



Non-Fiction

Group 1

Zheng He

Bradbury School, Huang, Jennie – 7

Zheng He is a very smart person from a long time ago. He always went on a boat with helpers to places, but on the seventh time he died.

Every person with him on his boat was helping him. No one could beat him and his helpers. There were 27,400 helpers with Zheng. He went around thirty countries and saw many kings and gave them treasures.

Zheng died on the seventh time because he was old and sick.

Everybody likes Zheng He and knows this story

Tin Hau

Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary & Primary School,

Chun, Wing Sum – 8

According to the legend, Tin Hau was a girl and her name was called Lin Moniang. She was born in Weizhou, Fujian Province in the Song Dynasty. People said that she got super power to tell when the storm would come. However, she lost her life during an accident. She tried to save her brother and father from a sinking boat and she got drowned. Since she saved her brother's and father's lives, her family members believed that she "rose to heaven" and became the "Goddess of Heaven". After that, many sailors saw Lin's spirit when their ship got wrecked and they all claimed that she saved their lives. Even the famous Chinese sailor Zheng He of the Ming Dynasty asserted that he saw Lin's Spirit during one of his expeditions. Since then, the Goddess' powers spread all over the region and lots of temples had been built along the coast.

There are over hundreds of Tin Hau Temples in Hong Kong. The most famous one is the one in Causeway Bay. It was believed that this temple was constructed by Tai clan and the year of construction was unknown. According to the legend, Tai clan found a red stone near the shore at Causeway Bay, which was like an incense burner. He believed that this burner belonged to Tin Hau, so he built a temporary shrine and put the burner into it. Since then, this temporary shrine became very popular. Tai clan raised money to build a bigger temple and this is the current Tin Hau Temple. The temple is so popular that the MTR station and the neighboring area used the name "Tin Hau".

The Tin Hau Temple at Joss House Bay is also famous in Hong Kong. It is built in 1266 and is the oldest and the largest Tin Hau Temple in Hong Kong. During the Tin Hau Birthday, i.e. 23rd of the third month on the Chinese calendar, people from all around Hong Kong will go to Joss House Bay to celebrate.

Another famous Tin Hau Temple is at Kowloon side – Tin Hau Temple at Yung Shue Tau, Yau Ma Tei. It is a temple complex comprises of five buildings:– Tin Hau Temple, Shing Wong Temple, Kwun Yum Temple, Shea Tan and Hsu Yuen. At the very beginning, it was a very small temple and was located at the present Kwun Chung Market area. The boat people and the villagers of Yau Ma Tei then moved the temple to the present place in Yau Ma Tei.

Throughout the history of Hong Kong, the many temples of Tin Hau have been protecting Hong Kong while some deadly typhoons have caused massive damages and claimed a lot more lives in its neighboring cities.

The Trip To Tin Hau

Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary & Primary School,

Liu, Cheuk Ue Ally – 8

If I ask you what is Tin Hau, you may answer it is MTR Station. However, it is not just name of an MTR Station. It means a lot more to Hong Kong than that. Tin Hau is a Chinese goddess. Who is she? How many temple of her are in Hong Kong? Why is her birthday important to Hong Kong fishermen? Now let me take you on an interesting trip, so we will know more about Tin Hau after that. Wish you a great journey of Tin Hau! Let's go!

At the first station, let me tell you who Tin Hau was. Tin Hau was a normal lady. In a Chinese fairy tale, she became a goddess of the sea at the end of the story. She was the goddess who protected the famous Ming Admiral Zheng He during his seven treasure voyages. Usually the fishermen will pray to her because they wish that Tin Hau will protect them from the wind and storm when they go for fishery. Tin Hau is also known as "Mazu". When people pray to her, they will bring fruit, flowers and some paper money to burn.

Next station, we shall visit Tin Hau's home -- the Tin Hau temple! If you want to go to any of the Tin Hau temples, it's not hard. There may be one next to your home! In Hong Kong, there are over 60 Tin Hau temples. They are located in Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and New Territories. The most famous one is the one in Yung Shue Tau (Yau Ma Tei) because it is surrounded by the popular Temple Street Night Market. The name Temple Street gets its name from Tin Hau Temple. You may want to know why there are so many Tin Hau temples in Hong Kong. Hong Kong was a fishery village many many years ago and fishery was an important activity. Because Tin Hau would protect the fishermen, she became very popular. People liked to visit Tin Hau temples and it would be convenient to have one next to their home.

Now we know more about Tin Hau. It is not just the name of one of the MTR stations. It's about a famous Chinese goddess of Hong Kong. It is an important part of Hong Kong culture.

Life Journey of a Great Man

Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Chiu, Long Kwain Isaac – 8

The story took place during the Ming Dynasty. Zheng He was an outstanding navigator and he was revered in the Chinese history. The purposes of the voyages were to establish trade and strengthen the relationship between China and other countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Middle East and Africa.

In Zheng's lifetime, he made 7 journeys and visited more than 30 countries and areas in the span of 28 years. He used compasses and ocean maps to help him. The farthest country he reached was Africa. He was able to break the ice between China and other foreign countries successfully, building up the relationship of the two nations, started the trade between the two places. Unfortunately he died in his last ocean journey and he never came back to China, but his contribution and stories never end...

Indeed, there are a lot of interesting and funny things we can share from the 7 ocean journeys made by Zheng. First, the fleets ranged from 48 to 317 ships, which was unimaginably massive in its scale in every journey. Every day, all the people ate, drank and slept together. They built up a good relationship with one another. During weekends, they had parties and they danced for fun too.

Second, in Zheng's every voyage, he drew detailed maps and gathered information like the local climate and cultures in the areas his fleet explored when he arrived at other countries and areas. When Zheng He first met the people from Africa, they found their skin colour intriguing and different. This sentiment, however, was echoed by the African, who thought the Chinese looked strange too. One thing they noticed was that although the skin of the Africans were all black, their palms and teeth were white. Another interesting story was their voyage to India. The Indians used their hands to eat, grabbed the food and put it directly into their mouths, which the Chinese found strange and unhygienic. But the most interesting thing was that they also brought back animals like giraffes and zebras that the Chinese had never seen before. When Zheng and his team saw the giraffes, they screamed loudly as they were very scared. There were also elephants, lions, snakes and leopards. In fact, there were a lot of different species of animals in Africa.

Third, during the 7 ocean journeys, Zheng's fleet had met pirate fleets a few times in the ocean. Luckily the soldiers on his fleet fought with them with their weapons and they were able to get back to China safely. I have seen some movies about pirates before, although the story didn't mention anything about the victory of Zheng's fleet, I dreamed of it myself and seemed like seeing all the action taken place. I think it must be exciting and exhilarating, as they might use guns, or knives, or even Chinese Kung Fu.

I think Zheng He's ocean journeys are good stories and could demonstrate good examples to encourage us to broaden our horizon. Other than reading books, we can create the chances to experience different adventures in life. People should try to travel and learn about different cultures all over the world, too.

The Adventure of Zheng He's Voyage

Shanghai United International School WanYuan Campus, Guo, Gary – 9

Zheng He was a famous Chinese explorer and diplomat in the early Ming Dynasty. When he was young, his father always told him about adventures on the sea. He was very interested in sailing from his young age, and decided to have adventures, like his father. From 1405 to 1433, he successfully led a large fleet to sail across the Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean for seven times. It was recognized as the biggest voyage before the Age of Discovery in Europe.

When he was nine, Zheng He was captured by the Ming army and was sent to serve Zhu Di, Prince of Yan. Throughout the years, Zheng He gradually gained the trust of Zhu Di who later became the Emperor of Ming.

Soon after Zhu Di took the seat of Emperor, he wanted to send a big fleet overseas to show friendliness to people in Southeast Asia and East Africa. The fleet could also help promote trade. Zheng He was selected as the leader of this fleet.

After several years of preparation, Zheng He's fleet left Nanjing and started the first voyage. He felt excited and a bit nervous. In the fleet, there were around 200 ships and over 20,000 soldiers and sailors. The biggest ship was over 150 meters in length and could contain 1,000 people. Zheng He also prepared goods to trade. They used body language and flags to communicate on foggy days.

Zheng He's fleet visited Vietnam and Java Island. During the visit, Zheng He sent diplomatic documents to local governors and traded with them. Zheng He's fleet was welcomed locally, however, sometimes it was also dangerous. During the trip, Zheng He had a big fight with pirates and made a big victory. The fleet came back to China in 1407.

Soon after, he started the second voyage, but the fleet only spent less than 2 years at sea. During his second expedition, he was not nervous, but excited. He always looked forward to going to different countries. Between 1409 and 1411, Zheng He made the third voyage.

The fourth voyage was an important landmark in the whole voyage series as it was the first time that the fleet visited East Africa. Afterwards, the fleet sailed toward the Arabian Peninsula. After passing the Peninsula, it finally came to East Africa. In the fifth voyage between 1417 and 1419, the fleet came again to the same area.

The last two voyages were short and neither of them lasted more than one year. But in the last voyage, the fleet arrived at the south part of Africa which was also the farthest place in Zheng He's exploration. As Zheng He put all of his energy and efforts into the voyage, it was said he died in the last trip in 1433. Zheng He's seven voyages were an amazing achievement. It strengthened the relationship between China and other countries in Asia and Africa. In addition, trade was also on the rise as the impact of Zheng He's exploration. You can still find artifacts in some Southeast Asian countries left in Zheng He's trip, which reminds us again of this great man.

Zheng He

Shanghai United International School Wanyuan Campus, Huang, Justin – 9

Zheng He was from Ming Dynasty. “Zheng He” is not his original name. He’s called Ma San Bao. He was born in 1371 and he was a HUI. He was very famous in that Dynasty. Because of him and his fleet “the Belt and Road” became true. You could say that Zheng He built the world friendship.

Zheng He was the person that Emperor Yongle most trusted. Emperor Yongle sent Zheng He to Southernmost Asia, Pacific and Indian oceans seven times from 1405 to 1433. He went to more than thirty countries and regions. He went as far south as Java, northwest to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, as far west as east coast of Africa. Zheng He’s first voyage was much earlier than Westerners, and he knew better navigation skills. This is a historical feat in China’s maritime history.

In July 1405, Zheng He led a fleet that had many vessels to southernmost Asia from Liu jiangang, Jiangsu Province. There were 27800 people on the vessels. There were 5 kinds of vessels in the fleet. The biggest vessel was about 151.18 meters long and about 61.6 meters wide. It could carry 800 tons of things such as gold and silver jewelry, porcelain, tea, silk and take thousands of people. It was the biggest vessel at that time. Every time Zheng He went to the ocean, he led more than 240 vessels. It was a difficult journey over stormy seas. The countries which Zheng He sailed through were not always received friendly. Sometimes he received hospitality, but sometimes he was viciously attacked. He wondered if he would ever make the trip across the ocean. In the end, Zheng He got many things from other countries such as pepper, elephant teeth, diamond, medicine, lion...He gave other countries porcelain, silk and tea.

From the first time to expedition to the ocean, he went on another six expeditions to the ocean. This great event in world maritime history. Zheng He’s expeditions promoted overseas trade and promoted economic development. It also promoted the development of China’s ancient maritime undertakings.

The Great Voyages of Zheng He

Shanghai United International School Wanyuan Campus, Jia, Stephen – 9

Zheng He was an important person on the Maritime Silk Road. He started the Silk Road because his personality was just right for exploring. He had a determined heart for discovering new things. He was open-minded so he could learn and remember new things. He went on seven journeys for making friends with other countries. Also, he had battles when other countries wanted their goods and they didn’t give the fleet any money or goods they have.

Zheng He had a huge fleet for sailing in the west ocean. He had about two hundred and seventy vessels in his fleet. His ship is forty-eight meters long and sixty meters wide. He had about sixty-two of his own ships in the seven journeys. His ship was much longer, wider and stronger than Marco Polo’s ship. His ships were made from wood and has a sail on each ship. It was the third emperor of Ming Dynasty—Emperor Zhu Di, who needs Zheng He to explore the Maritime Silk Road.

Zheng He traded a lot of things with other countries, like silk trade with diamonds or tusks. Also, they have battles too.

Now I’ll introduce a battle to you. It’s called the battle of Xi Lan Shan. Xi Lan Shan is a place showed now in Sri Lanka. The king was very greedy because he wanted to have more and more goods so he would become rich. He asked Zheng He to give him more things. (Infact Zheng He already gave him some goods.) So, Zheng He answered ‘ No,’ and the king’s army fought with him. At last, he used a clever way to win the war. The king’s army scared him to the sea. Then, Zheng He turned around and fought to the king’s palace and used the city’s walls for protection. At last, they won.

Zheng He went to a lot of countries on the way including India, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Somali, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Indonesia and Iran. Some of these countries’ king was kind and not greedy. Some were greedy and looked down at Zheng He’s fleet.

Zheng He was a very great person in Chinese History. He went on the great Silk Road in the Indian Ocean. We can learn a lot from him, like his determined heart, open-minded eyes and his wonderful courage. I think his name will be remembered by the whole universe!

The Great Voyages of Zheng He

Shanghai United International School WanYuan Campus, Liu, Matt – 9

During Zheng He's sea voyage, he was in his cabin room and taking a rest. Suddenly, he heard a sound. The sound said, "Give me all your gold, silk and porcelain. If you don't do that, the people on the boat will all die."

Zheng He got up to see who that was and he saw a strong man was shouting. It was Chen Zuyi, the cruelest and greediest pirate of the sea, and just because of him no one wanted to travel on the sea. Now he met Zheng He and he knew that Zheng He and his fleet had more than 200 boats with 2500 people. He thought, "If I can get all of these boats, I will rule the sea!" And then, they began to fight. The Ming army had very strong weapons and those pirates just had knives. So, Zheng He defeated the pirates.

Now Zheng He and his fleet began to sail again. They had reached more than twenty countries that was never known before. On the journey, they met more pirates but they defeated them all.

Zheng He was a brave man because when he got this mission from the emperor, he accepted it although he knew it was hard. He finished the task perfectly. He was one of the greatest navigators in Chinese history.

The Great Voyages of Zheng He

Shanghai United International School WanYuan Campus, Ma, Thomas – 8

In 1405 (Ming Dynasty), Emperor Yong Le sent Zheng He to lead the Chinese ships to the Indian Ocean. It was Zheng He's first voyage. He was a brave and resourceful man. He went on to lead seven expeditions in 28 years. He visited more than 40 countries and went as far as the east coast of Africa.

On the fourth expedition, Zheng He and his fleet sailed on the Indian Ocean. That day they had a storm at sea. The waves were so big. Some ships struck on a rock and sank. The crew drifted ashore. When they woke up, they found it was a wonderland. It was very hot there. People were all black and they spoke a strange language. They lived in thatched huts. People used elephants to travel. There were many strange animals and plants which they have never seen before. The crew wanted to stay there for the time being. They helped the local villagers defeat the boa constrictor. They traded silk and porcelain with the villagers for food.

After a few months, Zheng He led the other ships came to rescue them. That is Malind what is now Kenya. It is on the east coast of Africa. So the people there are all black. The strange animals are giraffes and zebras. Zheng He met the king of Malind and introduced Chinese culture. He gave the king many wonderful presents they had brought. The king was very happy. In return, the king gave him some giraffes and zebras.

Through this expedition, Zheng he and his crew made a relationship with Africa and opened up trade routes in Africa. In addition, Zheng He brought exotic foreign items back to China.

Zheng He and his Fleet

Shanghai United International School WanYuan Campus, Qu, Minghong – 9

Zheng He was the first person to go on the Maritime Silk Road in China. He was a servant. His Dad and Grandpa were sailors, so the emperor asked Zheng He to trade and to see if his predecessor emperor was alive.

One day Zheng He and his fleet were sailing in the sea, but they didn't expect they would meet a pirate called Cheng Zuyi. An islander named Shi Jinqing told Zheng He about Cheng Zuyi and that he was a pirate. He drilled a good army and took up a big island. They would rob Zheng He's ship... But, Zheng He had a plan.

In the war with Cheng Zuyi's army, first, Zheng's He's fleet gathered together around the pirates' ship. Then, Zheng He's soldiers fired at the pirates with guns, cannons, and fought the pirates with sabers.

