

Zheng He

In 1371, Zheng He was born in China. His original name was Ma He and he came from the Hui people, who are a Muslim ethnic group in China. His family were important leaders in the Yuan dynasty, which was founded by the Mongols. When Ma He was ten years old, the Ming dynasty took over from the Yuan dynasty. His father was killed in the fighting and the young Ma was captured by Ming soldiers. He was given as a slave to a prince. In a short time, the prince began to trust Ma. As a result, he received an education and rose up the ranks. The prince made Ma He one of his closest advisers and he chose also him to lead his armies. Ma He did such a great job that the emperor gave him a special new name: Zheng He.



How Big Were the Ships?

- The biggest one was more than 120 metres long.
- It had nine masts and four decks.
- They were much bigger than any other ships in the world!

The Seven Voyages of Zheng He

Soon afterwards, the new emperor chose Zheng He to lead a huge fleet of ships. The purpose of the fleet was to show China's wealth and power. Zheng He was also asked to trade with other countries and build good relationships.

The fleet had 317 ships, which were called 'junks'. Some carried gifts like gold and silver or trade goods like silk and spices; other ships carried food, horses and even fresh water. Zheng He took 28,000 crew, which included sailors, soldiers, doctors and even translators.

The fleet set sail in 1405. The journey lasted two years. During this time, Zheng He visited Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and India. He traded goods, visited kings, defeated pirates and brought diplomats back to China.

Over the next twenty years, Zheng He went on six more voyages. Each time, the fleet was just as big! He took diplomats from each country to meet the Emperor. As he was a Muslim, Zheng built mosques and he also gave gifts to temples. He also collected gifts from the countries he visited and brought them back to China.

In total, Zheng He visited 25 countries. He sailed to south-east Asia, India, Arabia and Africa. Some people even say he visited Australia and North America. No one knows exactly when Zheng He died. However, most people say he died in 1433. Zheng was on his way home from Africa as part of his seventh voyage and he was buried at sea. His tomb is in China but it is empty. It was the end of China's golden age of discovery.



How Is Zheng He Remembered?

- Zheng He led the greatest navy in history. He is a great hero in China.
- Many books have been written about his journeys.
- China National Maritime Day is celebrated every year on 11th July – the date that Zheng He embarked on his first voyage.

Questions

1. When was Zheng He born?

2. What religion was Zheng He?

3. How did Zheng He become a slave?

4. What did the Chinese call their ships?

5. Name three things carried on the ships.

6. Describe the largest ship used by Zheng He.

7. List at least two things Zheng He did on his journeys.

8. List two ways Zheng He is remembered today.

Answers

1. When was Zheng He born?
Zheng He was born in 1371.
2. What religion was Zheng He?
Zheng He was a Muslim.
3. How did Zheng He become a slave?
Zheng He became a slave because he was captured by Ming soldiers.
4. What did the Chinese call their ships?
The Chinese called their ships junks.
5. Name three things carried on the ships.
Accept any three from the following: gold, silver, silk, spices, crew, horses, and fresh water were carried on the ships.
6. Describe the largest ship used by Zheng He.
The ships were more than 120m long; they had nine masts; and they had four decks.
7. List at least two things Zheng He did on his journeys.
Accept any two from the following: He visited countries, traded goods, built mosques, gave gifts to temples, visited kings, defeated pirates and brought diplomats back to China.
8. List two ways Zheng He is remembered today.
Accept any two from the following: Zheng He is remembered today because he led the greatest navy in history; many books that have been written about his journeys; and he is remembered on China National Maritime Day, which happens every year on 11th July.

Zheng He

Zheng He was born in Yunnan, China in 1371. His original name was Ma He and he was from the Hui people, who are a Muslim ethnic group. His family were important leaders in the Yuan dynasty that was founded by the famous Mongols. He had four sisters and one older brother.

When Ma He was ten years old, the Ming dynasty took control of China from the Yuan dynasty in China. His father was killed in the fighting and soldiers captured Ma He. He was given as a slave to a prince called Zhu Di. Over time, Ma He gained the trust of Zhu Di. He received an education and rose up the ranks.

