage.

Before the departure, the gifts are "blessed" at the ancestral temple. First, the gifts are placed on mats and tables in the temple, and a priest recites a prayer for the success of the mission. The envoy also attends the ceremony. The gifts are then placed outside the temple doors, and the priest prays to the spirits of the road.

After the ceremony at the ancestral temple, the envoy travels to the ruler to receive his orders. In a carriage bearing a credential banner, he approaches the main entrance at the head of his assistants. The sovereign dispatches the first minister to meet and escort the envoy to the palace. The ruler greets the envoy with a ceremonial bow, hands folded across his chest.

The envoy stands before the sovereign and listens to his orders. Behind the envoy, on the left, stands his deputy. The official in charge of purchasing gifts, 贾人(guren), opens a wooden box, removes a jasper scepter and pendants on a cord, and hands them to the first minister, who in turn presents them to the envoy. These items constitute the credentials of the head of the mission.

In accordance with the sovereign's command, the envoy outlines the mission's objectives to his deputy, who takes the jade scepter and pendants and hands them to the official in charge of procurement, the 贾人(guren). Following the same procedure, the sovereign's consort hands over the small scepter 璋(zhang) as a credential.

This was the preparation for a high-level visit, where the envoy was one of the first ministers of the rank of 卿(qing).

The implementation of the mission's goals and objectives also involved several stages, each distinguished by ceremonial nuances.

Due to the length of the journey, the mission stopped overnight at inns in the lands of the Zhou kingdom. The presentation of the credential flag was not required for passage, and it was temporarily rolled up.

Upon reaching the border of a neighboring principality, the envoy sent an assistant to obtain permission to pass. An aide travels to an official of the outer court 外朝官(waichao guan) with a request to conduct a mission through the territory of their principality. The aide takes a piece of silk as transit payment.



An official of the neighboring state with the rank of junior adviser 下大夫 (xia dafu) takes the silk and, after reporting to the prince, receives permission to pass. The prince also, in accordance with ritual, presents the envoy with the carcasses of three sacrificial animals²³, grain for the journey, and fodder for the horses. The prince's representative, an official 士 (shi), directs the mission to the next border. At the border, the mission stops, and a historiographer 史 (shi) reads an oath-instruction on fulfilling the sovereign's mission.

Before crossing the border of the visiting principality, a gift presentation rehearsal is held. All junior aides participate. They hold the gifts that will be placed in the palace's state hall. They rehearse the presentation of gifts from the sovereign and his consort. Preparations for the gift presentation ceremony are not practiced during personal meetings.

Upon arrival at the border of the destination principality, a credential flag is placed on the carriage. An oath of non-violation of etiquette is taken. The mission reports its arrival to the outpost commander. The commander inquires about the number of accompanying persons and receives a reply from the envoy's assistant. The ruler of the principality sends a 士 (shi) official to the border to inquire about the reasons for the visit. After this, the mission is allowed free entry.

After crossing the border, the credential flag is rolled up, a tent is erected for the chief guest (the envoy), and the gifts are laid out. A ceremony to inspect the condition of the gifts takes place. The members of the mission don formal attire. The official in charge of gifts 贾人 (guren) takes out the scepter, wipes it, and displays it to everyone. The envoy's deputy inspects the scepter, after which it is returned to its wooden box. Silk is laid out in front of the tent. The gifts from the ruler's wife are displayed in the same manner. The official 贾人 (guren) reports to the deputy envoy, who then reports to the chief guest (on the condition of the gifts). Junior officials lay out the silk pieces for gifts to the host officials. Their presence and condition are reported directly to the envoy. The procedure for inspecting gifts is carried out both in the outskirts of the host principality and during an overnight stay at an inn for visiting guests.

