

Document A: List of Zheng He's Expeditions (Original)

From a stone marker erected March 31, 1431, at a temple near the port where Zheng He's fleets set off on their expeditions.

... From the time when we, Zheng He and his companions, at the beginning of the Yongle period [1402-1424] received the Imperial commission as envoys to the barbarians, up till now seven voyages have taken place and each time we have commanded several tens of thousand government soldiers and more than a hundred ocean-going vessels. Starting from Tai Chang [a city near Shanghai] and taking the sea we have by way of the countries of Champa [Vietnam], Siam [Thailand] Java [Indonesia], Cochin [India] and Calicut [India] reached Hormuz [Iran] and other countries of the western regions, more than 30 countries in all, traversing more than one hundred thousand li [~500 meters] of immense water spaces ...

On arriving in the outlying countries, those among the foreign kings who were obstructing the "transforming influence" (of Chinese culture) and were disrespectful were captured alive, and brigands who gave themselves over to violence and plunder were exterminated.

Consequently, the sea route was purified and tranquillized and the natives, owing to this, were enabled quietly to pursue their avocations. All this is due to the aid of the goddess [to whom this marker is dedicated]. ... we have written an inscription on stone and have moreover recorded the years and months of our voyages both going and returning in order to make these known forever.

I. In the third year of Yongle (1405) commanding the fleet we have gone to Calicut [India] and other countries. At that time the pirate Chen Zuyi and his followers were assembled at Palembang [Indonesia], where they plundered the native merchants. We captured that leader alive and returned in the fifth year (1407).

II. In the fifth year of Yongle (1407) commanding the fleet we went to Java [Indonesia], Calicut [India], Cochin [India], and Siam [Thailand]. The kings of these countries all presented as tribute local products, and precious birds and rare animals. We returned in the seventh year (1409).

III. In the seventh year of Yongle (1409), commanding the fleet we went to the countries (visited) before and took our route by the country of Ceylon [Sri Lanka]. Its king Alagakkonara was guilty of a gross lack of respect and plotted against the fleet. Owing to the manifest answer to prayer of the divine power, the plot was discovered and thereupon that king was captured alive. In the ninth year (1411) on our return he was presented to the throne as a prisoner; subsequently he received the Imperial favor of returning to his own country.

IV. In the twelfth year of Yongle (1414), commanding the fleet, we went to Hormuz [Iran] and other countries. In the country of Semudera [Indonesia] the false king Sekandar was marauding and invading his country. Its king had sent an envoy to the Palace Gates in order to lodge a complaint and to request assistance. Approaching with the official troops under our command we have exterminated and arrested (the rebels), and silently aided by the divine power we thereupon captured the false king alive. In the thirteenth year (1415), on our return he was presented (to the Emperor as a prisoner). In that year the king of the country of Melaka [Malaysia] came in person with his wife and sons to present tribute.

V. In the fifteenth year of Yongle (1417) commanding the fleet we visited the western regions. The country of Hormuz [Iran] presented lions, leopards with gold spots and western horses. The country of Aden [Yemen] presented a kirin of which the native name is tsu-la-fa (giraffe), as well as the long horned animal (oryx). The country of Mogadishu [Somalia] presented zebras as well

as lions. The country of Brawa [Somalia] presented camels which run one thousand li as well as camel-birds (ostriches). The countries of Java [Indonesia] and Calicut [India] presented the animal mi-li-kao [translation unknown]. All presented local products the like of which had never been heard of before and sent the maternal uncle or the younger brother (of the king) to present a letter of homage written on gold leaf as well as tribute.

VI. In the nineteenth years of Yongle (1421) commanding the fleet we conducted the ambassadors from Hormuz [Iran] and the other countries, who had been in attendance at the capital for a long time, back to their counties. The kings of all these countries presented local products as tributes even more abundantly than previously.

VII. In the fifth year of Xuande (1430), starting once more for the foreign countries in order to make known the imperial commands, the fleet has anchored at the foot of the temple and recalling how previously we have on several occasions received the benefits of the protection of the divine intelligence we have hereupon inscribed a text on stone.

Source: Excerpts from an English translation of the stone marker provided in the book Seven Epic Voyages of Zheng He in Ming China (1405-1433): Facts, Fiction and Fabrication. The book was written by Chinese historian Su Ming-Yang and published in 2005 in Torrance, California. The translation is on pages 35-39.