Finally, Zheng He won the war! He detained Cheng Zuyi back to Beijing. He told the emperor that they got a lot of goods and said: "I think the predecessor emperor is dead."

Actually, to explore the Maritime Silk Road, Zheng He met a lot of difficulties and obstacles. He always conquered them with his bravery, persistence and wisdom. He made great contributions for the prosperity of the silk road. China was made to be wealthier and stronger by the silk road. Zheng He also brought Chinese culture and friendship to countries overseas by trading goods. Chinese silk road's door was opened by Zheng He! He was a very important person to light the silk road.

Zheng He's Adventure on the Sea

Shanghai United International School WanYuan Campus, Xi, Henry – 9

Zheng He was a navigator for sailing. He was tall and thin. He was about 30 years old when he started his first voyage. He was very interested in sailing on the sea.

When he was on his last voyage, he said, "We need to go to a new place to trade." So they went across the Indian Ocean and came to the countries near the Red Sea.

They found many goods to trade and they spent many days in trading. He started his trip back in winter, but the Indian Ocean was frozen and their ships were stuck in the ice. They waited for two months, some sailors died and their food were almost gone. Finally, the ice melted, and they continued the trip.

One day, a huge tornado was coming, Zheng He's fleet didn't escape from the tornado and the ships were blown onto an island. They met some indigenous people, they made friends and lived together. One day, the indigenous people attacked Zheng He's fleet, but soon they were wiped out. Suddenly, Zheng He realized that he couldn't stay on this island anymore. So they fixed their boats and went away. A few months later, they arrived at Indonesia.

The pirates knew that Zheng He had many goods, so they got ready their weapons and lined up their boats. When Zheng He's boats went into the haven, Zheng He was scared because there were many pirates throwing hand grenades to them. He wanted to resist, but the pirates were too powerful.

Finally, the pirates caught Zheng He and forced him to become a pirate. Emperor Yongle was very sad because he lost an outstanding navigator.

The Great Voyages of Zheng He

Shanghai United International School WanYuan Campus, Zhao, Sally – 9

Zheng He was a Chinese navigator, diplomat, explorer and court eunuch in the Ming dynasty.

He was born as **Ma He** in a Muslim family in 1371. When Ma He was young, he was sent to serve Zhu Di, the Prince of Yan, who later became the Emperor Yongle. As a eunuch servant, Ma He finally became a trusted advisor to the Prince and assisted him in many military campaigns. After Zhu Di became the Emperor Yongle, he conferred the surname “**Zheng**” to Ma He because he won the battle at Zhenglunba. Zheng He was also known as “**san bao**” which means “Three Treasures”.

It was said that the Emperor Yongle wanted to capture his escaped predecessor, the Emperor Jianwen, so he sent his most trusted and open-minded person, Zheng He on a famous journey.

Zheng He’s first voyage departed on 11th July 1405 and consisted of 27,800 men and a fleet of 62 treasure ships, supported by around 190 smaller ships. The fleet included:

- Chinese treasure ships, used by Zheng He and his assistants;
- Equine ships, carrying horses and repair materials for the fleet;
- Supply ships, containing food;
- Troop ships with soldiers and weapons;
- Water ships with fresh water

On the ships there were navigators, explorers, sailors, doctors, workers and soldiers, along with the translator and diarist. The largest ships in the fleet, the Chinese treasure ships, were 147 meters in length and 60 meters in width. Can you imagine a ship longer than a soccer field? There were 62 ships like that, with hundreds small ships. The fishers were astonished by Zheng He’s big ships. They said that Zheng He’s fleet looked like dark clouds on the sea. They couldn’t believe their eyes.

From 1405 to 1433, Zheng He led seven voyages with the Ming Treasure Fleet to Southeast Asia, South Asia, Western Asia and East Africa. On some expeditions, they met peaceful people and presented gifts of nice goods, making new relationships with a variety of countries. On other occasions, they had to fight with their enemies, or deal with sly pirates. During the expeditions, Zheng He brought back to China many trophies and envoys from more than 30 kingdoms. There was even a King of a foreign country who came to China personally.

The Emperor Yongle did not find the Emperor Jianwen but Zheng He’s voyages brought prosperous foreign trade to the Ming dynasty. Now in China, 11 July is Maritime Day and is devoted to the memory of Zheng He’s first voyage.

My Adventure in Ming Treasure Fleet

St Stephen's College Preparatory School, Hung, Michelle – 8

My name is Mike. I am from Shanghai, China. I have lived near the sea for 9 years. I have always dreamed to become a sailor.

One day in the year 1367, I heard from my best friend that our Emperor would order a massive 'Treasure Fleet' of three hundred ships to the Western Ocean to promote our country to other countries. Hurray! I finally had my chance.

One early morning, I went to the pier and lined up to apply to be a sailor. When it was nearly my turn, a man told me that I was too small and short to be a sailor. He kicked me out. So I sneaked into the ship when no one was looking.

I finally could be "one of the sailors" from Ming Treasure Fleet. I saw lots of jewels in the chests. I was amazed that I jumped up and down because the jewels were so beautiful, sparkling and colorful. I had never seen such things that were as sparkling as fireworks! Also, I saw soft silks, white cottons, blue and white porcelain ceramics. They would all be presented to the rulers of different countries that we would visit in order to spread our Chinese culture. I was so excited. I would have such a good time to see so much. My first ocean journey was started with excitement and laughter.

A few months later we arrived in Malacca after vomiting more than ten times. It was the first time I travel on the ship for many days. Malacca was very beautiful. There were many things to buy. There were many plants especially palm trees. Suddenly, there was a fierce pirate who wanted to steal all our treasures! Luckily, our crew was very strong. We destroyed their ship very fast! But unfortunately, one of my legs was seriously hurt by the weapon of the enemy. I felt extremely miserable that I burst into tears!

When we returned to China, we brought back many new and funny things including curry powder, the seeds of palm tree and some big animals like lions and giraffes. Our King rewarded me with a gold flag for fighting for the country on the ship.

When I went home, I told my parents that I was afraid I could not walk anymore and I would never be a sailor again. My parents told me not to worry and my leg would recover very soon. They were very proud of me as a courageous sailor, fighting for the country.

Although I did not have another chance to be a sailor again after this journey, I would never forget this exciting and risky adventure. After many years, I opened a curry chicken shop to sell curry chicken which became a famous food shop. I lived happily ever after.

The Emperor's Fleet

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Ku, Chit Yui Morris – 6

In the early 1400s, a fleet of ships was setting sail to help the emperor to find treasure in Japan. But, the most unfortunate thing is that they set sail in the direction of India.

When the captain knew they were going in the opposite direction, he was very scared because in that direction, there were lots of nasty pirates, so he thought of this plan: Make new relationships with other cities and countries, so they set sail to Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and many more countries to make relationships!

The nasty pirates heard of this fleet of ships and they were jealous about them and wanted to make them bad, so the other countries heard about this and they cancelled relationships with them.

When they reached India, the nasty pirates came to challenge them. Of course, this fleet of ships had many military forces and weapons. But this is not an easy pirate team. When they almost lost, a ship came and some ships from the fleet of ships drove to the ship and gave wonderful presents to them to beg them to add them in their team and help them make other people or ships in their fleet. That person is helpful so he added them in their team, their military forces became stronger, so they won them and these happening always happen in their fleet of ships.

These travellers on the fleet of ships were going to reach Japan now! And treasure is coming. All their efforts were not in vain and the treasure felt moving, so it is easily to find it.

In 1410, they came back China and all people, even the emperor, welcomed them when they arrived because this was not only is the first fleet of ships to reach India and Africa and Arabica, but they were also the best explorers on planet Earth in history! The emperor thanked them because they not only got the treasure, but they also made new relationships with other countries than China!



Non-Fiction

Group 2

Chinese Space Exploration

Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary & Primary School,

Chan, Rachel – 9

Hundreds of years ago, the Ming Treasure Fleet made its journey across the seas to reach out and explore the world. Today, the modern China has reached a lot further -- into the outer space.

The space program of the People's Republic of China is directed by the China National Space Administration (CNSA). In the 1950s, it started a ballistic missile program but it was not until several decades later that a Chinese space program started which resulted in Yang Liwei's successful flight above the Shenzhou 5 in 2003. This achievement made China the third country to send humans into space.

When the Sputnik 1 accomplished the first artificial mankind satellite on October 4, 1957, Mao decided that time was ripe for their own attempt. China's first ever T-7 sounding rocket was launched successfully in the Nanhui launch site on February 19, 1960. The first successful launch of a T-7A(S1) sounding rocket holding an experiment project (transporting eight white mice) was on July 19, 1964. The first space-craft made for human occupancy was the Shuguang-1 in January 1968. China's Medical Space Institute was founded on April 1, 1968 and the Central Military Commission (CMC) commanded to start a selection of astronauts.

The development of China's first heavyweight satellite launch vehicle was started by Shanghai 2nd Bureau of Mechanic-Electrical Industry in August 1969. A few months later, a parallel heavyweight SLV program known as CZ-2 was started in Beijing in the First Space Academy. The second satellite launch attempt performed on April 24, 1970 was successful. In the operation, a CZ-1 was used to launch the 173 kg Mao-1. It was the heaviest satellite that was successfully launched. The PRC's second satellite was launched on March 3, 1971 with the last of the CZ-1s. The satellite was named Shijian-1, weighing 221 kg and was specially came with a magnetometer and a cosmic-ray/x-ray detectors.

The first crewed space program known as Project 714 was adopted in April 1971 with their goal of sending two astronauts into space by 1973. The screening process for the candidates had ended by March 15, 1975 with 19 astronauts chosen, but the program was soon cancelled because of political turmoil, only resulting in partial success. The CZ-2A launcher, was made to carry the Shuguang-1, but instead carried the first FSW-0 recoverable satellite but failed. After some design reworks, the FSW-0 No.1 was successfully launched by the new CZ-2C.

On September 9, 1976 Mao died and his rival, Deng Xiaoping denounced during the Cultural Revolution and forced to retire from his offices. First, it seemed as if new development would be slowed.

On August 10 1972, the heavy-lift SLV FB-1 made its first flight test with the results only partial success. Then, the projects which looked unnecessary were simply cancelled. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Aerospace Industry and Chinese Aerospace Industry was founded.

Nowadays, China is working on exploring the moon. Wish her luck 'round the stars!

The Ming Dynasty Treasure Fleet— Know More About Zhang He

Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary & Primary School,

Lai, Suet Ching – 10

If you love Chinese history, you should definitely know about this mighty fleet admiral. Yes, it is Zhang He. He is famous for his amazing voyages, for showing how rich and grand is China, but surely some people hate him a lot.

So let's start with who is Zhang He. He was actually a mariner, explorer and diplomat. Which was quite a lot of job for one person! He was born in Yunnan, in a Muslim family was named "Ma He", later adopted by the conferred surname of Zhang from empire Yongle.

As was one of Yongle empire's favorite, Zhang He rose up to the top of imperial hierarchy and served as a commander of the southern capital. He then thought of a fabulous plan of showing how grand and rich China is, so he took a lot of valuable treasures from China, built a massive royal boat and loaded those jewelries and presents on to that boat. As Zhang He was Yongle empire's favorite and Zhang He's plan was good for China's sake, so Yongle empire agreed.

Zhang He's first fantastic voyage was held at 11th July, 1405, from Suzhou. Which was an enormous fleet containing 317 gigantic ships and held about 28,000 crew men. Zhang He's fleets visited Brunei, Java, Thailand and Southeast Asia, India, the horn of Africa, and Arabia, dispensing and receiving goods along the way. Zhang He presented gifts of gold, silver, and silk; in return, China received such novelties as ostriches, zebras, camels, and ivory from the Swahili. The giraffe he brought back from Malinda was named to be a *qilin* and taken as proof of the favor of heavens upon the administration. They loved the giraffe as it was their first time seeing this kind of creature, which had such a long neck.

As others always boast about how spectacular and large Zhang He's ships were, I will now tell you how astounding the size could actually be. The largest ships in the fleet, the Chinese treasure ships described in Chinese chronicles, would have been many times larger than any other wooden ship ever recorded in history, surpassing *Lorient*. 65 meters long, which was actually built in the late 18th century. The first ships to attain 126 m long were 19th century steamers with iron hulls. Some scholars argue that it is highly unlikely that Zheng He's ship was 450 feet (137.2 m) in length, some estimating that they were 390–408 feet (118.9–124.4 m) long and 160–166 feet (48.8–50.6 m) wide instead while others put them as minute as 200–250 feet (61.0–76.2 m) in length, which would make them smaller than the equine, supply, and troop ships in the fleet. His ship was really worth talking about.

Zhang He generally sought to attain his goals through diplomacy, and his large army awed most would-be enemies into submission. But a contemporary claimed that Zhang He "walked like a tiger" and did not shrink from horrid violence when he considered it very necessary to impress foreign peoples with China's military might. He suppressed pirates who had long plagued Chinese and southeast Asian oceans that made it. When Zhang He had his 7th voyage, he successfully visited the foreign countries, but we do wish we could say the same about his return to Beijing.

There were a lot of theories of Admiral Zhang He's death. Some said the admiral died in 1433 (at age 61–62), which may have happened during or after the voyage. Another theory is that Zhang He continued to serve as the defender of Nanjing, dying in 1435. But we believe that he died in the return of their last voyage, which was a sad memory.

Zhang He died on the trip back to Beijing. He was wrapped with a few layers of white rags and was thrown in the sea. Like most people known, he had defeated, one of the most feared and strong respected pirate captains, in information the pirate captain was excellent on fighting, won, and returned him back to China for execution. The pirate attack was quite sudden and horrifying. It all started when they were sailing, the pirates ship came and wanted to rob the jewelry and the gifts other foreign countries gave them. But of course, Zhang He this mighty, brave admirer won.

He also waged a land war against the Kingdom of Kotte on Ceylon, and he made displays of military force when local officials threatened his fleet in Arabia and East Africa. From his fourth voyage, he brought envoys from thirty states who traveled to China and paid their loyal respects at the Ming court.

Admiral Zhang He is amazing, he is powerful and wealthy. The ideal life! Share this story and sob, giggle, and wow at Zhang He! He is a mighty historical admiral that we should all learn, admire from him. He should be highly respected by us, as he made other countries picture our beloved China grand and rich. Even though it was kind of a massive waste of money, but it's totally worth it.

Zheng He's Voyages.

Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary & Primary School,

So, Hayley – 10

Hi ! I don't think you know much about Zheng He's first voyage. So let me share an information report about Zheng He's first voyage with you!

Zheng He's first voyage (1405–1407) began in July 1405. He first set sail in 1405, commanding 62 ships and 27,800 men. The fleet visited Champa (now in southern Vietnam), Siam (Thailand), **Malacca** (Melaka), and the island of Java and then through the **Indian Ocean** to **Calicut** (Kozhikode) on the Malabar Coast of India and **Ceylon (Sri Lanka)**. Zheng He returned to **China** in 1407.

When Zheng he's first voyage went to Java, the empire of Java set up a war between Java and the peoples in Zheng He's first voyage. Many people died during the war. But at last Zheng he and his crew won. Zheng He and his crew also had a fight with the Guang Dong pirates who wanted the treasure. But Zheng He and his crew won. After many difficulties, Zheng He and his remaining crew came back to Nanjing safely at 1407.

Zheng He came back as a hero. Zheng He exchanged goods wherever they went on the fleet. Sometimes Zheng He also invited the peoples from where they went to come back and talk to the China emperor. So the Chinese people could learn somethings about the other countries and improve China. So all in all, Zheng He's first voyage was kind of successful. Zheng He and his crew rested for a while and plan for the second voyage.

In Zheng He's second voyage, he started in 1407. When they first sailed out, there was an huge storm and it changes the direction of the voyage slightly. They first went to Thailand then they went to Ceylon. In Ceylon because the emperor changed, so the new emperor of Ceylon set up a battle between Ceylon and the peoples in Zheng He's voyage. But the Ceylon loss, and Zheng He made the nice and friendly empire back to empire. Zheng He went back to Nanjing in 1412CE.