Having reached the nearest outskirts and staying at an inn, the envoy orders a flag of credentials to be raised. The prince dispatches an official of the rank of 大夫 (dafu) to the mission to inquire about the mission's destination. Upon the advisor's return, the ruler dispatches the first minister, dressed in ceremonial robes, with gifts of silk cloth to greet the guests. The envoy's deputy

²³ Three sacrificial animals - a calf, a kid and a pig



greet the minister and reports to the chief guest. The envoy greets the first minister and, in accordance with protocol, initially politely declines the gifts. Then, he invites the first minister into the prince's home, where he accepts the prince's gifts. At the home, the greeters are presented with deerskins and brocade as a thank you for the welcome. The exchange of gifts is accompanied by ceremonial bows.

The ruler's wife also dispatches a **大夫** (dafu) advisor to greet the arriving mission. He holds two lidded boxes—one lined with black cloth, the other with red. The boxes are filled with dates and chestnuts. Holding dates in his right hand and chestnuts in his left, he approaches the house where the mission is located. The chief guest agrees to accept the gifts from the prince's wife and receives the dignitary, showing him the respect he deserves as the first minister.

When the mission arrives at the outer courtyard (of the palace), it is met by the ruler of the host principality. The host and guest exchange ceremonial bows and etiquette. The mission members are led into a pavilion, where an informal dinner is prepared. The dinner ceremony is presided over by a court official, a **宰夫** (zaifu).

In the western part of the hall, the boiled meat of three sacrificial animals is laid out in appropriate vessels, while in the eastern part, the raw meat is prepared for later cooking. The amount of food was distributed according to the rank of the mission members. For the envoy, 12 tripods with meat - **鼎** (ding), 8 vessels with boiled millet- **簋** (gui), 6 vessels with sacrificial soup - **铏** (xing), 2 deep trays for boiled grain - **簠** (fu), and 8 teapots with wine - **壶** (hu) were prepared. The envoy's deputy was entitled to the same dishes, only in smaller quantities. The envoy's assistants ate only goat and pork. In addition, boiled millet and rice, a sacrificial soup with spices, and wine were kept ready in the pantry. Carts with grain, firewood, and grass for the horses were also parked outside.

The next day, a ceremony is held to receive the mission in the palace of the ruler of the host country. The envoy dons a ceremonial robe of deerskin and a white leather cap. The prime minister picks him up and drives him to the palace. At the large gates of the palace, they are met by the ruler, dressed in a ceremonial robe of deerskin. He leads the mission to the ancestral temple. After ascending the steps to the temple, in the central hall, the envoy reads the Wang's command to the prince and hands him a jade scepter. Upon exiting the temple, the chief guest presents the prince with a piece of brocade and a piece of jade. The ceremony is accompanied by appropriate bows. Animal skins are placed in front of the temple. After the ceremony, the envoy's assistants present the skins to their owners. The ruler's wife is given a small jade scepter **璋** (zhang)



and presented with an octagonal jade regalia with a round channel in the center 琮(cong).

Next, the envoy requests a personal meeting with the ruler. The request is affirmative. The meeting takes place in the large hall of the ancestral temple, which is furnished with seating mats and a table for ritual ceremonies. Bamboo and wooden bowls for fruits and grains, dried meat, and meat sauce are placed on the table. A vessel of sweet wine - 觶(zhi) and a bone ladle - 匕(si) are also brought.

First, the guest performs ancestral veneration and a sacrificial ceremony. Then, they share sweet wine with the ruler. The envoy presents the prince with lengths of brocade, and the prince, in turn, presents lengths of silk and a team of four horses. In addition to the envoy, his deputy asks the master of the welcoming ceremony to present a gift to the prince. Upon receiving an affirmative response, he presents the ruler with lengths of brocade and two deerskins. Having completed the gift-exchange ceremony, the envoy and his entourage return to the inn.

The envoy also presents gifts to the first minister, and his deputy to the adviser, who participated in the reception of the mission. The gifts are lengths of silk.

The ruler's wife also organizes a gift-presentation ceremony for the heads of the mission. The envoy is presented with a team of four horses and lengths of silk, and his deputy with a pair of horses and a length of silk. The hosts arrange a light breakfast and a gala dinner in honor of the departing guests.

