

# Admiral Zheng He

c. 1371–1435



**HOW HE AFFECTED THE WORLD** Admiral Zheng He was a Chinese Muslim military leader during the Ming dynasty. He led seven lengthy naval expeditions that influenced trade and cultural exchange between China and countries to the west.

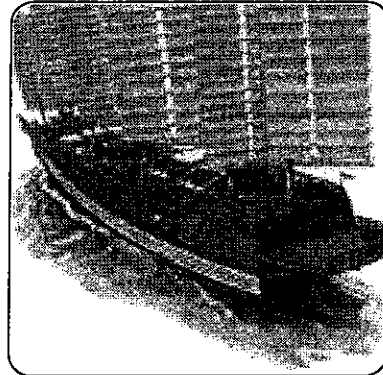


*As you read the biography below, think about how Zheng He's diplomacy helped him establish relations with many different cultures.*

Zheng He, also called Cheng Ho, was a Muslim born around 1371 in Yunnan, one of the last Chinese provinces still under Mongol rule. When Zheng He was about 10 years old, Yunnan was reconquered by the Chinese Ming dynasty. Captured and sent to the army as an **orderly**, Zheng He distinguished himself for his bravery and **diplomacy**. He eventually became a junior officer.

Zheng He had a great influence on Emperor Yung Lo, and he became the emperor's right hand man. The emperor named Zheng He commander in chief of the naval voyages he planned in order to demonstrate China's power and demand **tribute** from the western "barbarians."

Beginning in 1405—more than 80 years before Christopher Columbus launched his first journey across the Atlantic—Zheng He made a total of seven voyages. Zheng He commanded huge fleets with as many as 62 large ships, accompanied by hundreds of smaller vessels and up to 27,000 sailors. Zheng He visited about 30 different countries and traveled more than 35,000 miles.



## VOCABULARY

**orderly** person assigned to perform personal services for military officers

**diplomacy** negotiating without causing hostility

**tribute** payment to a ruler or nation by another

Each of Zheng He's ships carried enough food to last the entire voyage. Tubs of dirt for growing fruits and vegetables and non-perishable food like rice were placed on the ships.

Zheng He's voyages were diplomatic in nature. He secured tribute such as spices, pearls, gems, ivory, dyes, medicinal herbs, and exotic animals from the countries he visited. In return, Zheng He gave gifts from the emperor, such as Chinese silk and cotton, gold, silver, perfumes, and Ming porcelain. Foreign kings and ambassadors were invited to visit the Chinese court. Because of Zheng He's efforts, China and its glory was widely spread.

Zheng He died a couple of years after his seventh and final voyage in 1433. China did not continue the expeditions. Emperor Yung Lo had died, and the new emperor considered the sea ventures to be too expensive. China needed the money and resources to fight against barbarian invasions. The records kept by Zheng He and the great ships were destroyed, and China began a long period of isolation. Many historians speculate on how history might have been changed if China had not turned its back on exploration.

### WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

**1. Recall** What were Emperor Yung Lo's reasons for China's sea voyages?

**2. Predict** How do you think history might have changed if China had not stopped its explorations?

### ACTIVITY

Write a description of the position of admiral in Emperor Yung Lo's navy. Include a job description and list the qualities and preparation an admiral must have.