After many years, the emperor of Ming dynasty died. Hong Xi ruled Ming dynasty. Hong Xi hated Zheng He's voyages, he thought it was a waste of money. After that, he canceled the voyages. Many years passed again, Hong Xi emperor died. A new emperor ruled Ming dynasty and he heard the idea of the voyages and thought it was a pretty good idea. So he let Zheng He to continue the voyages and that was Zheng He's seventh voyage.

So in Zheng He's seventh voyage, they first went to Arabian Peninsula. Then they went to Malarba coast. In Malarba coast, Zheng He died. He was 62 years old when he died. After Zheng He died, the treasure fleet ended.

The Ming Treasure Fleet Information Report – All About Zheng He

*Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary & Primary School,
Yuen, Eires – 10*

Zhang He had a lot of jobs! For example, he was actually a Chinese mariner, diplomat, explorer, fleet admiral, and court eunuch during China's early Ming Dynasty. That's quite a lot of jobs for one person. Zhang He was originally born as Ma He in a Muslim family, then later adopted the surname Zhang from the Yongle Emperor. Zhang He commanded expeditionary voyages to Southeast Asia, South Asia, Western Asia and East Africa from 1405 to 1433. His larger ships stretched 120 metres or more in length! These carried hundreds of sailors on four tiers of decks .

As the favorite member of palace of the Yongle Emperor, whose usurpation he assisted, Zhang He was Yongle Emperor's favourite, so Zhang He rose to the top of the imperial hierarchy and served as commander of the capital Nanjing. His voyages were long neglected in official Chinese histories but have become well known in China and abroad since the publication of Liang Qichao's *Biography of Our Homeland's Great Navigator, Zheng He* in 1904. A trilingual stele left by the navigator was discovered on the island of Ceylon shortly thereafter.

Zhang He used a went on a lot of voyages, which means he boarded a lot of ships. Like Chinese treasure ships, equine ships, supply ships, troop transports, and many more!

In the decades after the last voyage, Imperial officials minimized the importance of Zheng He and his expeditions throughout the many dynastic histories they compiled. The information in the Yongle and Xuande Emperors' official annals was incomplete and even erroneous; other official publications omitted them completely. Although some have seen this as a conspiracy seeking to eliminate memories of the voyages, it is most likely that the records were dispersed throughout several departments and the expeditions – unauthorized by the injunctions of the dynastic founder – presented a kind of embarrassment to the dynasty.

Lastly, I'll tell you about Zhang He's unfortunate but true death. It was said that he died of disease in 1433 during his last voyage, and that he was tossed overboard for two reasons. The first is because that was his religion, Muslim, were supposed to be tossed in the ocean with his/her head facing a religious Muslim Tower. The second reason is because that the other voyagers on the ship were scared that the disease would spread. Sadly, after Zhang He died, the whole treasure fleet was destroyed. But that's not all! The shipyards were shut down and most of the documents that related to the fleet were "lost". Yeah, you probably understand the meaning of "lost".

Did you learn more about Zhang He now after reading this information report? I think Zhang He is a very courageous man who liked traveling on boats. It's such a shame that his documents related to the ship were ruined by other people! This story's moral is: Act before thinking!

Voyages of the Ming Fleet (Extract)

Lee Chi Tat Memorial School, Zhang, James – 10

Day 1	15 th June, third year of Yongle (1405) Sunny
<p>Today, I and my fellow crew are finally on board the ships we were looking forward to for several years. Admiral Zheng He is our captain. He is a devout Muslim, which is the reason why he was on the trip. The Emperor has already seen us off at dawn. As I am only eleven who is the smallest person on the ship. I was chosen because I had followed the Emperor in the Battle of Pacification three years ago. My duty is to fire the “Large Farangis”, which is a kind of large cannon. We are now in the calm sea. We set off from Nanjing and is already past Linjiagang. I hope to see new territories and exotic islands soon!</p>	
Day 963	26 th September, fifth year of Yongle (1407) Sunny
<p>What an exciting day we have had!</p> <p>The day before yesterday, a man named Shi Jinqing of Palembang came on our ship and talked with Admiral Zheng He. He informed us that a pirate named Chen Zuyi planned to rob our fleet of all gold and treasures. Admiral Zheng He talked with Shi for some time and thanked him for the priceless information.</p> <p>As the Admiral Zheng He expected, Chen Zuyi came to see us the following day. He acknowledged our fleet and said that he would prepare an escort through the port. He spoke politely, but his rude manners, shifty eyes and the greedy look as he looked around our fleet told us that this was a man of no good.</p> <p>Today was the big day of passing Palembang. Before we got into the port, Admiral Zheng He said, ‘My friends, tonight we are going to pass the port of Palembang. However, I fear that the pirate is planning an ambush for us when we are most at ease. So we will be ready for him! He paused, looked fiercely around at all of us. Then he continued, ‘Now, my fellow shipmates, let us be dispersed around the port in an arc. We should all fill in our cannons and be as armed as possible. When the pirate comes into our target area, we shall surround him and order him and his fellow pirates to surrender. Chen Zuyi is not an idiot, he would surely see by that time that he could not oppose us. If he is, we may as well blast him to pieces.’ His words were quite right. By about eleven o’clock at night, we had the arc formation ready. Then we waited for the pirates. It was well pass midnight when they finally arrived. As the enemy fleet entered the target area, our fleet secretly formed a full circle now. In the dim light of the torches, I saw Admiral Zheng He giving the signal. Instantly, we tightened the circle. The pirates discovered our presence a second too late. The Admiral Zheng He ordered them, ‘You have been surrounded. Surrender immediately or...’ Just then, a sudden sound followed by the roaring of the gray waves told us that eleven pirates’ ships had broken out their huddle and rushed straight at our side. My heart quickened: It is my time! I filled in my ‘Large Farangis’ for the first time. Then I fired it. A flaming iron ball shot out of the hole and towards the escaping pirates. With a deafening boom, a ship burst into flames. In five minutes, it had completely vanished, though bits of woods and steels were littered on the surface. All around me, my shipmates did the same. Soon there were no longer any enemy attempting an outbreak. Admiral Zheng He spoke again, ‘Surrender immediately or be blasted to pieces!’ At last the pirates surrendered. They are now kept in the vacant chambers and looked securely.</p>	
Day 380	30 th October, sixth year of Yongle (1408) Sunny
<p>Another ruler paying tribute to the Great Ming.</p> <p>On 25th, a man rushed out of breath to the port. He turned out to be one of our own men. When we asked him what was happened, he spluttered a lot, and the bits we could understand told us that he was one of the 180 to explore the new island. Since they were going to explore, they did not carry weapons. After that were a confusion but he remembered that several hundreds of native men holding bloody knives were running about wildly. In the fight, only ten Chinese ran away in time. He did not know where the others were. The following day, the Admiral Zheng He took over a thousand crew on land. I was one of them, being now fourteen. We captured ten natives and threatened them to take us to the native ruler, otherwise be executed, and of course the obeyed. After we were taken to the king, the Admiral Zheng He asked the king if he knew anything about the men that killed our 170 men. To our surprise, he dropped to his knees and pleaded for mercy. It turned out than this land was called Java and the king in front of our eyes was the West Java king. There had also been and East Java King. Five years ago, the two kings broke into war about who would rule Java. Eventually, the West King won. For three months hence, he had been wiping out the remnants of the East King. The 170</p>	

Chinese were killed because the Javanese men mistook them for East King allies. The West King apologized most sincerely to the Admiral Zheng He. He also handed us the men that killed our people, which we imprisoned.

Day 1204

22nd July, eighth year of Xuanda (1433) Cloudy

Today is the last day of my navigation life. The Emperor has just seen us off since today is the return of our seventh voyage. It's heavy news that Admiral Zheng He has died on the journey. He was buried in Kuri, where he died. He was a great man.

I plan to drop my journeys and return to my homeland, where Xuande Emperor has given me the job of Doctor of Treasury. This position is quite well for me: it's Level five. There may be an eighth journey; I wouldn't be up for it. While I started on the first journey I was eleven; now I am thirty-nine. I may be able to lead a quieter life.

Zheng He

Peak School (ESF), Schulz, Amelie – 8

Introduction

Zheng He was born on the 23 of December 1371. We don't know exactly when he passed away. Most probably it was in 1433 (aged 61–62). He lived in China in the region of Yunnan which is next to the border of Myanmar.

He was a great explorer and a fleet commander with 300 ships and over 30.000 troops under his command. He went on seven major expeditions to explore the world and to establish chinese trade in new areas. He was a symbol of China's peaceful rise.

Chapter 1 : The Beginning

There was once a boy called Zheng He. He had four sisters and one older brother. One day, after his 8th birthday, Zheng He was like always the last out of bed. Finally Zheng He was ready to go out and his family were going to the market. All of a sudden, lots of people started running away. They tried asking what happened, but no one stopped. Finally someone told them “There are a lot of soldiers coming and some are even coming with horses”.

The soldiers were coming nearer and nearer until they were very close to the village. Everybody started running for their lives until they were safe in their homes. Zheng He didn't make it back to the village. He was taken from the soldiers to the emperor's castle.

The soldiers were handing over Zheng he to the General Fu Youde.

“Why are you keeping me here?” asked Zheng He. The General started with a long explanation:

“Because in 10 years time you will be old enough to be a voyager, to explore the world. We will give you more than 300 ships and about 30,000 troops under your command. You will have sacks full of gold. If you come to a city that will fight you have to fight back! If the country is very nice you ask the boss of the city or country if you are allowed to visit their country, if their boss says yes you give him or her gold, then you enter their country. If they say no you give them a lot of gold and they might let you in if they don't you sail on. Your first voyage will be in 10 years that means you will be 18. You will be living in the castle for those 10 years and after that you will be gone.”

Chapter 2: The horse ride to Naypyidaw and the first expedition

After ten years living in the castle of Fu Youde, Zheng He was ready to start the adventure of doing amazing expeditions for the emperor. His army and all ships were already set up in the harbour of Naypyidaw. So Zheng He took his horse to ride to the harbour to meet his troops. He stepped on the boat and started shouting “Hello my ship mates! Happy to see you all! Welcome to our Adventure! Let's start our adventure! ”

The conditions were great to start the journey. They set of with enough food and water for everybody. The final destination of the first journey was Mumbai. They wanted to do a stopover in Colombo, Sri Lanka in the middle of the way to Mumbai. After two weeks in stormy water, all are happy to leave the boats. In Colombo they refilled their food, water and things they need for the boat ride. They set of once again to Mumbai. A soldier shouted on their way “There's a storm coming!” “Everybody of deck!” shouted Zheng He. Fortunately they arrived safely in Mumbai.

Chapter 3: Voyage to Pakistan

After Mumbai they traveled to Pakistan to the port of Karachi. There they gave the people gold and gifts. The people were so happy and invited Zheng He's troops to a local street party with lots of music. Happy and exhausted and the ships full loaded with presents from Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan, Zheng He returned back to Kunming to show Fu Youde all the gifts and filling the sacks with gold again.

Chapter 4: Off to Africa

After weeks in a rough sea they arrived in Somalia. Again, Zheng He gave the poor people gold and made lots of new friends. The people in Somalia showed him great dances and music and shared their food with him. One of the gifts which he got was an animal and Zheng He thought that it was a unicorn, but later someone found out it was a giraffe but nobody told him. Happy and satisfied, he took his troops to Madagascar. There he distributed lots of gold again to the people. He got lots of gifts for example coffee and spices for cooking.

Chapter 5: Adventures in Southeast Asia

The next voyages would bring Zheng He to Southeast Asia. The first country they went to was Indonesia, to the island of Java. The trip to Java was peaceful and enjoyable. They arrived safely in Jakarta. Now the troops knew exactly what to do after the last five expeditions, they had to give gold and gifts to the poor people. Everybody again was very happy and friendly. On the way to Vietnam, they stopped in Malaysia to say hello there. They filled up as well food and water for their final destination. Zheng He was getting very sick on their way to Hanoi and the doctor on the boat tried everything to help him. But unfortunately nothing helped and he passed away just before they reached Hanoi. The troops were very sad, but fulfilled the job of distributing gold and gifts in the name of General Fu Youde to the poor people before returning back home to China.

Chapter 6: The End

Zheng He was getting very famous in China, because what he did for China during the seven voyages and all the souvenirs from the different countries which he brought back to China for example like the giraffe.



Non-Fiction

Group 3

Zheng He and his glorious voyages of dream and power

Inmaculate Heart of Mary College, Cheung, Ching Po Chris – 14

When the Asian world was waiting to see the bewitching glory of Ming Dynasty, the Yongle Emperor, Zhu Di, seized the best moments to send his diplomat to let other Asian countries have the first glimpse of The Great Ming Empire. However, to whom did the emperor give his credence to? Who was the lucky man to be chosen to carry out this historical and glorious mission of Ming Dynasty? It all started with a 10-year old boy who was selected to serve in the palace of the Chinese Emperor...

In the 15th century, Yunnan, which was located in southwest China, was filled with the tense atmosphere between Mongols and ethnic Han Chinese; the villagers could smell the smoke of fire, bombs, ambition and hatred in the constant conflicts and wars. The volatile situation was meant to continue until Zhu Yuanzhang, the Hongwu Emperor, conquered China and ended the Mongol-led Yuan Dynasty in 1368. During the wars between Mongols and ethnic Han Chinese, numerous of mighty and loyal soldiers were killed, including the father of a young boy, Ma He.

As a 10-year-old boy, the childish smile of Ma He disappeared because of the tragic loss of his beloved father. With no time to mourn for the death of his father, Ma He was then being captured by a Chinese general and sent to Nanjing to serve in the emperor's palace. He was among all the chosen young boys, having the deepest fear in their hearts, missing their families and shivering in the unspeakable darkness. They were then castrated and sent into the unknown world of Chinese armies and palaces, without any single idea about their future.

The charming and enticing appearance and intelligence of Ma He shone brightly in Chinese Emperor's court, and his sparkling eyes could not hide his talents in military service and diplomatic affairs. The young Ma He was sent to serve in the Emperor's court, and he was a playmate of the Hongwu Emperor's son, Zhu Di, when he was small, and playing with Zhu Di must have helped Ma He forget his own unbearable past, and of course, more importantly earn the trust of the Emperor's family. When Zhu Yuanzhang died, he only passed his power to his son, Zhu Biao, but Zhu Biao died early. The son of Zhu Biao succeeded the power and became the Jianwen Emperor. However, after the Jianwen Emperor was in reign, he carried out harsh campaigns against the lords in order to weaken the power of his uncles, fearing that one day his throne would be taken away.

Witnessing the harsh and terrible cut of land and power, some of his uncles found the policy was too hard to bear, and the cruel reality forced them to end their lives. Zhu Di was the exceptional case, he decided to fight against the authority. Zhu Di pretended to be a mad man and found his way to get more support, especially from Li Jinglong and the prince's half-brother, Zhu Hui, and they played the important role of Zhu Di's success as they opened the gate for him in Nanjing in July, 1402. It was also known that Zhu Di also had superior tactics and capable Mongol auxiliaries to help him overthrow the rule of the Jianwen Emperor. It was believed that Ma He was one of the soldiers who facilitated Zhu Di to reign in power.

Zhu Di, the Yongle Emperor, rewarded Ma He for his help during his rebellion; he gave the surname "Zheng" to Ma He. Ma He then changed his name into Zheng He, and he became the most powerful man who served Zhu Di in the Emperor's court. He was also promoted to Grand Eunuch, the highest rank that a eunuch could be promoted to.

When Zhu Di had settled everything as the new Emperor of China, he then decided to revive the traditional tribute system. In the past, countries on China's borders agreed to recognise China as their superior and the Chinese Emperor as Lord of "All under Heaven". These countries offered the emperor gifts regularly in exchange for some benefits like providing them with military protection or signing trade treaties. The Yongle Emperor, one of the most ambitious and aggressive emperors in Chinese history, seized the chance to commission his favourite servant, Zheng He, to start the lavish expeditions to other Asian countries to overwhelm the Asians with Chinese advanced naval technology and show them the power of the Great Ming Dynasty.