Before departure, the ruler orders the first minister to return the envoy's credentials. The Prime Minister and the envoy, dressed in ceremonial deerskin robes, perform a ceremony to return the jade scepter - 玉圭(yugui) and the scepter - 璋玉(zhangyu). The items used to welcome the mission are also returned: the ring-shaped jade regalia - 璧(bi), a piece of silk, and four deerskins.

The honored guests are seen off by the ruler of the principality, who conveys his instructions to the envoy. Before leaving the palace grounds, the mission is presented with four birds²⁴ as a gift. Both sides exchange traditional ceremonial bows.

During the mission's stopover in a nearby suburb, the ruler dispatches the First Minister 卿(qing), the Junior Advisor 下大夫(xia dafu), and the Junior Official 士(shi) to perform the farewell ceremony and present gifts for the

²⁴ The birds given during the visit were geese and pheasants.



journey (usually lengths of silk) to the members of the mission according to their rank—the envoy, his deputy, and assistants.

The gifts are accepted, and ceremonial bows are made in gratitude.

A junior official 士 (shi) accompanies the mission to the border of the principality.

Upon reaching the capital's nearest suburb, the envoy dispatches a messenger with a report of the mission's return. Then, after performing a sacrificial offering at the capital's gates to ward off misfortunes from the state, the envoy, with an unfurled flag of credentials, enters the administrative center of the country. He then proceeds to the palace and displays all the gifts received from the ruler and the First Minister in the hall. The Deputy displays his gifts. They are greeted by the ruler and the prime minister. The envoy returns the large jade scepter - 玉圭 (yuguì) to the prime minister, and his deputy hands over the small jade scepter - 璋玉 (zhāngyù). The envoy then makes a brief report that the sovereign's order has been read and delivered to the prince, and that the gifts have been gratefully accepted.

The ruler expresses gratitude for their service and orders the prime minister to reward the envoy and his deputy. After ceremonial bows, the head of the mission and his deputy leave the palace.

Finally, the envoy hosts a small feast in the hall of his ancestral temple to celebrate the successful completion of the mission. Mats, tables, wine cups, dried meat, and meat sauce are brought into the hall. The members of the mission are invited. First, those present raise a toast to the envoy, who returns the toast. Then the guests exchange toasts to all those accompanying the mission. The deputy messenger organizes a similar feast in his ancestral temple.

The document cites an example of a high-level visit, in which the mission to a vassal territory was led by the first minister 卿 (qīng), who was appointed envoy 使 (shǐ). He was one of those trusted officials who, in this case, held both positions. His deputy, with the rank of 大夫 (dà fū), played an important role²⁵. He could have been a senior member of the Guest Reception Service 大行人 (dà xíng rén). Junior officials 士 (shǐ) from the Military Command Service were appointed as assistants to the envoy.

These positions were also occupied by junior officials of the Guest Reception Service 小行人 (xiǎo xíng rén). The latter also went on lower-level visits and were called commissioners for foreign affairs 行李 (xínglǐ) or 行理

²⁵ The source text doesn't specify which department the deputy belonged to. It's possible the envoy selected the deputy for himself.



(xingli)²⁶. The source notes that, to carry out a visit, envoys 使 (shi) were presented with credentials 符节 (fujie) to confirm their authority.

6. The Credential System and Diplomatic Infrastructure

In the administration of the Zhou Wang, the Department of Credentials 掌节 (zhangjie)²⁷ was responsible for issuing credentials, which reported to the official of the land 地官 (diguan). The official of the Department of Credentials issued special credentials 符节 (fujie) to the Wang's envoys, depending on the status and purpose of the mission.

For a visit to the princes of Zhou, the envoy received credentials made of jasper 玉节 (yujie), consisting of a large jasper scepter 玉圭 (zhanggui) for the head of the mission and a small jasper scepter 璋玉 (zhangyu) for his deputy.