Document B: Map of Zheng He's 7th Expedition



- **Palembang** is discussed in Document D.
- **Ceylon** [Sri Lanka], discussed in Document E, is the island off the southern tip of India, where Beruwala and Galle are marked with red dots.
- **Semudera** is discussed in Document F.
- **Malacca** (also spelled “**Melaka**”) is discussed in Document G.
- **Nanjing** was the capital of China at the time of Zheng He's first five expeditions.
- **Beijing** became the capital about the time of the sixth expedition.

Source: Drawn by Vladimir Menkov, based on information from a book by historian Edward Dreyer titled Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405-1433.

Document C: The Tributary System

By virtue of her cultural excellence, economic affluence, military power, and vast territorial expanse, China stood pre-eminent in East Asia for two millennia. Since early Ming times (1368-1643) there had been instituted a hierarchical system of “international relations” in East and Southeast Asia, with China occupying the position of leadership and Korea, Liu-ch’iu (Ryukyu), Annam (Vietnam), Siam, Burma, and a host of other peripheral states in Southeast and Central Asia accepting the status of junior members. ... “international relations” were based on an extension of the Confucian idea of proper relations between individuals: just as every person in a domestic society had his specific status, so every state in an “international society” had its proper station. Two Korean terms illustrate the idea well: relations with China were described as *sadae*, serving the great, whereas relations with Japan were termed *kyorin*, neighborly intercourse. Thus ... relations between the members were not governed by international law but by what is known as the tributary system. ...

During Ming and Qing times, tributary relations had been refined into a highly ritualistic performance, with clearly defined rights and duties on the part of each participant. To China fell the duty of keeping proper order in the East and Southeast Asian family of nations. She recognized the legitimacy of tributary kings by sending envoys to officiate at their investitures and by conferring on them the imperial patents of appointment. She went to their aid in times of foreign invasion, and sent relief missions and commiserative messages in times of disaster. On their part, the tributary states honored China as the superior state by sending periodic tribute, by requesting the investiture of their kings, and by adopting the Chinese calendar, i.e. recording events of their countries by the day, month, and year of the reign of the Chinese emperor.

Source: Hsü, Immanuel C. Y. (2000). The Rise of Modern China (6th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press. Pages 130-131. Hsü was born in China in 1923 and moved to the United States as a university student. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University and spent most of his career at the University of California-Santa Barbara.

Document D: Ma Huan's account of Palembang (Original)

Some time ago, during the Hung-wu period [late 1300s], some men from Guangdong province, Chen Zu-yi and others, fled to this place [Palembang] with their whole households; Chen Zu-yi set himself up as a chief; he was very wealthy and tyrannical, and whenever a ship belonging to strangers passed by, he immediately robbed them of their valuables.

In the fifth year of the Yongle period [1407], the court dispatched the Grand Eunuch Zheng He and others commanding the treasure-ships of the great fleet going to the Western Ocean [Indian Ocean], and they arrived at this place. There was a person named Shi Jin-qing who was also a man from Guangdong province, and he came and reported the acts of savagery and other such acts committed by Chen Zu-yi. Chen Zu-yi and others were captured alive by the Grand Eunuch Zheng He and taken back to the court, and they were put to death.

Subsequently, the emperor bestowed a hat and a girdle upon Shi Jin-qing and returned him to Palembang as principal chief, to rule over the territory. When this man died, his position did not descend to his son; it was his daughter Shi Er-jie who became ruler, and in every case rewards, punishments, degradations, and promotions all depended on her decision.

Source: An excerpt from a book written by Ma Huan, who traveled as an interpreter on three of Zheng He's expeditions. The title of the book is The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores, and it was written about 1435. It was translated from Chinese into English in 1970.

Document E: Ceylon (Original)

In the 9th month of the sixth year of Emperor Yongle's reign (1409), the fleet went to Ceylon [Sri Lanka]. King Alagakkonara invited Zheng He to his court and then demanded excessive gold coins. Meanwhile, the Ceylonese king sent soldiers to attack Zheng He's ships. Zheng He found that the majority of the enemy had left their state capitol, leaving it undefended. Thus, he commanded 2,000 soldiers to mount a surprise attack against the king's capitol and captured Alagakkonara, his wife, and other officials. The king's soldiers learned about the surprise attack and attempted to fight back, but they were completely defeated by the Ming forces.