In 1403, Zheng He's fleet was in a very huge scale with nearly 28,000 men on board including professionals like sailors, diplomatic specialists, scholars and more. The fleet of Zheng He then travelled all the way to the bustling and famous place, Calicut, India. After that, one of the most important parts of the first voyage was to visit Calcutta, the world's major trade depot at that time.

During the voyage, Zheng's journey was not always safe. The pirate, Chen Zuyi, might have spotted the huge and splendid fleet, and that attracted the greed of Chen. Chen attacked the fleet in order to get the big fortune, however, with the mighty force of Zheng's voyage fleet, the ships were well protected, and Chen lost everything, as he was arrested and sent to Nanjing. There, he received severe punishment from the Emperor.

The first voyage allowed foreign countries to know more about China, and the Great Ming Dynasty. Thus, the foreign ambassadors from various kings and rulers did not hesitate to make their way to go to China in return to pay tribute to the Yongle Emperor. The diplomatic relationship between China and those countries were strengthened by, of course, the exchange of goods, especially the luxury goods which included gemstones, spices, exotic treasures and rare animals. The First Voyage offered instant benefits to China and its diplomatic affairs. The second one was carried out in 1407, and this time, he was one of the honourable guests who were invited to join the inauguration of a new king in Calicut, India.

The third voyage was initiated in 1409, and this time, the places visited by Zheng He were not limited to a few, but quite a number of different ones. He travelled to Malacca on Malay Peninsular Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and this trip was pretty much challenged by the people of Ceylon who were totally clueless about the Great Ming Dynasty. The people of Ceylon appeared to be rude and disrespectful to Chinese. Zheng then captured the Sri Lankan King, Vira Alakeswara, using the impressive military power of Ming Dynasty. More importantly, Zheng also brought the tooth relic of Buddha back to China, and it was only returned to Sri Lanka in 1960.

After this incident, the Ming Dynasty had a great influence in Indian Ocean and the nearby areas which allowed Chinese to develop a maritime Silk Road in the future. The fourth voyage then followed in 1413. Zheng He and his fleet arrived Hormuz which was on the Persian Gulf. During the fourth expedition, Zheng He had a Muslim translator to help him on the way, and this helped Zheng a lot to communicate with the people in other countries effectively. The fifth one took place in 1417, and Zheng even visited the cities of the Red Sea and the east coast of Africa. The friendly visit of Zheng was always accompanied by the strong military force of Ming Dynasty, which was indeed quite a powerful image given to foreign countries. The last two expeditions, which were started in 1421 and 1431 respectively, enabled Zheng He to reach more places and visit all important ports in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean.

The seven voyages were definitely a demonstration of Chinese shipbuilding technology. Zheng He's armada was believed to be built partly at Longjiang Shipyard in Nanjing, and its docks were once the home to an army of between 20 and 30,000 shipbuilders from Hunan and Guangdong provinces. The spectacular "Treasure Fleet" was actually a gigantic navy with junks that had nine masts, and they were up to 400ft long. The ships carried cargos of precious gifts like silk, porcelain and tea as gifts to the diplomatic friends of China in Asia. Recently, the glory of the voyages was revealed again through subsequent excavations in Nanjing. Iron anchors and shipbuilding tools like axes, stone hammer, nails and knives were found, and all these help to compile a good documentary on Zheng He's successful voyages.

Zheng He's voyages took him to 37 countries over 28 years, and his fleet was one of the mightiest fleet that ever sailed. With the scale of 300 ships with 28,000 men on board, his journeys were indeed the biggest flotilla before the First World War. The dazzling and glorious success of Zheng He's voyages is something to be proud of as a Chinese student. Zheng He, a legendary explorer and "China's Columbus" helped China open its eyes to see the brave new world. Though the treasure fleet was put to an end eventually, it was still the most remarkable fleet that China has ever had.

The Great Voyages of the Great Ming Dynasty

Inmaculate Heart of Mary College, Chou, Cheuk Yan Ambrose – 12

The trace of the Great Chinese explorer, Zheng He, can be found everywhere in Asia. During last Christmas holiday, I travelled to Indonesia with my family. In the trip, I saw a statue of a Chinese man in the Sam Po Kong Temple, which is in Semarang, a city in Indonesia. Then, I found the words, “General Zheng He” below the statue. Who is Zheng He? How come he can attract so many tourists, or even Indonesians to pay a visit there? Later, our tour guide even told me that this city was actually named after him!

Zheng He, originally named Ma He, was born in a Muslim family in Kunming, Yunnan, China. It was not a great place or a capital like Nanjing. However, he was a well-educated man. He was also known as San Bao, which refers to the Three Jewels in Buddhism. As a eunuch serving the Ming Emperor, he once assisted the Yongle Emperor to ascend the throne and was given the surname 'Zheng', so he changed his name to 'Zheng He' afterwards.

Zheng He was well known as a navigator, but he was also an admiral diplomat. Despite he had a shining career in the Yongle Emperor's court, he did have an unbearable past. Unfortunately, his father was killed in the wars between the Ming armies and Mongol forces.

Zheng He was captured by the Ming armies in Yunnan in 1381. In 1385, he was ordered to serve the young Zhu Di, who is the Yongle Emperor later. Therefore, Zheng He was one of the Yongle Emperor's favorites in his court. Zheng He at first was only a soldier of Zhu Di in the war of 1402; however, after helping Zhu Di become the Yongle Emperor, Zheng He rose to the top of the imperial hierarchy and served as commander of the southern capital, Nanjing.

Later, the Yongle Emperor ordered him to sail to the west for the first time in 1405 because the emperor wanted to showcase the powerful Ming Dynasty to other countries. Also, he wanted to make friends with other Asian countries, and get more trading partners as well. The Yongle Emperor chose Zheng He because he knew lots of things about foreign countries, and Zheng was a well-trained diplomat. Zheng He had the total trust from the Emperor who believed that Zheng would never betray him.

Zheng He started his naval expeditions with 27 thousand people on board. There were six kinds of ships all together. They were: Chinese treasure ships, supply ships, troop transport, Fuchuan warships, patrol boats and water tankers. The Chinese treasure ships were the largest ships in the world. Zheng He started the voyage at Liu Jia port and went to more than 30 countries in Asia and Africa during his voyages.

During Zheng's voyages, he taught people from other countries the skills of farming and well-drilling, giving out silk in exchange for local goods to help the Yongle Emperor develop friendship with other Asian countries. There was, of course, cultural exchange between the Ming Emperor's court and Southeast Asian countries like India, the Medalees and Africa. Zheng introduced the worship of Mazu, the Chinese goddess of the sea, to different countries; so many temples were built for this traditional religion. In return, some countries offered China some special gifts like giraffes and camels. When Zheng He brought back these animals with him, the people of China were overjoyed to see all these new faces. They even sent someone to study these animals carefully. Though the Treasure Voyages were full of excitement, some people thought that the expeditions were used for searching for the Jianwen Emperor, as he disappeared after the victory of the Yongle Emperor in Nanjing. In 1424, when the Yongle Emperor passed away, Zheng He had completed his great missions, six voyages at that time.

Although China could attain a lot of lands, products and new technology from the countries or cities in Asia like Calicut, a city located on India's western coast. However, the six voyages drained a lot of money from the Ming government. The expenses of the voyages included the cost for making a ship and taking some special products from China in exchange for something good and exotic. After the death of the Yongle Emperor, his elder son, Zhu Gaozhi, became the Hongxi Emperor. During his nine-month reign, Zhu Gaozhi put an end to all the treasure fleet constructions and maintenance. Though everyone might find that was pity to stop all the voyages, but more money of the Ming government could be saved then because of having less expenses on the lavish and ambitious naval expeditions.

The Hongxi Emperor, a practical Confucian, preferred to spend money on fending off the Mongols in the north and feeding people in famine-ravaged provinces instead of having ambitious voyages which were too expensive to afford.

However, when the Hongxi Emperor died less than a year during his reign in 1426, his 26-year-old son became Xuande Emperor. The new Emperor was a happy man who had no worry about money at all, so he decided to commission Zheng He for a voyage again. Like his grandfather, the Yongle Emperor, the Xuande Emperor also showcased the power of the Great Ming Dynasty through travelling to other countries, and he thought that was also a good way to raise more income for the government revenue. He, according to some historical records, was an ambitious man who wanted more land and power, not for his country, but for his selfish desires.

In 1432, the 61-year-old Zheng He set out with his largest fleet ever for one final trip around the Indian Ocean, sailing all the way to Malindi on Kenya's east coast and stopping at trading ports along the way. On his return, as the fleet sailed east from Calicut, Zheng He died. He was buried at the sea, although legend says that the crew returned with a braid of his hair and his shoes for burial in Nanjing. He used 28 years to complete seven voyages by 1433.

In 1433–1436, Zheng He's companions, Ma Huan, Gong Zhen and Fei Xin published a book with the accounts of their travels to let everybody in China know about the great work Zheng He accomplished. His great achievement was indeed very important to Chinese history and Asia. To praise his great feat, a statue of Zheng He was made and erected at the Stadthuys Museum in Malacca City in Malaysia. In the opening ceremony of Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008, China also had a performance to thank the great mission completed by Zheng He, our national hero.

Zheng's voyages have great impacts on today's China and the world. It bridged the trading between China and Asian countries. There are still a lot of people using his route to trade today. In fact, it could be possible that Xi Jinping got the inspiration of The Belt and Road Initiative from Zheng He's glorious sailing routes.

Zheng He is always a legend in Chinese history of navigation. His seven voyages are indeed the tests on Chinese strength and technology. It would be fantastic if we all could learn from our hero and his loyalty to his emperor in his missions. It is never too late to follow his footsteps to explore and to learn from our Asian neighbours.

The truth about the Ming Treasure Voyages

Korean International School, Hittori, Ginka -11

“Ming Treasure Voyages” has been most frequently argued in the variety of academic society by those people who are studying the history belong to archaeology, anthropology, linguistics and geopolitics. The main reason why it is a serious topic is that they might have discovered the US continent before the visit of Christopher Columbus who has been recorded as the discoverer of America in the world’s first and even accomplished round-the-world by fleets earlier than Ferdinand Magellan. While this discussion is doubtful in reality, these days it can be said that their voyage is remarkably evaluated. If they did not sail to outside of country, many opportunities would be losing such as exchange of culture, new discovery and new innovation in our social system. In this background, many scholars have been starting to rethink of those missions what they did in terms of new discovery and also the Chinese history has been positively enhanced by people whose minds have been gradually noticed in society in the world.

What did they make in their voyages? First of all, Mr. Zheng He who was born in Kunming, Yunnan, China was the fleet admiral to sail out to Southeast Asia, South Asia, Western Asia, and East Africa from 1405–1433, which were seven times voyages to have had led seven oceans’ discovery. He was assigned upon the missions, which by Ming emperor whose name was Zhu Di was the third emperor of the Ming dynasty in China and the fourth son of the Hongwu Emperor who was the founder of the Ming dynasty. According to the general articles, the missions of the voyage would be several reasons such as exploring the new areas, to expand business trading and diplomatic friendly ships, and moreover the most reason why Ming empire wanted to make was to show their power to people and as a result many other countries thoroughly would recognize China's superiority to increase their trade. If refused, the admiral, Mr. He, did use force to those people, but they wanted to solve any issues peacefully by using the exchange of tribute and gifts. Mr. Zheng He is well known of originally Muslim, therefore he might have a basic principle to create well cooperation with merchants who were coming from Muslim society in the ports.

In the first voyage, they traveled the route from China to Southeast Asia and to India, all the route to major trading sites on Indian coast, and then in the next voyage they also sailed out with around 250 ships to Thailand, Java, Aru, Lambri, Coimbatore, Cochin and Calicut, where it would have been present for the installation of a new king as well as visited for the sultan of Brunei. Started from the year of 1409 they again visited with around 50 fleets and thirty thousand mariners in Southeast area. In the fourth voyage in late 1413, they sailed out to the Persian Gulf ordered by the emperor to the Arab port visited in Hormuz would be expected to be more widely profitability from the new trade. A team visited in Bengal and the new king accompanied when returned to China, who gave China emperor a giraffes which he had received from the ruler of Kenya. In addition, emperor instructed to reorganize the king of Samudera. In order to further expand their area, they reached out on his next voyage in 1417, arrived at the port of Aden, which is gateway to the Red Sea. In the 5th voyage, they went to Southeast, Indian coast, Arab area and Africa. They exchanged their gifts for premium stones and animals by the sultan. The fleets went to the African coast with ambassadors from Mogadishu, Somolia, and Kenya to their homelands. The 6th voyage started from 1421 to return other African envoys with 40 fleets, they would visit to Southeast, Arab and African countries. After the visit, the Chinese emperor died in the year 1424. The son who became emperor and immediately issued an official banning of any further voyages by the navy, however, the new emperor died within a few years and the former emperor's grandson came to the throne and ordered one last voyage appointed with Zheng He, left in 1431, to visit Southeast, India and the African coast. It consisted of over 100 fleets and more than 27,000 marines. During this travel, Zheng He died on the return voyage in 1433 at the west coast of India.

While he dedicated to innovation of numberless valuable things in China in the period, no more voyages after his death existed because of became more conservative in China and the records had been destroyed for the long time of Chinese history. The kind of fleets had never happened in the world until World War I again started with many fleets. For these voyage arranged by China the impact definitely caused many areas in the world. It would be both of positive and negative sides but in terms of worldwide history it brought us evolution by exchanged the local things like animals, plants, art and so on. Nowadays, the innovated technology has been greatly accreting our knowledges, which is, needless to say, internet technology is connecting everything even from any long distance, and moreover people would be unnecessary to look and touch upon real things. However, should we accelerate more this status than before that we need to take a certain time to go to there to see? Humans should shortly face the situation to make a decision whether or not to shift to the virtual world instead of the real one.

How did The Ming Treasure Voyages Open Opportunities for The Ming Dynasty? What Would have been The Effects and Influences if Those Opportunities Were Seized, for China and Other Countries?

Sha Tin College, Wong, Ivan – 14

'It was a tough challenge with multiple obstacles, meeting pirates and Emperors around the world, an experience people would never imagine' spoke a soldier from the third voyage in 1409. The Ming Treasure Voyages, a lesser known part of Chinese history, was one of the longest distance travelled voyages ever known during the Ming dynasty. Taking place during the time period of 1405–1433 and led by famous explorer Zheng He, fleets were commanded to sail across the seas, bestowing other countries with gifts from the Chinese Emperor, Zhu YuanZhang. Bringing over 27,000 men on the first voyage, they set off to the Western Ocean, bringing along commodities such as silk and brocade. However, they were misled by the map and were instead headed towards the Indian Ocean, taking them to a completely new destination. The Chinese were eventually able to create connections and become allies with other Emperors of other nations. After the first successful voyage, Emperor Zhu decided to continue these ventures across the world under Zheng He's guidance. The voyage proceeded with similar progress, but of other nations. Unfortunately, China ceased the voyages in 1433 when Zheng He passed away in India. By then, the furthest destination reached was East Africa. With Zheng He's abrupt death, one can only wonder what was planned ahead for the voyages? If China had continued with the offerings and affiliations with other countries, what benefits would they have gained in terms of economic and power? This discussion aims to deliberate this question. Ultimately, how the Ming Treasure Voyages would have been a great start for the Ming Dynasty and China's future prospects.

The trades China made with other countries would have boosted the economy and helped China regain their market in the international community. During the Ming Dynasty, China had been travelling across the seas, selling their national products to other countries. These products likely included silk, tea bags, jade, ivory, cloisonne etc. Making trades also meant China gain valuable goods in return too, rare and unattainable commodities, possibly even new discoveries. The number of trade deals China gained in short-term was vastly more than what they had expected. If China had continued these trades, the money gained would have been a substantial boost to the economy of China. This is to say, due to the number of treasures they had received. For instance, they had received horses from the Indonesian army, it became a great asset to the Chinese army. Even though these horses were common in Indonesia, it was a new species to the Chinese and it's acquisition indefinitely strengthened the army. On another voyage to Africa, Admiral Zheng He was presented with another foreign creature; the camel. Resilient in hot and rough conditions, camels were perfect for areas such the Henan province's humid subtropical climate, assisting farmers and citizens on long journeys such as ones on the infamous Silk Road. If China had continued to create alliances and trades with Africa, the amount of money generated from the camels sold and their aid in additional trades via the Silk Road would have been substantial. Even after the Ming Dynasty ended, the trades could have continued, becoming a stable income generator. As a result, China would have gained greater success in excelling the economy, short term and long term.