To visit the viceroys of the sovereign's lands, it was necessary to obtain a horn credential - 角节 (jiaojie). In the feudal lands of the royal house, a bamboo credential - 管节 (guanjie) was used.

Envoys traveled between Zhou and their vassal states in horse-drawn chariots. The level of the visit depended on the number of horses the envoy had. A high-level mission was determined by four horses. A lower-level mission corresponded to three or two horses. In ancient times, envoys were also named according to the carriage they used: a "light chariot" 輶轩 (yu xuan)²⁸ or a "ceremonial carriage" 轩车 (xuan che)²⁹.

The source indicates that horses were both an expensive and important gift from the host to guests of their overlord. Due to the high-profile nature of the visit, the prince presented the envoy with four horses, and his deputy, in keeping with his status, with a pair of steeds.

An infrastructure was created to facilitate the envoys' travel: roads were laid to all the imperial territories and to foreign peoples³⁰; along the route, every 10 li there was an small inn 廛 (lu), where one could stop overnight, have a meal, and water the horses; every 30 li, an hostelry 宿 (su), with rooms for overnight stays and a supply of firewood, was built; every 50 li there was a town

²⁶行李 (xingli) and 行理 (xingli) are essentially interchangeable words with the second part sounding identical. In historical sources, both the first and second words are used interchangeably.

²⁷ The following officials served in the department: two high-ranking officials 上士 (shangshi); four middle-ranking officials 中士 (zhongshi); two archivists 府 (fu); four historiographers 史 (shi); two secretaries 胥 (xu); twenty officials for minor assignments 徒 (tu) [14].

²⁸ Envoy of the rank of dignitary 大臣 (da chen)

²⁹ Envoy of the rank of minister 卿 (qing)

³⁰ The roads that existed in Zhou can be found mentioned in the contemporary canon, the Book of Songs 诗经 (Shijing): The great road, like a smooth whetstone, Like a straight arrow, rushed eastward. Valiant men passed along it, The common people watched their flow... [10, p. 181]



市(shì), where the envoys were offered a resting place with meals and firewood for heating. The source suggests that the mission also had tents, which were pitched as needed and used for performing the necessary rituals.

Because the envoys' journey was long and their mission difficult and dangerous, they performed a necessary ritual before departure: praying for the well-being and safety of their journey. After receiving the ruler's order and on the eve of departure, the envoy, dressed in ceremonial silk robes, would go to the ancestral temple to perform the traveling rite 释币礼("shì bì lǐ") and pray to the road spirits 行神(xíngshén). For high- and highest-level missions, the traveling rite was performed at the main Zhou ancestral temple by special priests.

The next day, upon leaving the city, the envoy was required to again perform the traveling rite 祖饗之祭(zǔ xiāng zhī jì) — offering wine and dried meat to the road spirit and drinking a sip of wine or rinsing his mouth with wine in his honor.³¹ A similar ritual was performed upon completing the mission and the envoy's return home.

The historical source describes in detail the specifics of transit through the territories of other princes and the obligation to adhere to the established ritual. Even the fact that the mission belonged to the overlord did not grant the right to unimpeded passage through vassal territories.

The description of a reception at the Prince (zhuhou) demonstrates the need for the envoy and all his assistants to be highly skilled in ritual and etiquette. The transmission of the sovereign's command and his gifts, as well as the receipt of gifts from the Prince (zhuhou), served as confirmation of the reciprocal friendly relationship of predetermined sovereignty between Zhou Wang and his vassal.