In the 6th month of the 9th year of Emperor Yongle's reign (1411), Zheng He presented the captured people to the royal Ming Court. The emperor pardoned the king's crime and returned the Ceylon people to their country.

Source: An excerpt from a book called Ming History, which was first published in 1793. Ming History was written by official historians of the Qing dynasty based on records from the Ming dynasty. This excerpt was recently translated from Chinese to English.

Document F: Ma Huan's account of Semudera (Original)

The king of the country of Semudera had previously been raided by the “tattooed-face king” of Nagur and in the fighting he received a poisoned arrow in the body and died. He had one son, who was young and unable to avenge his father's death. The king's wife made a vow before the people, saying “If there is anyone who can avenge my husband's death and recover his land, I am willing to marry him and to share with him the management of the country's affairs.” When she finished speaking, a fisherman belonging to the place was fired with determination, and said, “I can avenge him.”

Thereupon, he took command of an army and at once put the “tattooed-face king” to flight in battle; and later he avenged the former king's death when the “tattooed-face king” was killed. ...

Whereupon the wife of the former king, failing not to carry out her previous vow, forthwith married the fisherman. He was styled “the old king,” and in such things as the affairs of the royal household and the taxation of the land, everybody accepted the old king's decisions. In the seventh year of the Yongle period [1409] the old king, in fulfillment of his duty, brought tribute of local products, and was enriched by the kindness of Heaven; and in the tenth year of the Yongle period [1412] he returned to his country.

When the son of the former king had grown up, he secretly plotted with the chiefs, murdered his adoptive father the fisherman, usurped his position, and ruled the kingdom.

The fisherman had a son by his principal wife; his name of Sekandar; he took command of his people, and they fled away, taking their families; and, after erecting a stockade in the neighboring mountains, from time to time he led his men in incursions to take revenge on his father's enemies. In the thirteenth year of the Yongle period [1415] the principal envoy the Grand Eunuch Cheng Ho and others, commanding a large fleet of treasure-ships, arrived there; they dispatched soldiers who captured Sekandar, and he went to the capital and was publicly executed. The king's son was grateful for the imperial kindness, and constantly presented tribute of local products to the court.

Source: An excerpt from a book written by Ma Huan, who traveled as an interpreter on three of Zheng He's expeditions. The title of the book is The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores, and it was first written about 1435. It was translated from Chinese into English in 1970.

Document G: Ma Huan's account of Melaka (Original)

Note: "Melaka" is also spelled "Malacca"

There was no king of the country; and it was controlled only by a chief. This territory was subordinate to the jurisdiction of Thailand. It paid an annual tribute of forty-eight ounces of gold; and if it were not to pay, then Thailand would send men to attack it.

In the seventh year of the Yongle period [1409] ... the emperor ordered the principal envoy the Grand Eunuch Zheng He and others to assume command of the treasure-ships, and to take the imperial edicts and to bestow upon this chief two silver seals, a hat, a girdle and a robe. Zheng He set up a stone tablet and raised the place to a city; and it was subsequently called the country of Melaka. Thereafter Thailand did not dare to invade it.

The chief, having received the favor of being made king, conducted his wife and son, and went to the court at the capital [of China] to return thanks and to present tribute of local products. The [Chinese] court also granted him a sea-going ship so that he might return to his country and protect his land. ...

Whenever the treasure-ships of the Central Country [China] arrived there, they at once erected a line of stockading, like a city-wall, and set up towers for the watch-drums at four gates; at night they had patrols of police carrying bells; inside, again, they erected a second stockade, like a small city-wall, within which they constructed warehouses and granaries; and all the money and provisions were stored in them. The ships which had gone to various countries returned to this place and assembled; they marshaled the foreign goods and loaded them in the ships; then waited till the south wind was perfectly favorable. In the middle decade of the fifth moon they put to sea and returned home.

Source: An excerpt from a book written by Ma Huan, who traveled as an interpreter on three of Zheng He's expeditions. The title of the book is The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores, and it was written about 1435. It was translated from Chinese into English in 1970.