Financial benefits gained from The Ming Treasure Voyages would have been momentous for China's Emperor and citizens. The financial benefits China had gained helped the people and economy of the country. When Zheng He brought back gifts from other countries, he showed the Emperor and fellow citizens of their achievements, telling them about the journey. When people saw the opportunity buying the product for their own good, they asked Zheng He for the price. But, Zheng He had limited stock and had to raise the price of the object in order to earn more money for himself. People started bidding on goods and it soon became an effective way for the emperor and the crew to reap in on the financial benefits the voyage offered. In addition, it was a prime opportunity to interest people to participate in the Ming Treasure Voyages. Upon witnessing the riches of people who came back from the voyage, how they sold precious commodities and trinkets from other countries, they would want to earn a name for themselves, helping their families as well as getting to travel around the world and start a new adventure, exploring and meeting different people in different cultures. The Emperor can earn more money, which leads to building and making the nation stronger. It could be spent on weapons, training and development in the army, or used to build more infrastructures for the citizens. Also, this could develop the voyage itself. After gaining

these gifts, the Emperor and its strong team can suggest ideas on how it can help the voyage. For instance, they can use fur from animals to keep the crew on the ship warm during nights and storms. By gaining these financial benefits, it can help not only the country itself but also its development on technology and other areas which could secure the country and show their strengths. To conclude, the financial benefits gained in the Ming Treasure Voyages the people and the economy of the country, making businesses out of it as well as developing technology for the country and the voyage itself.

If the Chinese Emperor had continued the Ming Treasure Voyages disregarding the death of Zheng He, it could have opened up an industry and business for China, ensuring their vital position in international trades and affairs. After Zheng He's death in India, the fleets returned, making it the last voyage for China and its sea. The following dynasties passed by without any development or notice of the Ming Treasure Voyages. Before Zheng He's death, men and generals have been gaining progress to improve the sea weapons against pirates as well as different functions of the ship to make it more sustainable. Builders have already started building and making the outer structure of the developed models, planning to use it in the 8th voyage for testing. However, when the Emperor had received news regarding Zheng He's death, he did not continue to pursue the projects and proposals Zheng He had placed. Instead, he terminated the voyages, for good. The new technology developed and encouraged by Zheng He could have been an opportunity for China to sell the parts and tools to other countries, taking the lead as the most advanced in the world. Additionally, China themselves may utilise the tools and equipment, exploring new lands, providing land for agricultural and development purposes, perhaps even an opportunity for colonisation. Building alliances with other nations, aiding one another to strive in areas of struggle.

If the Ming Treasure Voyages continued while sustaining connections and relations, a lot of misconceptions and misunderstandings would have been avoided. Western and Middle Eastern countries viewed China as a land of resource, having sufficient land and technology. Pirates would have taken this advantage, seeing the Chinese Emperor did not utilise Zheng He's designs, they stole a lot of the technology from China to gain power. China, more known to be a 'closed' country, due to its huge amount of resources, has been self-sufficient and have not been trading or connecting with the outside world. Rumours were spread across the world and brought different misconceptions towards China. Some said the Emperor kills the poor, some say the Chinese are ghosts at night. This brought disadvantages to China. But, if they made use of the technology Zheng He has developed, they could sell it, tying in with the connections with the international community. It seemed like ever since the end of The Ming Treasure Voyages, China became more separated from the outside, only if they had utilised the technology they had.

In conclusion, the Ming Treasure Voyages overall provided many opportunities for the Ming Dynasty. Further, it also explains the affect and influence it had on China and other countries. The financial, long-term benefits and trades, it could have brought to China, the alliances and advantages they come with, how all of that potentially may have prevented conflict and wars happened between nations. China ultimately would be much more well known and more open to the outside world. Economically, the country and its people would have flourished through the humble beginnings of the Ming Treasure Voyages. _



Non-Fiction

Group 4

A New World Order

Diocesan Boys' School, Yeung, Thaddeus – 15

Since the year 1978 when the Central Chinese Government introduced the Reform and Opening-up Policy, China's economy and domestic development have improved tenfold. As members of the Hong Kong society, this is highly relevant to our lives as China's growth will lead to direct consequence to Hong Kong, which is a city of China under the doctrine of "one country, two systems", and to the international world order itself.

Historically, this is not the first time that China finds herself wielding great international influence as a world power. In the Ming Dynasty, China was leading among the global powers in terms of living standards and economic development, and her foreign political influence extended far into the west with the help of the Seven Treasure Voyages, much alike China's foreign policies today such as the Belt and Road Initiative. By looking at Ming China and her international achievements and conduct, we can develop a good idea of what modern day China might aspire to achieve, as philosopher and father of Communism Karl Marx once observed in his study of class-based struggles, "history repeats itself, first as tragedy and second as farce". Through comparing the Treasure Voyages of Ming China and modern-day China's foreign policies, we can see that this is indeed the case.

Firstly, let us take a look at the Ming Dynasty and how, through Admiral Zheng He's treasure fleet, Chinese influence was spread vast and far, from neighboring Vietnam and India to Arabia of the Middle East to the very continent of Africa.

The Ming Dynasty, under the rule of the ethnically Han royal house, is regarded as one of the most powerful and influential dynasties of Imperial China, with its naval might surpassing even the European powers of the time. While both the Europeans and the Chinese aimed at spreading their influence to other regions of the globe, the methods with which they chose to do so were vastly different: while European powers such as the Dutch, the French and the British chose to spread their influence through their gunboats and through colonizing any helpless civilization it came across, Ming China, rather than exercise its military might, tried to earn the loyalty of lesser civilizations through gifts.

As the 1st wave of European colonization took place in the 15th century, the Yongle Emperor took on an opposite approach to that of the European powers. Admiral Zheng He was appointed by the Emperor to commandeer a "Treasure Fleet". Over the course of 7 voyages, the Ming Treasure Fleet distributed Chinese wealth in the form of silk, spices and rare minerals to foreign countries, in return for their rulers and kings to arrive at the Ming capital and declare themselves tributaries of Ming China. Over the 7 voyages, Ming China successfully established absolute control over maritime trade in the South China Sea, reaching great political and economic success for both Ming China and for countries that were reached by the Treasure Fleet as all parties benefited from the improved maritime trade (Wang, 1998). These smaller and less developed countries also benefited greatly from Ming China's involvement with their local development, such as Malacca, Cochin and Malindi which obtained more infrastructure in the form of ports with the help of China (Sen, 2016).

However, the spread of Chinese influence was not entirely beneficial to smaller countries. While the Treasure Fleet gave the countries it reached much incentive to follow Ming China's international order, China also used militaristic means to force smaller states into compliance. Through the heavily armed Treasure Fleet, Ming China threatened hostile governments into submission, purged political rivals in the region and intervened in local politics, undermining the sovereignty of many smaller countries. Mills (1970) expressed the view that Ming China's Treasure Fleet was "an instrument of aggression and political dominance", and he may not be so wrong.

Now, let us compare Ming China's foreign policies with that of modern-day China.

The Belt and Road Initiative was proposed by President Xi Jinping in 2013 during his visits to Kazakhstan and to Indonesia. Kuik (2016) summarizes the Belt and Road Initiative as aimed at "constructing a unified large market", "enhancing mutual understanding and trust between member nations" to reach an "innovative pattern with capital inflows, talent pool and technology database". We can see that this is highly similar to Ming China's Treasure Fleet, which was aimed at enhancing maritime trade and cultural & technological exchange.

However, modern day China's foreign policies are also similar to those of Ming China in the aspect that the sovereignty and freedom of many smaller countries may be at stake. Coining Secretary of State of the US Rex Tillerson, China's "debt-trap diplomacy", in other words attracting smaller countries into borrowing money for building infrastructure while they are unable to repay the debt, results in countries losing their sovereignty and political freedom to make their own decisions as they have to repay the debt. Examples of this include Sri Lanka and Djibouti, which were both forced to cede ports to China in order to repay their debts. This results in a vicious cycle where China's influence grows continuously as that of countries in debt decline, resulting in more and more countries falling into debt with China. This is highly similar to Ming China's foreign policy of providing gifts and treasures to smaller countries in return for their sovereignty and for them to become vassal states of China.

Ming China's attitude towards establishing an international order is highly similar to that of modern-day China. Both Ming China and modern China aim at promoting international trade and local development of smaller countries, while at the same time expanding China's political influence and achieving international hegemony. Whether this is beneficial to other countries is still a topic of debate today; however, it remains certain that if China wishes to establish a new world order similar to that of the Ming Dynasty, she must take on her share of the responsibility of being a new global power in order to truly achieve a win-win situation for both China and the rest of the world.

Should America be renamed Zhengherica?

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Webb, Stephanie – 14

The year was 2001. A renowned lawyer and collector of maps by the name of Liu Gang stumbled across an ancient world map. He purchased it for 500 dollars from a small Shanghainese dealer, thinking it was probably just a modern fake. Little did he know that the map would fan the flames on a later debate surrounding the “1421 theory”.

The controversial “1421 theory” originated from the book “1421: The Year China discovered America” which was written in 2003 by Gavin Menzies, an amateur historian and former submariner in the British Royal Navy. In the book, Menzies asserted that it should be Zheng He, the great Chinese admiral, who should be credited with discovering America some 70 years before Columbus’ journey. He claimed that Zheng was the first to complete a circumnavigation of the world, stumbling across America on the way. Although many historians discarded Menzies’ theory, his book kindled a spark of debate among professionals, and later became a bestseller, along with his “1421” website.

Charged with a mission to impress foreign countries of China’s might by the Ming Emperor Yongle, Zheng He led multiple voyages around the world, establishing diplomatic relations with many nations and bringing back treasures from different cultures. His expeditions which sprawled from 1405 to 1435 were recorded in a book called “The Marvellous Visions of the Star Raft” which appeared in China around 1418. The significance of the world map that Liu had acquired was that not only did it support the descriptions of this book, but it also depicted the continents of the world including the Americas. Although Liu’s map was drawn in 1763, the copyist who drew it had imitated another map supposedly dated 1418. He made a distinction between what he himself had added and what was on the “1418 map”. After reading Menzies’ book, Liu was convinced that his map would help prove Menzies’ “1421” theory. Indeed, if it could be proven that the “1763 map” which Liu had bought was truly based on a “1418 map”, then the history of the world would have to be rewritten, but how authentic was this “1418 map”?

In the “1418 map”, the world was shown as a 3-dimensional sphere presented on a flat sheet of paper. In the top right hand corner, the message “a chart of the integrated world” was written in Chinese characters. Despite a few obvious errors, much of the world was shown in fairly accurate longitudes and latitudes. However, it is precisely the remarkable details of the map that drew criticism that the cartography was too anachronistic for it to be truly dating from the knowledge that had existed in 1418.

To start with, many critics of the “1418 map” suggested that Zheng He could not have known that the world was round at the time. However, Mr Robert Cribbs, of California state University argued that with the Chinese’ advance nautical knowledge, the royal geographers who charted Zheng He’s voyages would likely have postulated this. Nevertheless, even if they had known the world was round before Zheng He had set sail, opponents pointed out that the rendering technique of presenting a 3-dimensional world on a flat sheet was unknown in Ming Dynasty. Dr. Geoff Wade, a historian with the National University of Singapore suggested that this rendering technique was only adopted by the Chinese after the Europeans introduced it to them much later.

Instead of Liu’s map being based on a “1418 map”, Dr. Wade believed it was more likely to have been based on maps drawn by Jesuit missionaries in the 17th Century. He also pointed out that apart from them both mistakenly presenting California as an island, even a part of the text was a clear translation from Jesuit maps. Other historians also showed that China itself was poorly drawn which seems to contradict with the advance knowledge of the royal geographers, particularly regarding their own country.

Perhaps one of the most telling flaws of the “1418 map” is the precise representation of inland features such as the riverine systems and mountains. For example, the Himalayas were marked as the highest mountain range in the world; St Lawrence River and the Mississippi were both well represented. It is unfathomable how maritime sailors like Zheng He could have known the inland geography of the lands they travelled past with such accuracy.

Meanwhile, examination of Liu's "1763 map" by experts confirmed that the vermin on the bamboo paper and the de-pigmentation of the ink did indeed date from over a hundred years ago. Unfortunately, this in no way bolsters the case that the "1763 map" was based on a "1418 map". Besides taking the word of the copyist, how else can we verify Menzies' 1421 theory?

If we were to analyse all the facts objectively from scratch, we should first ask: did Zheng He even have the capability to sail to America? The answer is yes, he definitely did. His flagship and other largest vessels dwarfed European ships of that century. It was 4 to 5 times bigger than Columbus' flagship – the "Santa Maria". Zheng He's treasure ships were 400 feet long and 160 feet wide, carrying nine masts and twelve sails. With a double hull designed for stability and storage, they towered at several stories high, complete with lavish staterooms and opulent balconies.

In addition to having advanced vessels at their disposal, Zheng He's team would have been skilled in numerous navigational techniques which would have allowed him to discover America. By the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, China's naval technology was already far superior than any other nation's. Not only could they rely on magnetic compasses, an invention dated some three hundred years prior, but they would also have been able to navigate by studying the positions of the stars. Since the 13th Century, the Chinese had printed manuals of star charts and compass bearings that allowed them to navigate in the middle of the night when the sky was clear.

Advanced navigational technology aside, favourable trade winds and currents in certain seasons could have easily carried Zheng He to the Americas. According to Menzies, "if you just go out in a plastic bathtub, the currents will just carry you there". Perhaps the currents did indeed carry Zheng He and his 400 feet long treasure ships with fancy balconies to America.

Having established that America was within Zheng He's reach, we should examine all the historical sources available. Unfortunately, many written records were destroyed as the political tide turned. Prompted by the depletion of treasury resulting from Emperor Yongle's extravagant spending on expeditions, infrastructure and defense, coupled with losses from natural disasters, the traditional Confucian court advisers who advocated frugality gained favour at the expense of the pro-expansionist Eunuch factions. Not only did this bring an abrupt end to China's golden era of exploration, but most of the records of Zheng's monumental expeditions, possibly including any evidence of excursion into the Americas, were also confiscated and destroyed.

The only written records of Zheng's expeditions still remaining today are the engraving from a stone pillar that was discovered in Fujian province and three written accounts by some of Zheng's crew members. The pillar was inscribed with descriptions of the voyages and a list of places they had visited such as Java, Sumatra, Vietnam, India, Yemen, Somalia among others but America was not one of them. Similarly, the first-hand accounts of the crew members described in detail the customs and cultures of the foreign countries they had visited as well as the souvenirs that were brought back to China, such as indigenous animals of Africa like lions and giraffes; spices from India and many more. However, there was no mention of America at all. If Zheng He had indeed reached America, why would any written record of America be missing when there are such detailed records of others?

Even if the written records of Zheng's trip to America had been destroyed, one would expect certain folklore describing Zheng's encounters with Native Americans should have survived in China, just like the Vikings had folklore recounting their interaction with Native Americans. While Menzies cited some indigenous folklore in America, such as how the Incan tribes of American were reportedly governed by Chinese admirals, he never managed to verify these. What was strange was that despite the absence of any written account of America, there was a Chinese commentary on the "1418 map" describing people with "black-red skin" and "feathers wrapped around their heads and waists" which clearly matched the appearance of Native Americans. This accurate description of the natives stands out as even more suspicious amidst a complete lack of other written evidence and could only further support the case that Liu's map was indeed based on 17th Century Jesuit maps.

If Zheng He and his crew had really landed in America, we would expect some evidence of their settlement, physical or otherwise. Indeed, in places such as Malacca and Java, many towns, caves and temples were named after Zheng He. According to Menzies and his supporters, eight different sites in America have uncovered Chinese coins and ornaments with purportedly Chinese beads. Artefacts of pre-Columbian

Chinese jade have also been excavated from the sea floor in the Florida Keys and off the coast of California. However, the dates of these artefacts have not been ascertained so that they could have been from a later period while those that were found underwater could have been carried by currents from elsewhere. Importantly, if Zheng He did reach America, it seems incomprehensible that they did not leave any indelible marks anywhere in America. In contrast, the Vikings' stone outposts built by them during their brief settlement some 500 years before Columbus' discovery can still be seen today.