The canon 礼记(Lǐ Jì), "The Book of Rituals," describes the types of visits from the Zhou capital to vassal princes. The Wang sent his senior officials as "envoys every year to the Zhou on a courtesy visit to explain his will; he presented (the Zhuhou) with sacrificial meat for their well-being to establish friendly relations; He congratulated the Zhou dynasty on joyful events and offered support; he expressed condolences to the Zhou dynasty in the wake of natural disasters and provided them with (material) assistance." [13]

³¹ In the canon "Book of Songs" 诗经(Shìjīng), in the poem "Ode to the Han Prince" 韩奕(hàn yì), there are lines that confirm rituals dedicated to road spirits. This Han prince, setting out on a journey, Offers all travelers a sacrifice to the god. [10, p. 270]



7. Intelligence, Reporting, and Inspection Mechanisms

Junior officials of the Guest Service also served as envoys on missions to vassal states. In addition to protocol duties and conveying the orders of the Zhou Wang, they collected information about dependent and neighboring countries, which they compiled in the form of five reports:

- a report on the benefits and losses of the peoples of the states;
- a report on folk customs and rituals, and the success of state governance, public education, and law enforcement;
- a report on riots, rebellions, atrocities, and violations of the law;
- a report on epidemics, crop failures, and poverty;
- a report on prosperity, tranquility, peace, and friendship.

The reports highlighted the characteristics of each state. All information was transmitted in the form of a report to the Emperor, so that the Emperor could understand the state of affairs in the Celestial Empire.

The Office of Foreign Affairs 掌交 (Zhangjiao) coordinated its activities with the officials responsible for receiving guests 行人 (xingren).

The officials of this office, "having received credentials and gifts, toured the large and small Zhuhou states and the subjects living there on an inspection tour, conveying the Emperor's will and thoughts to them, and ensuring that everyone did what the Emperor liked and avoided what he disliked. They strove to establish good relations with the Zhuhou and bring joy to the people." [13]

The Office of Foreign Affairs handled the affairs of vassal states and established friendly relations with them. They also informed the Princes (zhuhou) about the benefits of the nine taxes³², the respect for the nine rites³³, support for the rulers of the nine regions, the difficulties of the nine prohibitions, and the power of the nine interventions (in the affairs of local principalities). This service consisted of eight officials on external missions of the rank of 中士 (zhongshi), two archivists 府 (fu), four historiographers 史 (shi), and 32 officials on minor missions 徒 (tu) [13].

³² Nine types of taxes during the Zhou Dynasty: The pre-Qin dynasty text *Zhou Li* (Rites of Zhou), in the section on the Grand Steward, records the practice of "collecting wealth through nine taxes." These nine taxes refer to nine types of taxes levied: those levied on the central and suburban areas, the imperial fiefs, household taxes, taxes levied on the county level, taxes levied on the capital, taxes levied on the border markets, taxes levied on mountains and marshes, and taxes levied on surplus currency.

³³ Nine Rites (wearing a hat on the occasion of coming of age 冠 (guan), wedding 婚 (hun), audience with the king 朝 (chao), visit to the zhuhou 聘 (ping), funeral and mourning 丧 (san), sacrifice 祭 (ji), the relationship between host and guest 宾主 (bin zhu), organizing a feast 乡饮酒 (xiang yin jiu), in the army 军旅 (jun lü).



An essential link in Zhou's external relations was the courier service 行夫 (xingfu). Its mandate consisted of quickly traveling on stage horses throughout the Celestial Empire and conveying the Wang's orders to the Princes (zhuhou) regarding good and bad events. Since the couriers dealt with minor matters, they did not observe the ritual of presenting gifts to the Princes (zhuhou) they visited. Nevertheless, they always carried a credential for travel on the roads. A distinctive feature of this service was the mandatory delivery of information, despite the difficulties of the journey. If a courier met with an official mission of the House of Zhou in any vassal state, he assisted the chief representative in his work. [13]

8. Professionalization of the Foreign Affairs Service

During the reign of the Western Zhou rulers, the mechanism of executors in the sphere of foreign relations evolved. As foreign relations developed, this position became professional and hereditary. Guest reception officials 行人 (xingren) held the ranks of 大夫 (dafu) and 士 (shi) and had the right to receive land from the Wang as a grant. These were educated men of the time, familiar with the ritual 礼 (li) and skilled in drafting the sovereign's decrees and orders.