Years passed and the prince Zhu Di became emperor. He made Ma He one of his closest advisers and asked him to lead his armies. Ma He did such a great job defending the empire that the emperor gave him a special new name: Zheng He.



Appearance

Records say he was a huge man! He said to be about 230cm tall with glaring eyes. He walked like a tiger and had a voice as loud as a bell.

The Seven Expeditions of Zheng He

The Emperor chose Zheng He to lead a huge fleet of ships. The purpose of the voyage was to demonstrate the power of China to the countries he visited. Zheng He was also asked to fight pirates, trade – particularly for spices and medical herbs - and build good relationships with other countries. Zheng He's fleet totalled 317 ships; these ships were called 'junks'. Some carried gifts like gold and silver or trade goods like silk and spices; other ships carried food, horses and even fresh water. He also took almost 28,000 crew, comprising sailors, soldiers, doctors and even translators so he could communicate with the people he met.

The Ships

The ships were gigantic: the biggest one was more than 120 metres long. They had nine masts, four decks and were far larger than any other ships in the world at that time!



In 1405, the fleet sailed into the Indian Ocean, visiting Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and India. He purchased exotic goods, visited kings, defeated pirates and brought diplomats from each country back to the Emperor in China. Over the next twenty years, Zheng He set out on six further expeditions. Each time, the fleet was just as large as the first. On these journeys, he continued to take diplomats home and picked up new ones to bring back to China. He built mosques and gave gifts to temples of other religions. He also collected gifts from other countries and even fought a land battle!

Gifts

Zheng He gave many gifts to the rulers of the countries he visited, including gold and silver. In return, he received many different items including lions, zebras, ostriches and even a giraffe! In total, Zheng He visited 25 countries. He sailed to south-east Asia, India, Arabia and Africa - some people claim he visited Australia. No one knows exactly when Zheng He died. However, most people say he died in 1433 during a return journey from Africa. He was buried at sea, somewhere in the Indian Ocean. However, attacks from the Mongols drew China's attention away from the exploring other countries. Instead of building new ships, the Ming dynasty focused on strengthening the Great Wall of China. This decision marked the end of the Chinese golden age of exploration.



How Is Zheng He Remembered?

- He helped to spread Islam around the world.
- Today, he is worshipped in temples across south-east Asia.
- Many books have been written about his journeys.
- China National Maritime Day is celebrated every year on 11th July – the date that Zheng He set off on his first voyage.

Questions

1. In what year was Zheng He, also known as Ma He, born?

2. What religion was Zheng He?

3. Describe what Zheng He looked like.

4. Name three things carried on the ships.

5. Describe the largest ship used by Zheng He.

6. List at least three things Zheng He did on his journeys.

7. What happened to end the Chinese golden age of exploration?

8. What do you think was Zheng He's greatest achievement? Explain your answer.

9. List three ways Zheng He is remembered today.

Answers

1. In what year was Zheng He, also known as Ma He, born?
Zheng He was born in 1371.
2. What religion was Zheng He?
He was a Muslim.
3. Describe what Zheng He looked like.
It is said that Zheng He was 230cm tall; he had glaring eyes; he walked like a tiger; and his voice as loud as a bell.
4. Name three things carried on the ships.
Accept any three from the following: Gold, silver, silk, spices, crew, horses, fresh water, trade goods, gifts.
5. Describe the largest ship used by Zheng He.
The ships were than 120 metres long; they had nine masts; and each ship had four decks.
6. List at least three things Zheng He did on his journeys.
On his journeys Zheng He visited countries, traded goods, built mosques, gave gifts to temples, visited kings, defeated pirates and brought diplomats back to China.
7. What happened to end the Chinese golden age of exploration?
The Chinese golden age of exploration ended because famine and attacks from the Mongols drew China's attention away from the exploring other countries. Instead of building new ships, the Ming dynasty focussed on strengthening the Great Wall of China. This decision marked the end of China's golden age of discovery.
8. What do you think was Zheng He's greatest achievement? Explain your answer.
Answers will vary, for example: Zheng He's greatest achievement was to explore Southeast Asia, India, Arabia and Africa because this made China more powerful.
9. List three ways Zheng He is remembered today.
Zheng He is remembered today for spreading Islam around the world; he is worshipped in temples in south-east Asia; many books have been written about his journeys; and China National Maritime Day is celebrated every year on 11th July – the date that Zheng He set off on his first voyage.

