

History 104, Lecture 02: Why Columbus Wasn't Chinese

1. Ming Emperor Yongle (1403-1424) Extending All Under Heaven

- a. Chinese Missions to Southeast Asia
- b. Malacca (Melaka) under the Ming

2. Zheng He's Treasure Ship Expeditions (1405-1433)*

- a. Yongle's Motives for Sending Zheng He Abroad

Ma Huan wrote this poem in 1416. It tells of the observations he made during the Zheng He's voyage of 1413-1415:

The Emperor's glorious envoy received the divine commands,
"proclaim abroad the silken sounds, and go to the barbarous lands".
His giant ship on the roaring waves of the boundless ocean rode;
afar, o'er the roaring billows vast and limitless, it strode....

Here when the heavenly writing came, a happy clamor meeting,
chieftains and heads of the barbarous tribes all tried to give it greeting.
Tribute of southern gold, rare gems, from distant parts appear;
grateful, admiring our virtue, they show themselves loyal, sincere....

Above to heaven and down to earth I looked—no boundary ran;
to heaven's ends and earth's extremes each one is the sovereign's man.
Union under imperial Ming our grand and great land shares;
from time forgotten until now no other land compares.

- b. Sailing from China to Swahili city-states

3. Why China Didn't Become a Global Sea Power

- a. The Politics of Maritime Non-Expansion
- b. The Economics of Woods and Winds

* See attached **Timeline A Chronology of the Ming Voyages** for details.

Timeline: A Chronology Of the Ming Voyages

First Voyage 1405-1406

Zheng He commanded a fleet of 317 ships, almost 28,000 men, their arms and supplies. The fleet included several massive "treasure ships," approximately 400 feet long and 160 feet wide. The places the fleet stopped included Champa (central Vietnam); Majapahit on Java; and Semudra and Deli on the northern coast of Sumatra. It continued to Ceylon and then to Calicut, known as "the great country of the Western Ocean." Traveling through the Straits of Malacca on its return, the Chinese defeated a pirate chief who had been threatening trading ships in the Straits. Zheng He was not able to find any trace of the deposed Emperor whom some Chinese had thought might have found asylum in Southeast Asia.

Second Voyage 1407-1409:

Zheng He did not go on the second voyage which probably returned the Siamese ambassador who had gone to China earlier on his own, and installed a new leader in Calicut. Again the fleet stopped at Champa (central Vietnam); Majapahit on Java; and Semudra and Deli on the northern coast of Sumatra; Ceylon; and Calicut.

Third Voyage 1409-1411

This expedition's special charge concerned Malacca, a port on the Malay peninsula that was gaining importance. Stopping in Malacca, the Chinese recognized Paramesawara as the legitimate ruler of Malacca and gave him a tablet officially declaring that the city was a vassal state of China. Increasing Malacca's power, the Chinese court believed, would establish a balance of power among Siam, Java and Malacca and insure Chinese trading rights through the Straits. After stopping at Semudra, the fleet went to Ceylon where they got involved in a local power struggle among its Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslim populations. Luring the Sinhalese troops out of the city, Zheng He and his troops took the capital, captured the ruler and installed a ruler of their own choice in his place. After this voyage many ambassadors from the countries the treasure fleet had visited brought tribute to the Ming court.

Fourth Voyage 1414-15:

This voyage headed for Hormuz and the Persian Gulf. The fleet stopped at Champa and Java. At Sumatra, the Chinese captured a pretender to one of the local thrones and sent him back to Nanjing where he was executed. One part of the fleet went to Bengal and brought a giraffe back to the Emperor. (The Chinese believed the giraffe was a magical animal comparable to the unicorn, an auspicious sign and symbol of the righteousness of the Ming reign.) Zheng He

and the rest of the fleet continued up the coast of Malay; to Ceylon; the Maldives; ports on the Indian coast; and Hormuz. This voyaged marked the height of Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean.

1415: The Emperor decides to move the Chinese court from Nanjing to Beijing.

1416: Repairs on the Grand Canal are completed.

Fifth Voyage 1417-19

This impressive fleet was to take back home 19 ambassadors who had brought tribute to the Chinese court. While at Quanzhou, Zheng He tried to stop the persecution of Muslims there. The fleet then went to several ports on Champa and Java; to Palembang and other ports on Sumatra; to Malacca on the Malay peninsula; the Maldives, Ceylon; and Cochin and Calicut. This time the Chinese attempted to strengthen Cochin to counter the power of Calicut. The fleet explored the Arabian coast from Hormuz to Aden and the east coast of Africa, returning ambassadors from Mogadishu, Brawa, and Malinda and also stopped at Mombasa. The sailors brought the Emperor another giraffe from Africa.

Sixth Voyage 1421-22:

Besides taking ambassadors home, this voyage explored more of the coast of Africa. At Semudra the fleet divided and the majority of the ships went to Aden and the coast of Africa while Zheng He returned to China, perhaps so he could participate in the events surrounding the dedication of the Forbidden City in Beijing as the new capital.

1419-23: A costly rebellion erupts in Annam.

1421: Fire destroys much of the Forbidden City. Emperor Zhu Di first invites criticism, but soon he kills those who criticized him.

1422: Emperor Zhu Di plans a military expedition against the Mongols.

1424: Emperor Zhu dies while on military maneuvers in the north.

1424: Zhi Di's eldest son becomes Emperor. He favors his Confucian advisors and hopes to lessen tax burdens on the people caused by expensive military maneuvers, the voyages of the fleet and moving the capital.

1424: The Emperor issues an edict ending all voyages of the treasure ships.

1425: The Emperor dies.

1425-1435: Zhu Zhanji becomes Emperor.

1430: Emperor Zhu Zhanji issues an edict calling for a 7th voyage to inform distant lands of his rule and to urge them to "follow the way of heaven and to watch over the people so that all might enjoy the good fortune of lasting peace." (Levathes, pg. 160 -- see Resources, end of lesson)

Seventh Voyage 1431-1433

300 ships with approximately 27,500 men embark. Besides ports on Champa and Java, the fleet stops at Palembang, Malacca, Semudra, Ceylon and Calicut. The Chinese urge the Siamese king to stop harassing the kingdom of Malacca. At Calicut, one part of the fleet goes along the east African coast to Malinidi and trade on the Red Sea and several of the Chinese sailors may have visited Mecca. Zheng He, who had probably stayed in Calicut, died on the return voyage and was buried at sea.

1435: The Emperor dies.

1436 - 1449: Zhu Qizhen, the emperor's seven year old son, becomes Emperor. Initially he is controlled by eunuch Wang Zhen

1449: Wang leads an expedition against the Mongols on the northwest frontier. During this campaign, the Mongols capture the Emperor Zhu Qizhen and hold him prisoner.

1450: Emperor Zhu Qizhen gets free from Mongols and is reinstated as Emperor. Tension and rivalry exist between Confucian scholars and other advisors, particularly the court eunuchs. Emperor Zhu Qizhen faces the urgent question: Should the court resume the voyages or end them?