Regarding the work on official documents, Confucius wrote: "When drafting an order, Bi Chen drafted it, Shi Shu judged it, Ziyu³⁴, the envoy in charge, corrected it, and Zichan of Dongli polished it"³⁵ [1, p. 498].

This statement describes the process of drafting a diplomatic document, which was worked on by three senior officials of the Zheng state. Confucius also praises the organizational skills of Zichan (- 522 BC), the chancellor of the state of Zheng. He also notes the work of Ziyu, an official of the reception service (xingren), who edited the document.

As the service of receiving guests improved, officials developed a certain professional ethic.

Confucius, who attached great importance to the ethical norms reflected in the canon "Liji" and the formation of moral relations in society, put forward the ideal image of an official serving the sovereign in his judgments: "Zigong asked: 'What kind of person can be called a dignitary?' The teacher replied: 'One who can feel shame for his actions and, when sent to other countries, does not let down his sovereign, can be called a dignitary.'³⁶" [1, p. 472-473]

³⁴ In L.I. Golovacheva's version, Tzuyu is called a diplomat [1, p.858]

³⁵ Translation by A.E. Lukyanov

³⁶ Translation by V.A. Krivtsov. In our opinion, this is the best of the translations of this statement presented in the book, but it still contains some inaccuracies. In the source, Zigong asks: 何如斯



Confucius demanded that officials strictly evaluate their actions and be responsible for the sovereign's instructions, not tarnishing the ruler's name with their actions.

Concerning the qualities that an official in charge of foreign affairs should possess, Confucius wrote the following: "Zizhang asked about the correct way to behave." The teacher replied: "If one is sincere and truthful in speech, honest and respectful in actions, then such behavior is acceptable even in a barbarian state. But if one is not sincere and truthful in speech, and not honest and respectful in actions, then is this acceptable in one's own village? When you stand, imagine that you see these [two] principles before your eyes; when you sit in a cart, imagine that you see these [two] principles on the crossbar. Only then will you be able to act correctly." Zizhang wrote these words on his belt"³⁷ [1, p. 555-556].

Confucius is talking about the personal qualities of an official, who, according to the context, can be an envoy. The main thing is that words do not diverge from actions and that words contain loyalty and trust – 言忠信 (yan zhongxin), and actions – fidelity and respect. In other words, officials must be loyal to the sovereign in both word and deed, their speech must inspire trust, and their behavior must be respectful even toward non-Chinese peoples. These principles must be kept in mind at all times: when receiving guests, participating in ceremonies, and traveling to vassal states.

An important aspect of the professional ethics of officials in the reception service is the priority of the interests of the ruler and the state over private interests. Envoys visiting vassal states were not supposed to participate in private audiences, as this was contrary to ritual. A dignitary 大夫 (dafu) with a scepter, as confirmation of the Wang's envoy's authority, evoked trust and

可谓之士矣 (Who can be considered a 士 shi?). The authors of other translations – Popov P.S., Semenenko I.I., Lukyanov A.E. – give the meaning "scholar," but, in the context, the presence of high moral qualities during a mission to other states and the implementation of the will of the sovereign are characteristics of an official, and not just a scholar. Moreover, the position of shi was present in the staff of the service for receiving guests and the service for external assignments. Another matter is that dignitaries were considered to have ranks no lower than dafu (大夫), who were indeed appointed as 士shi envoys to other states. Officials of the rank of 士(shi) were more often sent as 行李 (xingli) – lower-level envoys to resolve minor issues [1, p.472-473].