Apart from the lack of written and physical evidence, there was also no evidence of any exchange of gifts which would have been a customary gesture to build diplomacy whenever Zheng landed on foreign soil. The Chinese would offer their products such as silk and porcelains in exchange for local treasures such as spices, gems, medicinal herbs and even exotic animals. As such, it appears inconsistent that Zheng never brought back any exotic treasures from America such as corn from the Aztecs or gold from the Incas. Even the Europeans took back treasures such as maize, tomatoes and gold from America.

While evidence in support of "1421" theory seems to be somewhat lacking, we should consider what it would imply if Zheng He had really discovered America. Of course, history books would have to be rewritten; people would have to be re-educated and Zheng He would rise to universal fame.

However, history should not be just about labelling who discovered what in which year. Instead, history should help us understand the causes and effects of one's actions as well as learn from people's failures and accomplishments. In this case, the Europeans did not stop at "discovering" America but they also went on to exploit and develop the land so that America could become a superpower of the world. After all, America was not named after Columbus but rather, Amerigo Vespucci, the man who recognised the Americas as being two separate continents, later leading to exploitations of the land. Even if Zheng He had discovered America, the Chinese did not exploit the land commercially or politically. The overall course of history would therefore not have been much different.

Yet, for us to discuss the exploitation of America as if it was some great achievement just seems wrong to start with. It was the Native Americans who had been living there for thousands of years before the Europeans' "discovery". Many of the natives were wiped out by new diseases introduced by the Europeans or forced to surrender their lands after losing battles to the new settlers, while survivors were involuntarily moved to areas called reservations. The new European immigrants did not accord the respect the indigenous people deserved both in terms of their rights and their cultures until recent years. In contrast, if Zheng He had indeed "discovered" America, we would expect him to have extended diplomacy by an exchange of gifts with the natives instead of "conquering" a foreign people. In this scenario, America might still have retained its original name in the indigenous language rather than be named after Zheng.

Indeed, this sums up what made the Ming Treasure Voyages truly revolutionary and magnificent even if Zheng He was not the one who "discovered" America. The voyages started a new era of peaceful exchanges between nations and gave China and other places of the world a new perspective of different global cultures. They expanded the horizons for many without having one nation exploiting another for their own gains. Zheng He and his crew also conquered notorious pirates and helped sailors who had gone astray. Therefore, we should uphold the Ming Treasure Voyages as an inspiration for us to step out of our comfort zone and explore the world outside with a sense of adventure and curiosity, embracing others' ideas without imposing our own on others. After all, you will never know what you might discover!

The Legacy of the Ming Treasure Voyages

Renaissance College, Helau, Conrad – 15

The Ming dynasty was a Chinese imperial dynasty lasting from 1368 to 1644. The result of a rebellion against the Mongol ruler of the previous Yuan dynasty, the Ming was among the stablest and longest ruling periods in Chinese history and is often characterised by its unmatched development in military, population, and quality of infrastructure. Early Ming underwent an unparalleled commercial revolution from which agricultural, science, arts, craftsmanship and technology peaked, giving way to a robust and advanced economy.

Zhu Di, also known as the Yongle emperor, was the third ruler of the Ming dynasty. Born in 1360, he was the fourth son of the Hongwu emperor, the Ming's founding ruler, and the former Prince of Yan. In 1402, with the help of the eunuch faction and the rebel force, Zhu Di overthrew his nephew the Jianwen emperor and proclaimed himself *Tian Zi* (Son of Heaven).

The Yongle emperor was known for his vigour and ruthlessness, and under his reign of Yongle (meaning “perpetual happiness”) from 1402 to 1424, China enjoyed a golden age of political stability and saw an unprecedented booming economy. The ruler hired an effective and efficient administration that removed corrupt officials. He reclaimed uncultivated land for agriculture that maximised state revenue, thus accelerating population growth. The emperor also emphasised trade. He knew that economic benefits would be guaranteed if China was involved in the Indian Ocean trade, an influential and global maritime network of its time, and sought to dominate it.

Thanks to his agricultural, political, military, and economic reforms, trade, culture, art, and science flourished throughout the realm. These advancements, combined with a broadening of geographical knowledge, the rise of powerful merchants along maritime trade routes, exceptional Ming shipbuilding techniques, and the development of more effective weapons, propelled China onto the world stage as a large and wealthy coastal nation.

To further spread this image across nearby regions, the emperor invested vast amounts of resources into one grand project designed to develop China's political interests abroad and expand Chinese hegemony around neighbouring regions: the Ming treasure voyages, one of the most spectacular displays of wealth and power ever seen in the ancient world.

The Ming treasure voyages were a series of seven maritime expeditions dispatched by the Yongle emperor from 1405 to 1433 that travelled along maritime trade routes to major ports around the rim of the Indian Ocean. The vessels carried and exchanged Chinese treasures for foreign commodities, yet the focus of the voyages was the interactions between the Chinese and foreign traders, and the diplomatic ties that naturally developed.

Before setting out for sea, however, it was decided that a dramatic and magnificent entrance was necessary to build a strong first impression with the traders and to do that, the emperor had to construct a fleet that reflected China's position as a prosperous and thriving nation. Indeed the Ming treasure ships surpassed all previous maritime vessels in both grandeur and size.

The largest ships of the fleet — called “*baochuan*” or “treasure ships” — were up to 440 feet long and 180 feet wide; armed with multiple cannons and carrying more than two thousand tons of lucrative goods, they dwarf Christopher Columbus's 85 feet long *Santa María* and Vasco De Gama's 84 feet long *São Gabriel*. Other ships included the 370 feet long “horse ships” that carries beasts of burden, multiple 280 feet supply junks, troop transports, patrol boats, warships, and tankers carrying freshwater. Together, the vessels number to 250–300 strong. The crew consisted of hundreds of officials and eunuchs, and the rest were cooks, blacksmiths, carpenters, tailors, doctors, navigators, astrologers, merchants, translators, and more than 27,000 sailors and mariners — soldiers trained to move and fight at sea.

With such splendid vessels, the Yongle emperor needed a trustworthy diplomat familiar with Islam and navigation to lead his armada into the ocean, so he commissioned Zheng He, a Muslim eunuch, as the admiral of the treasure fleet and envoy of the Ming.

Zheng He, born in 1371 and hailing from Kunming, Yunnan, was originally surnamed 'Ma', a Chinese rendition of Muhammad. He was ten when he was captured by Ming forces pushing remaining Mongol forces in Yunnan, then castrated and sent as a servant soldier of the then-Prince of Yan Zhu Di, who later became the Yongle emperor. Zheng proved to be talented in literary and military training, ascending in his ranks. Zhu Di became good friends with Zheng because of his loyalty and his skill in military commanding.

Under Zheng's command, the 250 strong treasure fleets set sail to the islands of Southeast Asia, India, the Persian Gulf, and later on farther away to the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa. The ships ventured out brimming with silk, coins, ceramics, jewellery, and returning laden with fragrant woods, animals, medical herbs, Indian spices, African ivory, Arabian horses, and tributaries brought from foreign territories.

The first voyage lasted from 1405–1407. The treasure fleet first went to Champa near modern day Quy Nhon in Vietnam, to Java and Malaca. They landed in Sumatra, then Ceylon (present day Sri Lanka), before moving around the tip of India to Calicut. There, they traded and exchanged gifts with the locals. When the fleet turned back and was traveling through the Malacca Strait, the pirate fleet of Chen Zuyi attacked the treasure-laden armada. The ships and sailors fought back, successfully capturing Chen Zuyi and when the fleet arrived back in China, they executed him.

The second and third voyages lasted from 1407–1411, and the fleet stopped in ports in and around Siam and India. On their return journey, they travelled back to Ceylon. There, the locals treated the Chinese with hostility and committed piracy towards neighbouring states. So the Ming-Kotte war erupted, ending with King Alakeshvara being captured and sent to the Yongle emperor. The king was later sent back to Ceylon.

In 1413, the treasure fleet set off again. This time Zheng led the armada all the way to the desert ports of the Arabian Peninsula and the vibrant coast of East Africa. They landed in Hormuz (Iran), Aden (Yemen), Djofar (Arabia), and Muscat (Oman). With the help of the Chinese Arabic translators, they engaged in the trade of camels, dried fruits, Islamic scriptures, and spices. They then sailed south, to Mogadishu and Barawa (Somalia) and Malindi (Kenya), and traded gold, salt, ivory, and exotic animals, including the giraffe that later inspired the auspicious Chinese mythical creature the *qilin*. On their return, they captured Sekandar, a rebel leader against the harbour kingdom of Samudera Pasai near Malacca. For their fifth and sixth voyages, the treasure fleet sailed the same routes and brought many tributaries back who acknowledged the Chinese emperor as their ruler.

In 1424, the Yongle emperor died, and the treasure armada halted for ten years before being ordered by the Xuande emperor to make one last voyage across the Western ocean. This time, the ships visited the ports from the Horn of Africa, the coast of India, and the city states scattered across the Indonesian archipelago.

Zheng died while in Calicut at the age of 62 and was buried at sea. Faced with the invasion of the Mongols in the north and a depleted treasury back in the capital, the voyages were put to a stop for good, and the treasure ships never set sailed again.

By the first quarter of the Ming dynasty, China had emerged as a naval power unsurpassed anywhere else, having reached a peak of maritime technology with advances in navigation and shipbuilding techniques as a result of centuries-worth of maritime experience.

Before the Ming dynasty, the Chinese had developed the magnetic compass in the early Han period and used it for maritime navigation two centuries before Europe. Astrologers were taken aboard to analyse the position of the stars, and by using star charts and detailed compass bearings available since the late Song era, ships were able to pinpoint their location on the waters and thus accurately predict their movement on a map. Another invention developed in the first century was the sternpost rudder. The rudder, positioned at the rear of the ship, could be moved back and forth that allowed the vessel to turn much more easily, particularly when navigating crowded harbours and narrow canals.

Along with navigation and steering devices, an essential improvement in shipbuilding was the construction of double hulls that separated the main ship from the water via a second watertight compartment. This proved to be life saving when the outside hull was rammed, as the ship could still remain buoyant. The double hulls also served as a method of transporting and storing water.

The vessels of the Chinese armada had unique sail designs and much more efficient rigging perfected by shipbuilders over the centuries. Multiple masted ships were built to harness maximum power of the wind, which was done nearly a thousand years before Europeans did. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the influence of Arab traders around China prompted shipbuilders to incorporate the lug sails into their designs. The lug sail was more flexible than the traditional sails, as its direction can be easily adjusted, and allowed ships to sail against the opposite wind, increasing efficiency and reducing the time it took to travel by boat.

Compared with European vessels, the width of a Chinese treasure ship was unusually wide; the ratio between the breadth and length of the vessel is around 0.254. The treasure ship's wide waist enabled it to achieve stability much more easily. With a heavy ballast, a long keel, and floating anchors fitted on both of its sides, the ship's movement would have been relatively stable and when in turbulent waters, kept its balance well. These naval technologies were fine-tuned by Ming craftsmen, many of which were later years incorporated into the treasure ship designs.

Knowing China's position as the most powerful nation of its time, the Yongle Emperor restored the tributary system, an ancient practise where neighbouring states acknowledge the superiority of the Chinese emperor through gifts of tribute in exchange for certain benefits. The treasure voyages promoted this system as part of the emperor's plan to expand China's sphere of influence onto the banks of other countries bordering the Indian Ocean.

Often the sight of the mighty Ming navy, equipped with 28,000 soldiers and firearms, was enough to overawe local authorities, compelling them to declare themselves as tributaries of the Ming. Those who accepted Ming supremacy were rewarded with Chinese valuables and grants of political protection, while those who did not submit were, according to a Ming scroll, 'pacified by force', their land annexed, and their leaders coerced to kowtow.

An early example of powerful states exerting soft power, the Ming expeditions sparked economic impacts in and around China. Dominance over the trade networks and the increased number of tributaries brought more commerce and trade under Ming regulation. There was a rise in production and circulation of merchandise which spurred a boost in the region's economy. Considerable revenue was produced as a result of increasing numbers of financial negotiations and transactions between Ming and foreign ambassadors.

Additionally, the voyages established a heavy Chinese military presence along the maritime coast. Warships among the fleets fought and defeated Chen Zuyi's pirate fleet in Palembang, Alakeshvara's forces in Ceylon, and Sekandar's forces in Semudera, freeing the maritime trade routes from the piracy and hostilities that plagued the coast of Southeast Asia. The three battles, each ending with Chinese victory, gave Ming China an even stronger hold on the rules of the tributary system, assisted in their coercive 'diplomacy' overseas, and significant imperial control and dominance over the maritime trade itself, enabling them to dictate the coming and going of foreign traders and how they interacted.

Following the death of Zheng He and the Yongle Emperor, social unrest, corruption, and political turmoil weakened the economy. Famine and epidemics raged. When the state revenue dwindled, orders were given to halt the voyages, and when 1433 rolled in, the treasure fleet arrived home for the last time, never to set sail again.

"We have traversed more than 100,000 li of immense water spaces and have beheld in the ocean huge waves like mountains rising in the sky, and we have set eyes on barbarian regions far away hidden in a blue transparency of light vapors, while our sails, loftily unfurled like clouds day and night, continued their course as rapidly as a star, traversing those savage waves as if we were treading a public thoroughfare."

Zheng He's written entries like these are a testament of the legendary voyages that he commanded. With the sun in his eyes, the wind whistling in his hair, and the emperor's decree in his hand, Zheng led a floating city brimming with priceless treasures across the ocean, seeing exotic sights and people. A symbol of national pride, the seven expeditions of the Ming treasure fleet was a diplomatic instrument which every nation bowed to, and to this day serves as a reminder of China's magnificent maritime history.

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China's Historical Formulation of Hegemony: Analysing Exceptionalism and 'Soft Power' in the Ming Treasure Voyages for Contemporary Applications

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The Ming Treasure Voyages were a series of seven far-reaching maritime expeditions, spanning from 1405 to 1433. Led by imperial eunuch and admiral Zheng He, the expeditionary voyages travelled to Southeast Asia, South Asia and – most eminently – as far as the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa. Poised to circumnavigate the whole world, the voyages marked a period of Chinese exceptionalism. A period in which China was the indisputable regional hegemon, advancing trade and diplomatic relations with the 'Known World'. Contemporaneously, a consensus is given such that the voyages' main functions are seen to be overwhelmingly political, rather than 'exploratory'; it allowed the Ming Empire to expand its – already preponderant – sphere of influence through amalgamations of soft and – less conceded – hard power approaches. Indeed, one may argue that the comparatively soft-power elements¹ in China's historical and contemporary rise to power marks the distinctive Chinese conceptualization of hegemony. This stands in contrast to the imperialistic approaches of the West – as encapsulated through the 'discovery of the New World'² and the modern rise of '*Pax Britannica*' and by transition in the 20th century, a '*Pax Americana*'. =

The pretensions and extent of soft power in the Ming Treasure Voyages will be scrutinised. The expansionist period and naval pre-eminence of the Ming Dynasty will also be contrasted with the 'century of humiliation', explicating how differentiated approaches to power manifests varying degrees of success in the East and the West – especially, the drawbacks of sinocentrism against the colonial and comparatively recent westphalian system.

A contemporary analysis will also be given through the retrospective lens of 'China's peaceful rise' and the 'China threat theory', especially relevant considering modern China's disruption of international polarity and increasingly expansionist foreign strategy. Unveiled in 2013 by President Xi Jinping, the Chinese-led BRI (Belt-road Initiative, 一带一路) seeks the revivification of the historical Maritime Silk Road and, by that token, what some contend to be the formation of a neo-tributary system – both of which were historically consolidated by the Ming Treasure Voyages. Some further contend the re-ascendency of a *Pax Sinica* (Chinese peace). In light of the aforesaid, the Ming Empire, being a historical regional hegemon – one that basked in a period of – albeit declining – 'Chinese peace', lends insight into modern-day China. Both the BRI and the historical tributary system share vast elements of similitude – the revivification thereof, perhaps. Both systems – with sinocentrism as a fundament – are shrouded by a quid-pro-quo system that manifests expansion through soft power and a symbiotic relationship between countries. Alternatively, it can be seen as self-aggrandizement by means of diplomatic and economic manipulation (sharp power); a comparative analysis will be conducted in this regard.

