

Naval Power in Ming China

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Overview

- The Ming Dynasty
 - Background
 - The Yongle Emperor
- The Voyages
 - The Admiral Zheng He
 - The Treasure Fleet
 - The Seven Expeditions
- The End of the Voyages
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 - Growing Focus on the North
 - Political Conflict
- Conclusions





The Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

- Founded in 1368 by the Hongwu emperor
- Period of great stability with notable accomplishments in the arts
- Zenith of Chinese maritime power

The Yongle Emperor (r. 1402-1424)

- Ruled as Prince of Yan in Beiping while father in power
- Took throne in rebellion
- Sought to assert his legitimacy and power through voyages



The Admiral Zheng He



- ❑ Captured and castrated as a boy in Yunnan
- ❑ Served Yongle from youth
- ❑ Grew into imposing military figure
- ❑ Led seven voyages from 1405-1433



The Treasure Fleet

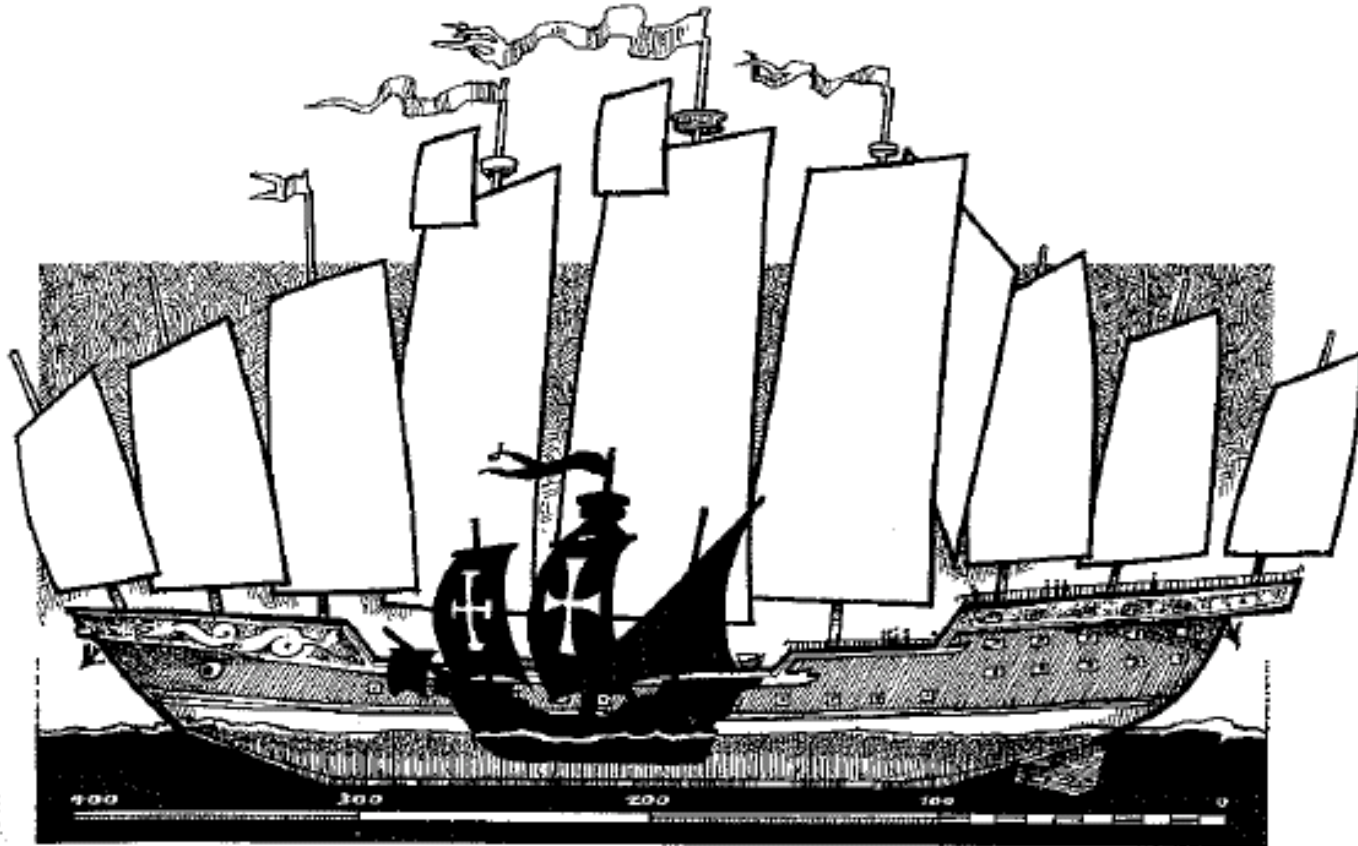
- Each fleet consisted of 249-317 ships:
 - Treasure ships
 - Flagships of fleet
 - Carried diplomats and tribute
 - Supply boats
 - Horse and troop transports
 - Battleships



The Treasure Fleet

- Each fleet included over 28,000 men:
 - Soldiers and eunuchs
 - Blacksmiths, sailmakers, and caulkers
 - Astrologers and geomancers
 - Translators and protocol advisors
 - Doctors and pharmacologists

Some perspective...



The Voyages

- Primarily tributary exchanges to expand Chinese sphere of influence
- Included occasional violent conflicts



MING CHINA 1368 - 1644

- 1368 Ming dynasty est. at Nanking
- 1421 Capital moved to Peking
- 1522 Mongol incursions and Japanese sea pirate attacks
- 1566

China 1400
China 1644



The End of the Voyages: Economics

- Expeditions not motivated by profit
- Fleet expensive to stock and maintain
- Too many competing projects:
 - Moving capital further north to Beijing
 - Ongoing war with Vietnam
 - Military campaigns into Mongolia



The End of the Voyages: Growing Focus on North

- Northern borders became a priority:
 - Capital moved north to Beijing
 - Mongols an immediate, viable threat
 - Took court away from Longjiang shipyards
 - Completion of Grand Canal

The End of the Voyages: Political Conflict

- Two factions: officials versus eunuchs
- Scholar officials opposed voyages from the outset:
 - Enabled eunuchs
 - Waste of resources
 - Promoted interest in exotica
 - Took focus away from agriculture
- Officials prevailed in 1435



Conclusions

- Chinese were a major maritime presence but withdrew quickly
- Withdrawal created power vacuum in Indian Ocean
 - Immediately filled by Arab merchants
 - Later by European explorers



Questions?