³⁷ Translation by V.A. Krivtsov. Confucius's reasoning is profound and requires interpretation. Zi Zhang's question, "行 (xing)?", has been interpreted differently by translators. V.P. Popov translates it as "How to become famous?", I.I. Semenenko translates it as "what does it mean to prove oneself," and A.E. Lukyanov translates it as "how to get around." The character 行 (xing) means "movement" and is a component of the words for "behavior" - 行为 (xingwei) and "official of foreign affairs" - 行人 (xingren). We believe this dialogue can be understood as Confucius's answer to the question of what a reception official should be like.



respect. As the Liji canon states: "Vassals have no external relations; [an envoy] cannot afford two rulers." [16]

9. Conclusion

By the end of the Western Zhou period, in the 8th century BC, a professional and hereditary foreign affairs service had emerged. It evolved from individual assignments to a position in foreign affairs, and then to a systemic mechanism in the form of departments within the Judicial Affairs Bureau, personified by the official Autumn, who held the position of Prime Minister (Chancellor).

The internal structure of the foreign affairs service was the domain of professional officials who participated in the reception of high-ranking and senior guests in coordination with other services of the Zhou administrative apparatus. Its distinctive features included meticulously developed protocol and etiquette, rules of seniority and the recording of titles and positions, ceremonial attire, and insignia of authority.

The external structure of the foreign affairs service encompassed the territory beyond the lands belonging to the House of Zhou. These were the territories of the appanage princes of Zhuhou and foreign tribes, whom the Zhou people called barbarians. Officials holding professional positions in the Zhou state apparatus were also responsible for maintaining the system of communication between the center and the periphery, monitoring the Zhuhou's response to incentives from the Wang, and ensuring strong feedback from vassal rulers.

The Zhou Wang's commissioners enforced his will and built strong vertical ties between the sovereign and appanage princes, and the sovereign and the leaders of foreign peoples.

High-ranking envoys maintained contacts with the rulers of vassal territories. Lower-ranking envoys developed ties with representatives of the Zhuhou and barbarians at a lower level. Officials on foreign missions and special couriers transmitted the Wang's decrees and orders throughout the Celestial Empire. Interpreters facilitated communication with foreign tribes and were responsible for relaying the Wang's decrees and orders to neighboring countries.

With the transition to the Eastern Zhou period (771-221 BC), the Zhou vertical power structure began to lose its rigidity as central authority weakened. Permanent control began to weaken. Despite their symbolic relationship with the Zhou Wang, the appanage princes felt increasingly independent. To maintain stability in the Celestial Empire, horizontal connections between the



appanage states had to be established. This work was undertaken by the foreign affairs officials (xingren), whose foundations had been laid during the Western Zhou.

References

1. Conversations and Judgments of Confucius. St. Petersburg: Crystal Publishing House, 1999. 1120 p. (In Russian)
2. Gabuev, A.T. Semantics of the Concepts of Go and Bang in Shijing: On the Formation of Political Terminology in Ancient China // HISTORY OF CHINA. Proceedings of the Sinology Conferences of the Institute of Asian and African Studies at Moscow State University (Collection of Articles) (May 2005, May 2006) / Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov. Institute of Asian and African Countries; [edited and compiled by M.Yu. Ulyanov]. Moscow: Humanitarian, 2007. ISBN 978-5-91367-034. pp. 11-34. (In Russian)
3. Goncharov, S.N. Two Traditions in the Diplomacy of Imperial China // Goncharov, S.N. On Medieval and Modern China: Notes from Different Years. – Novosibirsk: Nauka. 2006. pp. 113-142. (In Russian)
4. Duman, L.I. The Doctrine of the Son of Heaven and Its Role in China's Foreign Policy (from Ancient Times to Modern Times) // China: Traditions and Modernity. A Collection of Articles. Moscow: Main Editorial Board of Eastern Literature, Nauka Publishing House. 1976. – pp. 28-51. (In Russian)
5. Spiritual Culture of China: Encyclopedia: in 5 volumes / ed.-in-chief M.L. Titarenko; Institute of Far East. – Moscow: Eastern Literature, 2006. – . Philosophy / ed. M.L. Titarenko, A.I. Kobzev, A.E. Lukyanov. – 2006. – 727 p. (In Russian)
6. History of the East. Vol. 1: The East in Antiquity. Moscow: Izdatelskaya Firma Vostochnaya Literaturaya RAS, 1999. 688 p.: maps. (In Russian)
7. Chinese Philosophy. Encyclopedic Dictionary. Moscow: Mysl'. 1994. 574 p. (In Russian)
8. Martynov A.S. The Status of Tibet in the 17th-18th Centuries in the Traditional Chinese System of Political Representations. Moscow: Main Editorial Board of Eastern Literature, Nauka Publishing House. 1978. 284 p. (In Russian)
9. Nepomnin O.E. Political Culture of Traditional China. Foreign Policy Doctrine // Spiritual Culture of China: [Vol. 4:] Historical Thought. Political and Legal Culture / M.L. Titarenko et al. Far East Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Moscow: Vostok Literature. – 2009. Pp. 161-168. (In Russian)
10. Shijing: Book of Songs and Hymns / Translated from Chinese by A. Shtukin; Text and Introduction by N. Fedorenko; Commentary by A. Shtukin. – Moscow: Art Literature, 1987. – 351 p. (In Russian)