Document H: Zheng He was trying to dominate other countries for China's benefit (Original)

To enable these great fleets to maintain the *Pax Ming* in the immediate region and sail through the Indian Ocean to Africa, it was necessary to create staging posts in what is today Southeast Asia. These depots (“guan-chang”), which comprised military garrisons-cum-treasuries, were established at Melaka, and at the northern end of the Melaka Strait near the polity of Samudera on Sumatra. ...

Below, five major military actions are sketched out for the reader.

The first example is of an attack on the polity of “Old Port” (Palembang) in Sumatra in 1407. In that year, Zheng He returned from his first major mission abroad, bringing with him a “pirate” Chen Zu-yi captured at Old Port, for reportedly having “feigned surrender but secretly plotted to attack the Imperial army.” The Ming fleet reported 5000 persons killed, with ten ships burnt and seven captured in the fracas at Old Port. Later in the same year, the Ming recognized the polity of Old Port, and appointed a Chinese person, Shi Jin-qing, as ruler. He was probably appointed by Zheng He to represent the Ming state and this polity was in effect a Ming Chinese client state in Southeast Asia. ...

A fourth attack was on Sri Lanka in 1411. This was perhaps the event most revealing about the nature of the eunuch-led maritime voyages. It involved a military invasion, the capture of Alagakkonara, the ruler of the Rayigama kingdom, and the carrying back of him and his family members to the Ming court in 1411. As was the case in similar scenarios in Yunnan, the Ming appointed a puppet ruler to replace the king, presumably to act in ways beneficial to the Ming. ...

Fifth, there was the attack and capture of Su-gan-la of Samudera. In 1415 Su-gan-la, the reported “leader of the Samudera bandits,” was captured and taken to China from Sumatra by Zheng He. While full details of the events that occurred in 1414 and 1415 remain obscure it is likely that Zheng He and his forces inserted themselves in a civil war in northern Sumatra, supported the side that was not hostile to the Ming and engaged in warfare with the other. ...

The examples above suggest that the maritime forces sent abroad in the first third of the fifteenth century were intended to achieve the recognition of Ming pre-eminence among all the polities of the known maritime world. To achieve this they used force, or the threat thereof. The number of Southeast Asian rulers travelling to China with the Zheng He missions suggests that coercion must have been an important element. It was almost unheard of for Southeast Asian rulers to travel to other polities, both for ritual and security reasons. That such a large number of rulers did travel to the Ming court in this period suggests coercion of some form. “Gunboat diplomacy” is not a term that is usually applied to the voyages of Zheng He. However, given that these missions were nominally involved in diplomacy and as it appears that the ships were indeed gunboats, with perhaps 26,000 out of 28,000 members of some missions being military men, this seems an eminently suitable term to apply to the duties of these armadas.

As such, they were missions intended to coerce and obtain control of ports and shipping lanes. It was not control of territory, which came with later imperialism, but was political and economic control across space — control of economic lifelines, nodal points and networks. By controlling ports and trade routes, one controlled trade, an essential element for the missions' treasure-collecting tasks. The colonial armies that manned these ships were the tools necessary to ensure that the control was maintained. ...

Source: Wade, Geoff. (2009). Ming Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia. In Geoff Wade (Ed.). China and Southeast Asia. (Vol. 2: Southeast Asia and Ming China from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century). (p. 218-221). London: Routledge.

Document I: Zheng He was a peacemaker (Original)

... As soon as Zhu Yuanzhang [the Hongwu emperor] established the Ming dynasty, he clearly spelt out the Ming court's non-intervention foreign policy in an imperial decree which states, "The rulers of China and barbarian states, far and near, should be kind to each other equally, adopt a friendly policy towards neighbors, and all will live in harmony as well as enjoy peace and happiness." ... Emperor Hongwu's proclamation on neighboring states in Southeast Asia not to be invaded was also observed by Emperor Yongle [his son]. Thus, Ming China's foreign relations with Southeast Asian states were fundamentally based on trade and diplomacy. This had been the guiding policy and tone of Cheng Ho's mission from 1405 to 1433.

