

More Than Just Treasure Voyages

Zheng He's Seven Voyages of Friendship and Culture Exchange

From 1405 to 1433

During Emperor Zhu Di's administration, Ming Dynasty was in great prosperity. Rapid agriculture and manufacture growth made Ming dynasty very powerful and rich. The Forbidden Palace and the Great Wall were built under his command. Zhu Di was also a visionary and had passion for the unknown land. That was why he commanded Zheng He to explore the sea.



Zhen He was born in Southwestern China in 1371. He listens to his father telling him folktales and myths about the distant land. He liked adventures and was brave and curious. Later he was selected by the young Prince Zhu Di as his body guard, and promoted to the chief diplomatic officer for the expeditions when Zhu Di became emperor.



EUROPE

ASIA

White Sheep Turkomans (Iran)

During Zheng He's visits in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Bangladesh, exchanging of goods took place. Ming Dynasty gave the visited countries gold, silk in exchange for all kinds of spices that these countries were famous for, for example: agilawood. Exchanging goods is a great way for these countries to get to know Ming Dynasty, also build diplomatic relationship with Ming Dynasty.

Spice exchange



Zheng He's birth place

Ming Dynasty (China)

Fundamental decision

The origin of seven voyages

The ships used in the fleets were all manufactured at Baochuan Shipyard. In the seven voyages, there were total of more than 1400 ships started from here.



Loading goods and ready to go

At Taiping Harbor, this is the last stop for Zheng He's fleets before they enter into the South China Sea. Here, they were loading all the goods they would be sending out as gifts, such as the rare Blue and White Porcelain, silk, gold, etc. Also, prepare food, water, weapons (mostly used for defense purpose) and everything else needed for long expeditions. Here, they were also waiting for Southwest Monsoon in summer, Northeast Monsoon in winter. Monsoon was the main driving force for their fleets.



Exotic animals exchanging and friendship increasing

When Zheng He arrived in Africa, he met with the king and queen of Mogadishu. Zheng He sent Chinese silk, porcelain, and tea as gifts. In exchange, the king gave Ming Dynasty a giraffe, which is called "Qi Lin" by ancient Chinese. The prince of Mogadishu and several diplomats also went back to visit Ming with Zheng He.



Somalia

First voyage, 1405-1407

Second voyage, 1407-1409

Third voyage, 1409-1411

Fifth voyage, 1417-1419

Seventh voyage, 1431-1433

Fourth Voyage, 1413-1415

Sixth voyage, 1421-1422

Special cities

Major trading sites

Delhi Sultanate (India)

Siam (Thailand)

Sumatra (Indonesia)

Java (Indonesia)

Open up Malacca Channel and share well digging skills

Malacca is a very narrow strait. As Zheng He's fleets arrive here, they helped establish Malacca as a channel for later navigations. Also, as they arrived here, they dug wells in the mountains to collect fresh water; they also shared the well-digging skills with natives in Indonesia. The wells Zheng He's fleets dug are still used today.



During his first voyage, Zheng He arrived in Java when the East and West kingdom are in war. Hundreds of Zheng He's men were accidentally killed by the West King. Many people predicted there would be a war between Ming and the West King, since Zheng He's fleets had advanced weapons prepared, but Zheng He followed Ming Emperor's instruction, "Peace is the key". Not only did they not get into war, but also the two countries built their international friendship for the first time. Trading and gift exchanges later took place.

Peace and friendship



Influential hint for future navigators

During ocean navigations, one of the deadly diseases was scurvy. It is proved to be caused by lacking of Vitamine C in human diet. Especially for sailors, fresh vegetables are scare resources. But during Zheng He's voyages, they brought along with them green beans and soy beans. They sprouted these beans and cooked them as daily dishes. This is one of many reasons that each of Zheng He's voyage could last one or two years.



Kenya

AFRICA

Reference: Baidu Baike 2014
National Geographic, Zheng He's Voyage 2005
Base map data: Natural Earth
Projection: Sphere Mercator
Central Meridian: 85° E
False Northing: 0°
Cartographer: Mengyu Amber Liang

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