11. Yi li. Pin li (Book of Ceremonies and Etiquette. Visit Etiquette)// Zhongguo zhhexueshu dianzihua jihua (Plan for Digitizing Books on Chinese Philosophy)// URL: <https://ctext.org/yili/pin-li/zh> (Accessed: 05.03.2026) (In Chinese)
12. Kong Yingda Liji zheng yi. (Correct Interpretation of Liji)// Pin yi. No. 48. Juan 63. Zhongguo zhhexyueshu dianzihua zihua (Plan for digitizing books on Chinese philosophy)// URL: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=237159&remap=gb> (Accessed: 05.03.2026) (In Chinese)
13. Liji. Qiuguan. Sikou (Book of Ritual, Official of Autumn. Minister of Judicial Affairs) // Zhongguo zhhexueshu dianzihua zihua (Plan for Digitization of Books on Chinese Philosophy) // URL: <https://ctext.org/rites-of-zhou/qiu-guan-si-kou/zhs> (Accessed: 05.03.2026) (In Chinese)
14. Song Yanping. Si Han te jie zhidu kao (Study of the Credentials System of the Western Han Dynasty) // Dongfang luntan. No. 6. 2017. Pp. 43-53 (In Chinese)
15. Tang Yedan. Chunqiu pinli weitan - and "Zuozhuan", "Yi li. Pin li " ji "Liji. Pin yi wei hexin (Study of diplomatic protocol in the Spring and Autumn period based on the treatises Zuozhuan, Yi li. Pinli, and Liji. Pin yi) // Shehui kexue qianyan. 2020. 9(5). Pp. 699-704. (In Chinese)
16. Fan Xianghui. Shiyu sifang, xian Qin "Xingren" de meijie shuxing ji chuanbo gongneng (Send envoys to all parts of the Celestial Empire, mediator affiliation and communicative functions) // URL: <https://www.aisixiang.com/data/142150.html> (Accessed: 05.03.2026) (In Chinese)
17. Fu Xiaohan. Cong "Xingren" dao "Waijiaoguan" - waijiaoguan chengwei de yanbian (From "Xing ren" to "Waijiaoguan" ——Evolution of the name of the diplomat) //URL: <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/25000.html> (Accessed: 05.03.2026) (In Chinese)
18. Yang Xiankui. "Zhou Li" de Neirong Fengsi Ji Qi Chengshu Shidai (Analysis of the contents of "Zhou Li" and the era of the books' creation). 2005 // URL: <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/16eacf69ab956bec0975f46527d3240c8447a16e.html> (Accessed: 05.03.2026) (In Chinese)
19. Xiangxing Zidian (Dictionary of Pictograms) // URL: <https://www.vividict.com/Public/index/page/details/details.html?rid=11040> (Accessed: 05.03.2026) (In Chinese)