Wade cited that Cheng Ho mounted attacks in Sumatra, Java, Sri Lanka and Su-gan-la of Samudera to prove Cheng Ho's militaristic and intimidating nature of the maritime voyages. Based on this author's research, however all these actions were taken either for a good cause or self-defense. For instance, Cheng Ho's capture of Chen Zu-yi in Palembang, Sumatra, helped clamp down on rampant piracy in the Straits of Malacca and thus was good for the East-West maritime trade. ... In the Su-gan-la (Sekandar) case in Samudera, Cheng Ho quelled the rebellion to restore peace and order of the state at the request of the native ruler. His men left the state once the rebellion was over. The military action in Sri Lanka was in self-defense as Cheng Ho's fleet was under attack by the native ruler Alagakkonara.

Wade also argued that depots ("guan-chang") set up by Cheng Ho's fleet in strategic port cities like Malacca and so on were military bases or colonies. In fact, the depot in Malacca as described by Ma Huan was clearly simply a warehouse.

In the above cases, Cheng Ho acted as a peacekeeper and guardian of native states to maintain law and order of the region and the safety of trade routes. Throughout his seven voyages, Cheng Ho did not occupy or colonize an inch of foreign land. Wade's expansionist theory is not supported by valid arguments and therefore not plausible at all.

...

Source: Tan, Ta Sen. (2009). *Cheng Ho and Islam in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies. (pp. 166-168).

The vassal states were obligated to pay tributes but *nothing* would happen to them if they failed to send tributary missions. The benefits of sending tributary missions far exceeded that of not sending. Besides getting gifts of gold, silver and other valuables, they had the Ming empire as patron to protect them. Therefore, numerous native states, big or small, came to pay tributes to the throne. So the Ming throne maintained peace with them and treated them well. ...

Source: Tan, Ta Sen. (2005). *Did Zheng He set out to colonize Southeast Asia? In Leo Suryadinata (Ed.). Admiral Zheng He and Southeast Asia. (p. 53). Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.*

Document Analysis Worksheet

Name:

DOCUMENT D

STEP 1: SOURCING (Understanding where the document came from.)

Before you read the document, read the “source” note at the bottom and answer these questions.

1. Who wrote the document?
2. When was it written?
3. Is this a primary source or a secondary source?
4. Does this writer see the events from a Chinese perspective?
5. Is this writer a reliable source for these events? Should we believe what this writer says? Why or why not?

STEP 2: CONTEXTUALIZING (Thinking about what else was going on when the events happened, information that isn't in the document.)

1. Using Document A as your guide, figure out on which of Zheng He's seven voyages did the events you read about happen?
2. Who were the participants in the events besides the Chinese? For each participant, answer the question in the chart below.

| Other participants | Do you think they saw Zheng He as a peaceful ambassador or an imperial aggressor? Explain your answer. |
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DOCUMENT E

STEP 1: SOURCING (Understanding where the document came from.)

Before you read the document, read the “source” note at the bottom and answer these questions.

1. Who wrote the document?
2. When was it written?
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STEP 2: CONTEXTUALIZING (Thinking about what else was going on when the events happened, information that isn't in the document.)

1. Using Document A as your guide, figure out on which of Zheng He's seven voyages did the events you read about happen?
2. Who were the participants in the events besides the Chinese? For each participant, answer the question in the chart below.

| Other participants | Do you think they saw Zheng He as a peaceful ambassador or an imperial aggressor? Explain your answer. |
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DOCUMENT F

STEP 1: SOURCING (Understanding where the document came from.)

Before you read the document, read the “source” note at the bottom and answer these questions.

1. Who wrote the document?
2. When was it written?
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4. Does this writer see the events from a Chinese perspective?
5. Is this writer a reliable source for these events? Should we believe what this writer says? Why or why not?

STEP 2: CONTEXTUALIZING (Thinking about what else was going on when the events happened, information that isn't in the document.)

1. Using Document A as your guide, figure out on which of Zheng He's seven voyages did the events you read about happen?
2. Who were the participants in the events besides the Chinese? For each participant, answer the question in the chart below.

| Other participants | Do you think they saw Zheng He as a peaceful ambassador or an imperial aggressor? Explain your answer. |
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DOCUMENT G

STEP 1: SOURCING (Understanding where the document came from.)

Before you read the document, read the “source” note at the bottom and answer these questions.

1. Who wrote the document?
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| Other participants | Do you think they saw Zheng He as a peaceful ambassador or an imperial aggressor? Explain your answer. |
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