On 'Chinese Exceptionalism' in the Ming Dynasty

One must first examine the remarkability of the voyages, which stem not only from its far-reaching nature, but also with its unprecedented fleet consisting of 27000 men³, carried in what is purported to be 317 ships⁴ – all of this in the first voyage. Most astoundingly, Zheng He's own nine-masted flagship measured approximately 400 feet long⁵ – the likes of which were hitherto unseen, dwarfing European ships until the

¹ "Comparative" due to instances such as the conquest of Yunnan (1381) and the invasion of Vietnam (1406-07) in the time period of the Ming Empire

² Although such a claim remains highly scrutinised, with some even contending that Zheng He reached the Americas before Columbus - this, however, remains largely unsubstantiated and 'evidence' remains suspect.

³ This number was not limited to armed soldiers, instead encompassing men from varying walks of life such as meteorologists, clerks and sailors.

⁴ The numerical validity of the fleet remains contested by historians, although the figures range from a minimum of 42 to a maximum value of 317 ships.

⁵ The dimensions of such Zheng He's fleet has been challenged on engineering grounds and source reliability. However, in 1962, a large rudder post measuring 36 feet long, corresponding to ships 540 to 600 feet in length and 600 years of age.

invasion fleets of WW1. Comparatively, Christopher Columbus's *Santa Maria* – a ship that does not sail until 80 years later – measured 85 feet. The gargantuan nature of the armada in both magnitude and size of the ships per se serves as one exemplification of the exceptionalism of the Ming Dynasty and functioned to 'awe' foreign states and potential enemies, bringing immeasurable prestige for the Ming Empire – especially as it traversed through the rims of the Indian Ocean. Indeed, the Ming Dynasty had been extending its naval influence for the past 300 years, having been the preeminent maritime power for centuries. The armada was equipped with the latest advancements in propulsion, navigation and naval architecture – amalgamations of Chinese inventions and technologies adapted from the Indian Ocean and the South China Seas⁶.

To project the indomitable force of the Ming Dynasty, the Yongle Emperor, Zhu Di commissioned the construction of the acclaimed Treasure Ships – ships that were larger than what was necessitated. The concomitant goods of such ships included gifts of silk, tea and porcelain; such goods are the perfect manifestation of soft power, enticing foreign civilisations through advancement and resplendency.

The impetus of ever-increasing naval superiority stemmed from the need to control the Maritime Silk Road and to facilitate Sino-Arab and Asian trade relations by means of the tributary system, fulfilling increased demand for spices and herbs amongst other commodities. Moreover, It is believed that the Yongle Emperor used the voyages as a means to instantiate his right to the throne, the 'Mandate of Heaven'⁷ – legitimizing his usurpation of the throne from his nephew, the Jianwen Emperor.

Soft Power

As noted, the tributary system was of great importance to the Ming Empire and specifically, the Yongle Emperor. As such, the voyages sought to revivify, consolidate and enforce the tributary system. To this end, Short-term success was evident, greatly expanding tributary relations and thereby overall commercial circulation amongst tribute countries⁸ – permeated influence was achieved, albeit, not for long.

The sinocentric worldview of Imperial China saw that all rulers of the world pivoted around the Emperor of China – from whom they derive their authority. Under such a system, Imperial China exercised suzerainty⁹ over the tribute states. Indeed, it was an inherently asymmetric power structure. However, one must recognize the nature of China's soft power appeal. Evidenced by the luxuriousness of the treasure voyages, the tribute countries did have much to gain. The tributary system greatly facilitated Northeast and Southeast Asia's international trade network, allowing the affairs of the tribute country to be intertwined with the hegemonic Imperial China – who controlled official trade routes. After the submission into a suzerain-vassal relationship, and thereafter, an official 'investiture' of the foreign ruler, deputations were allowed to traverse to China to pay tribute, and as a measure of quid pro quo, given return bestowals – it was very much a symbiotic relationship, albeit an asymmetrical one. Moreover, east-west trade relations and cultural exchange were also facilitated, with cosmopolitan discourse conducted on both the ships and in the Ming Empire – a short path towards internationalism. Through such means, China's position was indubitably raised.

The narrative, as established, maintains that the Ming Treasure Voyages can be adduced to exemplify China's history of 'peaceful rise', a paradigm of symbiotic cooperation, benevolence and coexistence of nations – or so it is claimed¹⁰. Indeed, the Chinese ability to form diplomatic relationships without resorting to imperialism through 'conquering' and 'subjugation' as enacted by the West. July 11th, 2005 – now known as China's Maritime Day – marked the 600th anniversary of the voyages but only as of recent has Zheng He's legacy been venerated and applauded in acclamation, and conveniently so indeed. The voyages perfectly exemplify China's soft power appeal as President Xi Jinping seeks Chinese rejuvenation and the

⁶ An important advancement was the construction of double hulls that were divided into separate watertight compartments, allowing ships to be saved from sinking if rammed and providing a method of water storage for both passengers and animals.

⁷ Similar to the European Doctrine of the 'Divine Right of Kings' and the Korean formulation of the 'Posterity from Heaven' – heaven embodies natural order. Chinese formulation, however, only applies to a 'just ruler', hence justifying revolution against the unjust.

⁸ It is noted that tributary states rose to more than 60.

⁹ wherein states enjoyed internal autonomy whereas foreign policy fell under the hands of the stronger power

¹⁰ Vice Foreign Minister Zhang noted that the voyages "promoted the peaceful coexistence of various civilizations, demonstrating China's cultural tradition of friendship in international relations."

'Chinese Dream'. However, such claims of soft power are very much suspect – and in contemporary China, the new BRI and expansionist policies shrouds itself under the same pretensions.

It is claimed that the soft power appeal of Chinese traditionalism and 'higher culture' remains the preeminent reason for voluntary tributary involvement. Indeed, claiming the voyages were acts of 'cultural expansion', not military coercion – the modern narrative of the BRI remains similar, characterized as mutually-benefiting economic expansion, rather than predatory schemes. This, however, remains a disingenuous characterization. Proclamations were sent to foreign kings to either "submit" to the Ming Empire or either risk potential overwhelming military force and "pacification" – a risk surely noted given the over-militarization of Zheng He's fleets. Moreover, tribute countries had to reaffirm the supremacy of the Chinese Empire which exemplifies the inherently asymmetrical, non-egalitarian power structure entailed in the system – bargaining power was constrained¹¹. It was a truly hierarchical system, projected from the tenets of Confucianism in regards to structures of 'father and son' and 'filial respect'.

Zheng He was also known to "walk like a tiger"¹² and certainly did not stray away from necessary violence. To exemplify, Zheng He waged a land war against the kingdom of Kotte on Ceylon Island (an area now modern day Sri Lanka) for disobeying Ming authority. Moreover, he flouted his military force when local officials threatened his fleet in Arabia and East Africa. As noted in Zheng He's inscription in Liuja Harbour (1431): "When we arrived at the foreign countries, barbarian kings who resisted transformation and were not respectful we captured alive". Of course, many conflicts were preempted due to the overwhelming might of the armada – rulers were threatened into submission

It is indubitable that China did have soft power appeal, yet Beijing's current narrative overlooks the nature of Zheng He's voyages and the preponderance of power asymmetry involved – a primary reason for involvement in the tributary system as otherwise, it would have been unlikely – under free choice – for countries to accept the sinocentric ideal of Chinese supremacy.

The Fall

Subsequent Ming rulers – after the death of the Yongle Emperor – retrospectively deemed such voyages to be of prodigality and that they were cost-beneficially inefficacious. With redirected aims, such as the then-ensuing land war between the Yongle Emperor and the Mongols – a war wherein naval supremacy was largely redundant, the voyages were stopped. Interfactional disputes between pro-expansionist eunuchs and the parsimonious Confucians resulted in the eventual dwindling of the former and the ascendancy of the latter – the notions of human welfare taking precedent over state profit and 'expansion' remained cardinal in Confucian philosophy and the voyages were infractions of thereof. This was substantiated by reference to admonitions stipulated in the Huang-Ming Zuxun (皇明祖訓), the dynastic foundations left by the Hongwu Emperor for his descendants. Therein, Hongwu asserted the need for 'austerity' in practical administration. Moreover he regretted the profligacy and "high and unnecessary expenses"¹³ incurred through the tribute system of his time. With lack of support from civil officials, treasure voyages ceased and further attempts at reinitiation were precluded, eventually leading to the confiscation of Zheng He's records and the destruction of his treasure fleet. By extension, shipyards were shut down and ordinances were placed delineating that no ships with over two masts were to be made. Crafts knowledge eventually faded, plunging the naval pre-eminence of the hegemon into oblivion¹⁴. Further ordinances precluded trade with 'foreigners' – a turn to isolationism, with the tributary system breaking down thereafter. Economist Angus Deaton¹⁵ postulates that such ordinances were a reaction from the higher elites fearing the spread of mercantilism and free trade, which threatened the centrality of China's economic prowess. The "passive"

¹¹ An interesting example would be through how leaders of tributary states could only refer to themselves as 'king', with the title of 'emperor' remaining exclusively Chinese

¹² As noted by a contemporary of Zheng He

¹³ Yen Ch'ung-chien. *Ch'u-yü chou-chih lu*, Vol. III, ch. 8, 25. National Palace Museum (Peiping), 1930. Op. cit. in Chang, 1974.

¹⁴ At its peak, the Ming Empire had 3500 ships - a truly astounding number (considering the United States at present only has 324[#]). Moreover, US Navy will not reach 355 ships until 2050 asserts Rear Adm. Brian Luther, deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for budget.

¹⁵ Nobel Prize-winning Princeton economist, "The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, and the Origins of Inequality,"

grounds by which Chinese traditionalism stood prevailed, indeed, Confucianism prevailed¹⁶. As a result, agrarianism was perpetuated, in lieu of innovation and trade – the drawbacks of such insularity remain evident, as will be explored.

What ensued after the dwindling of the voyages and its concomitant ‘philosophy’ was the perpetuation of mediocrity; with the Industrial Revolution in the West and the general advancement and innovation, China was very much left behind – an agrarian state amidst a world that waited no more. *Poised* to circumnavigate the globe before Columbus, what was meant to be a beginning was the end. Zheng He’s legacy remained in oblivion until recent decades, with his stories told as mere tales and limited first-hand accounts. Not only was Zheng He’s cadaver tossed overboard at sea, but along with him the potentiality of the Chinese hegemony – a truly scintillating alternative to consider. As the Ming Empire regressed, the West flourished and great strides were taken in ‘Enlightenment’. What was, indeed, Chinese exceptionalism in the period of the Ming Dynasty dissipated.

Such reluctance in modernization and industrialization can be adduced to explain the advent of the China’s ‘century of humiliation’, as commenced by defeat at the hands of Great Britain in the First Opium War (1839–1842) and perpetuated by defeat at the hands of the Japanese in numerous conflicts¹⁷. Moreover, The Treaty of Nanjing (1842) ratified after the First Opium War. which brought China ignominiously to its knee with what China now calls the ‘unequal treaties’¹⁸. The Qing government – which remained fragmented – were forced from protectionism to free trade under Western principles. Moreover, they had to pay high reparations cede territory to foreign ‘spheres of influence’¹⁹. Among the reasons for the perpetuation of such a period would be the naval inferiority of the Qing Empire, especially in contrast to the advancements of the West in maritime technology, armaments and military strategy – as cultivated by imperialism and its conflicts. The potentiality brought upon by the Ming Treasure Voyages were neglected and from what could have been China’s rise, marked China’s downfall²⁰.

Another element to consider is the faults of the sinocentric system, which maintained the centrality of Chinese culture and influence without the general need for sinofication and colonial settlements. As the purported centre of the world, China – fundamentally – saw no need for expansionism and the retracement of the voyages are but one example thereof. As noted, China was grounded in the pacifist principles of Confucianism²¹. Moreover, they regarded themselves as self-sufficient and even for trade, the Empire allowed for a centralized bureaucratic system, without the need to ‘conquer’, failing to consolidate an intercontinental Empire. This is a key differentiating factor in comparing the Colonial West and Imperial China²² – an eminent factor in the Western victory against the Qing Empire in the Opium War²³. Contemporarily, however, such systems are but vestiges given the emergence of the new hegemonies by name of the United States and as of recent, China – they seek to consolidate a *Pax Americana* or bring an age of *Pax Sinica*, respectively.

Ascendency

Indeed, learning from its century of humiliation, China rises from the fetters of agrarianism as a result of Mao Zedong (the formation of the PRC) and Deng Xiaoping, the latter of which brought trade liberalization (the *laissez-faire* system) and modern foreign policy, embracing the utility of Western systems

¹⁶ The fear of change was grounded in Confucian philosophy, wherein order and structurality were prized virtues.

¹⁷ The First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), The Twenty-One Demands (1915) - although not a conflict, it remained a great defeat in power dynamics. Other conflicts include Japanese Invasion of Manchuria (1931-1932), Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). This is in tandem with defeats by the West.

¹⁸ Such treaties dissolved any vestiges of the tributary system

¹⁹ Hong Kong remains the preeminent example, remaining westernized until this very day

²⁰ **The most searing and eminent of humiliations, of course, remains the systematic plundering of the Old Summer Palace (□明□) in 1860 at the hands of a vindictive British force.**

²¹ Although such principles were not invariably followed, they remained intrinsic to Chinese thought

²² The former having control in colonized countries, albeit at a abhorrent cost of human life

²³ Both, however, did not stand the test of time given the dissolution of the colonial system and the emergence of the Westphalian System (state sovereignty) in the 20th century - indeed, even the concept of state sovereignty is wavering!.

whilst prizing the foundations of Chinese tradition and culture (中学为体，西学为用) – a gradual, yet effective paradigm shift. With the modernization of China, the West faces a formidable opponent that continues to disrupt international polarity. Just last year, the Chinese navy has become the world's largest, comprising of more warships and submarines than the naval might of the United States – we see now the resurgence of the strength of the Ming dynasty and its voyages. In fact, the ascendancy of China has given rise to admonitions by the international community regarding a 'China threat', whilst alternatively, China itself maintains its position of 'peaceful emergence' In actuality, China's rise marks an amalgamation of soft, sharp and hard power approaches – as with the voyages.

With Xi Jinping's initiation of the BRI, many see elements reminiscent of the tributary system. Under the shrouds of multilateralism and interconnectivity lies a potentially exploitative attempt to re-establish the sinocentric world order – a scheme inherently geopolitical. As with the tributary system, what transpires is an asymmetrical power system. Some claim the initiative to be a form of debt-trapping²⁴; this is in tandem to further expansionist policies both continentally – throughout infrastructurally deprived regions – and through maritime advancement²⁵. Indeed, the Ming Treasure voyages – under the narrative of peaceful expansion – legitimizes the development of maritime power, all for the benefit of the new leviathan by name of China.

We must look carefully upon the political discourse of modern china and its purported 'peaceful rise'. The pretences of soft power in both the Ming Voyages and its facilitated tributary system remain a disingenuous characterization. The international community must be weary in the face of the revitalized China, as its unfettered ascendance harkens to the glory of the Ming Empire and its voyages. The 'Chinese Dream' will be a dream no more. 'Humiliation' will be no more. A new hegemon emerges.

The world must act with prudence.

²⁴ Those claiming thereof drawing attention to Sri Lanka, wherein white elephant projects are made in lieu of true economic advancement. In 2017, as a result of indebtedness, Sri Lanka was forced to cede the recently constructed Hambantota port on a 99-year lease

²⁵ For example, the String of Pearls theory wherein China is increasingly controlling maritime choke points along the Indian Ocean. Moreover, disputes in the South China Sea - Interestingly, China uses Zheng He's voyages as historical legitimization for their right to the area

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The Great Ming Treasure Voyages

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The Ming Treasure Fleet was a pioneer in what it set out to do. It carried cargoes of gold, silver, silk, spices, sandalwood, ivory and countless other precious commodities. The captain and sailors were looking to make and develop national relations with other countries by giving these aforementioned materials away as gifts to people. However, the Ming Treasure Fleet also had its fair share of obstacles to overcome as it had to fight battles with belligerent armies or exchange blows with pirates who wanted to steal their gold. The fleet of ships was heavily militarized which helped immensely in their clashes. Thus, this article will discuss the adventures of the Ming Treasure Fleet, the unforgettable sights one would take in, the sorts of jobs that would have to be done on the ship and what it would be like to have been a young person on the journey.

To start with, the Ming Treasure Fleet had legendary adventures, quite literally. Swashbucklers across the board, the captain and sailors are known to have gone on some great adventures as the efforts of the fleet resulted in seven far-reaching ocean voyages to the in and around the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and beyond. The crew on the ships must have taken in some breathtaking views such as new locations and different cultures that nobody had heard of then. Therefore, the Ming Treasure Flight must have had some great adventures.

Next, the types of jobs that would have to be done on the ship will be stated. Tasks such as keeping the ship clean and cooking for the crew would have to be performed. To add, the ship would have to remain in optimal condition on the off-chance that the fleet had to go into battle so there must have been people in charge of repairing any broken parts and maintenance of the hull. Obviously, there were also captains on the ships and they supervised the day-to-day affairs of the ship as they were in command. Consequently, there were a lot of important tasks to be carried out on the ships. Fear

To be a young person on the voyages must have had a huge influence on their life after travelling across the seas as the battles with enemies could have had side effects on the youth such as anxiety and depression. Such stressful events could have easily traumatized an adolescent and scarred them for life. This would have taken a toll on people's mental health.

To conclude, the people on the Ming Treasure Fleet must have had some great adventures and some scenic views, but to be a young person on the journey must have been a lot to handle and extremely detrimental to one's health.



Non-Fiction

Group 5

Ming Treasure Voyages

Korean International School, Ting, Tsz Yau Amber Chloe – 16

In 1403 Nanjing, under the orders of Zhu Di or The Yongle Emperor, the early Ming Dynasty went through a militaristic expansion with voyages such as the seven treasure voyages. The Yongle Emperor was particularly aggressive and he wanted other countries to know how powerful China is and to perceive them as the strongest country. He decided that it is the time China should make use of the advanced technology and riches the state had to offer, for this special occasion he chose one of his most trusted general, a man he had known since he was young, Zheng He.

China had their connections, but to satisfy the demand for spices, medicinal herbs, and raw materials, Chinese merchants cooperated with Muslims and Indian traders to develop a network of trade that reached past the southeast Asian islands to the edges of the Indian Ocean. Coming from the East China ports was ginseng, celadon, lacquerware, gold and silver, horses and oxen from Korea and Japan. From the ports of southern China came hardwoods and other tree related products, ivory, rhinoceros horn, kingfisher feathers, ginger, sulfur and tin from Vietnam and Siam in the mainland Southeast Asia; cloves, nutmeg, batik fabrics, pearls, tree resins, and bird plumes from Sumatra, Java, and the Moluccas in the island southeast Asia. The Indian Ocean brought ships carrying cardamom, cinnamon, ginger, turmeric, and pepper from Calicut on the southwestern coast of India, gemstones from Ceylon (Sri Lanka), as well as woolens, carpets, and more precious stones from ports such as Hormuz on the Persian Gulf and Aden on the Red Sea.

The First Voyage, in the third lunar month of 1405, an order was issued for Zheng He and others to take command of 27,000 troops to the Western Ocean. An imperial edict, estimated date on 11th July 1405, was issued containing orders of an expedition. It was issued and addressed to Zheng He, Wang Jinghong, and others. The Yongle Emperor held a banquet for the crew on the evening before the first voyage, gifts were presented to the crew according to their rank. Sacrifices and prayers were offered to Tianfei, the indigenous goddess of the sea meant to protect fisherman and sailors. She has become a patron deity of Southern Chinese and East Asian persons. Autumn of 1405, they assembled at Qinhuai River where the shipyard was located, ready to depart from the city. The crew included sailors, builders, repairmen, soldiers, diplomatic specialists, medical personnels, astronomers and also scholars of foreign ways. According to the Taizong shilu 11th July 1405 entry about the dispatch of the fleet, Admiral Zheng He and the crew departed for the first expedition "bearing imperial letters of the countries of the Western Ocean and with gifts to their kings of gold brocade, patterned silks, and colored silk gauze, according to their status." The treasure fleet made their first stop at Liujiagang, then the fleet was organized in squadrons, while the fleet's crew honored the goddess of sailors Tianfei with more prayers and sacrifices. Afterward, the fleet sailed down the Chinese coast, towards the entrance of the Min River located in Sichuan, traveling east where they awaited the northeast monsoon at the Taiping port located in Fujian. More prayers and sacrifices were then conducted for the Tianfei goddess by the crew during the wait for the northeast monsoon. The fleet then departed via the Wuhumen in Fujian.

The treasure fleet sailed to Champa, Java, Malacca, Aru, Sumatra, Lambri, Ceylon, Quilon, and Calicut. From Lambri the crew sailed straight through the Indian Ocean rather than following the Bay of Bengal coastline to Ceylon. Three days after the departure from Lambri, one of the ships split off and went to the Andaman and Nicobar Island. The treasure fleet saw the mountains of Ceylon after another six days and arrived at the western coast of Ceylon two days later. They were met with hostility from the Alagakkonara, which was a prominent feudal family that provided powerful ministers and military rulers during the medieval period in Sri Lanka, so the fleet left the place. Dreyer (2007) states that it is possible that Admiral Zheng He made port at Quilon, but there is no account confirming this because the King of Quilon was with the fleet when they returned to China in 1407. Mills (1970) states that the fleet may have had a four-month stay at Calicut. Around the southern tip of the Indian Peninsula, the fleet changed direction and began its returning journey back to China. While returning the fleet made port at Malacca again.

The Imperial order for the second voyage was issued in October 1407. The possible confusion of whether Zheng He embarked the second voyage stemmed from the fact that a Chinese envoy was dispatched before Zheng He had departed with the main body of the treasure fleet. The imperial decree for the third voyage was issued during the period of the second voyage whilst the treasure fleet was still in the Indian Ocean during that time, so either Zheng He was absent when the court issued the imperial order or he had not embarked on the second voyage. On 21st January 1409, a grand ceremony was held in honor of the goddess

Tianfei. Duyvendak (1939) thinks that Zheng He could not have been on the second voyage because the ceremony was so important that Zheng He's presence was required. However, the author Fei Xin explicitly mentions Zheng He when describing the 1409 stop at the Pulau Sembilan, which strongly suggests that Zheng He had been on the second voyage according to Dreyer (2007).

The imperial order for the third voyage was issued during the first month of the seventh year of the Yongle reign. It was addressed to Zheng He, Wang Jinghong, and Hou Xian. Admiral Zheng He embarked for the third voyage in 1409, the fleet once again departed from Liujiagang in the ninth month. They left Changle in the twelfth month for the seas, proceeding through the Wuhumen. Then making stops at Champa, Java, Malacca, Sumatra, Ceylon, Quilon, Cochin and Calicut. Traveling to Champa within 10 days, Wang Jinghong and Hou Xian making short stops at Siam, Malacca, Sumatra, and Ceylon during the detours, arriving at Ceylon in 1410. During the returning journey back to China in 1411, the fleet would engage in hostile confrontation with King Alakeshvara (Alagakkonara) of Ceylon. Alakeshvara posed a threat to the neighboring countries, the Chinese were overbearing of the Sinhalese, whom they resented and considered them disrespectful, rude and hostile. Resenting them for committing attack and piracy towards neighboring countries who had diplomatic relations with Ming China. Alakeshvara had lured Admiral Zheng He and his troops into the Kotte territory planning to launch an attack on them, Zheng He and his 2000 accompanying troops invaded Kotte, conquering its capital. They took Alakeshvara captive, his family and other high ranking officials. The Sinhalese army hastily surrounded the capital, but they were defeated in battle against the Chinese troops, meanwhile the opposing Sinhalese army was said to have over 50,000 troops. The king and his family were taken captive to Nanjing. Admiral Zheng He returned to Nanjing in July 1411, presenting the Sinhalese captives to the Yongle Emperor. Eventually, the emperor set them free and returned them to their country. Kotte's previous legitimate dynasty had re-established themselves, from then on, the treasure fleet would experience no hostilities during visits to Ceylon on their voyages.

On December 1912, the Yongle Emperor ordered the fourth voyage, Admiral Zheng He and others were commanded to lead it. Admiral Zheng He's fleet left Nanjing in Autumn 1913. They set sail from Fujian during the 12th month of the 11th year in the Yongle reign. The fleet sailed to Champa, Kelantan, Pahang, Malacca, Palembang, Java, Lambra, Lide, Aru, Sumatra, Ceylon, Jiayile, Cochin, and Calicut. Then proceeded to Liushan, Bila, Sunla, and Hormuz. At Java, the treasure fleet delivered gifts from the Yongle Emperor, in return, the Javanese envoy arrived in China on April 1415, presenting tribute in the forms of western horses and local products while expressing their gratitude. In 1415, the treasure fleet made a stop at Sumatra during their returning journey from Hormuz, they would engage Sekandar at this point of the voyage. Sekandar was an autonomous ruler but was not recognized by the Chinese. Fei Xin described Sekandar as a false kinda who stole, robbed, and usurped the throne of Semudera from Zain al-'Abidin. Ma Huan twenty-five-year-old Muslim translator portrayed Sekandar as someone who attempted to overthrow the ruler, Ming Shilu noted Sekandar was the younger brother of the former king and plotted to assassinate the ruler. Admiral Zheng He had orders to launch an attack against Sekandar to restore Zain al-'Abidin as the rightful king of Semudera. Sekandar led his forces to attack the Ming forces but defeated ultimately. The Ming forces pursued Sekandar's forces to Lambri where they caught Sekandar and his whole family. King Zain al-'Abidin later expressed his gratitude by dispatching a tribute mission.

The Yongle Emperor bestowed gifts to princes, civil officials, military officers, and the ambassadors of the seventeen countries. The fifth voyage was primarily a return trip for seventeen heads of state from South Asia. They had made their way to China after Zheng He's visits to their homelands in order to present their tribute at the Ming Court. On this trip Zheng He ventured even further, first to Aden at the mouth of the Red Sea, and then on to the east coast of Africa, stopping at the city states of Mogadishu and Brawa, and Malindi. He was frequently met with hostility but this was easily subdued. Many ambassadors from the countries visited came back to China with him.

The sixth expedition of 41 ships sailed to many of the previously visited Southeast Asian and Indian courts and stops in the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and the coast of Africa, in order to return nineteen ambassadors to their homelands. Zheng He returned to China after less than a year, having sent his fleet onward to pursue several separate itineraries, with some ships going perhaps as far south as Sofala in present-day Mozambique.

The seventh and final voyage was sent out by the Yongle Emperor's successor, his grandson the Xuande Emperor. This expedition had more than one hundred large ships and over 27,000 men, and it visited all the important ports in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean as well as Aden and Hormuz. One auxiliary voyage traveled up the Red Sea to Jidda, only a few hundred miles from the cities of Mecca and Medina. It was on the return trip in 1433 that Zheng He died and was buried at sea, although his official grave still stands in Nanjing, China. Nearly forgotten in China until recently, he was immortalized among Chinese communities abroad, particularly in Southeast Asia where to this day he is celebrated and revered as a god. Zheng He died in 1433, either in Calicut, where he decided to stay during his 7th voyage due to failing health or on the return journey to China. Another suggestion is that he managed to return to China, and died some years later. Immediately after Zheng He's death, the eunuch fell from favor, and most of the Chinese historical records about him and his voyages are said to have been destroyed. It may also be mentioned that the Yongle Emperor died in 1424 and that during the reign of his successor, the Hongxi Emperor, no voyages were undertaken.

The Ming court was divided into many factions, the pro-expansionist voices led by the powerful eunuch factions that had been responsible for the policies supporting Zheng Ho's voyages, and more traditional conservative Confucian court advisers who argued for frugality. When another sea voyage was suggested to the court in 1477 the vice president of the Ministry of War confiscated all of Zheng He's records in the archives, incriminating them as "deceitful exaggerations of bizarre things far removed from the testimony of people's eyes and ears." He argued that "the expeditions of San Bao the West Ocean wasted dozen of myriads money and grain and moreover the people who met their deaths may be counted in the myriads. Although he returned with wonderful precious things, what benefit was it to the state?"

Eunuch politics and wasteful policies, the voyages were over. With the Ming Dynasty ruling for 276 years from 1368 to 1644, the voyages lasting from 1405 to 1433 lasting 28 years. By the end of the century, ships could not be built with more than two masts, and in 1525 the government ordered the destruction of all oceangoing ships. The greatest navy in history, which once had 3,500 ships (the U.S. Navy today has only 480), was gone.

Contributions of Zheng He

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He was the first man in history to accomplish the groundbreaking mission of travelling around the world by sea. He was born Muslim but would seek protection from Mazu and donate to Buddhist temples. He was the eunuch courtier who spread the network of the prosperous Ming Dynasty over the eastern Pacific and Indian Oceans. Who is he? He is Zheng He, the leader of the Ming Treasure Fleet.

How he manoeuvred his way through the endless sea has fascinated many, be it a historian or a diplomat. What had he done to earn the admiration of people and become one of the legends of China?

In the past, without advanced technologies like satellites and telecommunications, navigating through the vast and boundless seas was definitely a challenging job. Then what had enabled Zheng He to embark on such an unprecedented journey? That's Zheng He's knowledge in astronomy and intellectual technologies such as water clocks and compasses that were founded in the Ming Dynasty. Natural phenomena, such as the circulation of the sun and moon and tidal flows, were taken into account to determine the sailing routes. Apparatus found at that time, including the water clock and compass helped Zheng He to locate his ships and explore new realms. Besides, the sternpost-mounted rudder was a large ship which had a high carrying capacity and contained weapons and helped Zhang He to defeat intruders. This allowed Zheng He to voyage safely to different countries, ranging from the South East Asia to East Africa, and make good ties with them through exchanging their local goods. Amongst all of the exchanged products, the most significant one was a giraffe he received from Malindi, Kenya, which was later considered to be a holy animal that only existed in the tales of China — Qilin. Not only did the exchanged goods allowed the Ming Dynasty to make the best out of them to boost their economy, but also planted the seed of Chinese culture in different countries.

Apart from Zheng He's contribution in the diplomacy of the Ming Dynasty, his voyages also gained him respect from many people who had been living under the terrors of Chen Zuyi, the infamous pirate leader, and his henchmen. At that time, many local and foreign merchants were attacked and had their valuables robbed when they sailed across the South China Sea to trade. Chen Zuyi was let loose in the sea until he met Zheng He in Palembang. When Chen Zuyi saw the massive fleet of ships led by Zheng He, he planned to ambush them. He pretended to surrender to Zheng He, attempting to trick him into thinking that he was not a threat. However, Zheng He had seen through his nasty schemes. When Chen Zuyi later tried to mount a sneak raid, he and his allies were completely wiped out by Zheng He's army, which comprised more than 5,000 soldiers. In the end, Chen Zuyi was captured and executed. After the fiasco of the notorious pirates, the evil acts of pirates were effectively suppressed, allowing safer trades in China. Most importantly, it gained respect and recognition from the ruler in Palembang. The acknowledgment even extended to the allies of Palembang in Ming's supremacy. In return, these countries received benefits from Ming such as military and trading. More than 30 ambassadors even brought gifts to Yongle Emperor to express their appreciation and gratitude towards his reign of China.

Although the ancient wisdom found in the Ming Dynasty had long outshone by the modern technologies, Zheng He's venturesome expeditions across the oceans, punitive raids on the pirates, and considerable contributions to the China's trade and diplomatic force shall never be forgotten. His journey — the seven voyages of the Ming Chinese Treasure Fleet shall forever stand tall in the Chinese and world history