Zheng He

Zheng He, then known as Ma He, was born in 1371 in Yunnan, southwestern China. He came from the Hui people, a Muslim ethnic group in China. His family were important Muslim leaders in the Yuan dynasty, established by the famous Mongols. He had four sisters and one older brother. When Ma He was ten years old, the Ming dynasty replaced the Yuan dynasty as rulers of China. Ma's father was killed in the fighting and soldiers captured him. He was given as a slave to a prince called Zhu Di.

In a short space of time, Ma He gained the trust of the prince. He was given a formal education and rose through the ranks. As a man, he is said to have been huge - over two metres tall. He is also said to have had glaring eyes, walked like a tiger and had a voice as loud as a bell. When the prince Zhu Di became emperor, he employed Ma He as one of his closest advisers. Ma He distinguished himself during several wars, capturing cities and defending important places from the enemies of the Ming dynasty. In recognition of his achievements, the Emperor changed his name to Zheng He.

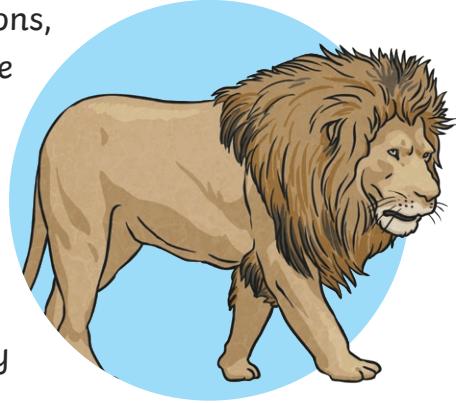
The Seven Expeditions of Zheng He

The new emperor now chose Zheng He to lead an enormous expedition. It was designed to show the rest of the world the might of the Chinese empire and to establish trade and forge strong diplomatic relations with the rest of the world. The fleet included 317 ships (commonly called 'junks'), the largest of which was more than 120 metres long, with nine masts and four decks. These ships would have dwarfed similar ships in Europe at that time. Some ships, called treasure ships, carried trade goods like silk, porcelain and spices; whereas others carried food, horses and even fresh water. He took almost 28 000 crew members, comprising sailors, soldiers, physicians and linguists.

In 1405, the fleet set sail on a two-year voyage, which visited Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India. During this time, Zheng He traded goods, visited kings, defeated pirates and brought back diplomats from many of the places he visited to pay tribute to the Chinese emperor.



Over the next twenty years or more, Zheng He explored the Indian Ocean in six further voyages. Each time, he took a fleet almost as large as the first. Diplomats from each country were brought to visit the Chinese emperor. He also collected tribute and gifts from countries that wanted to maintain good relations with China. These gifts included lions, zebras, ostriches and even a giraffe that people thought was a mythical creature. He traded goods throughout the world, built mosques and gave gifts of gold and silver to temples of other religions. Throughout his explorations Zheng He visited 25 countries, from south-east Asia to India, Arab kingdoms and African nations. It is even claimed by some historians that he visited Australia.



Mystery surrounds his death; however, most people believe he died in 1433 while returning from Africa on his seventh expedition and that his body was buried at sea. Shortly after his death, famine then danger from the Mongols drew Chinese attention away from sea exploration. Instead, China dedicated itself to a massive expansion of the Great Wall of China.

His Legacy

Zheng He led the greatest navy in history and he is responsible for the Chinese golden age of exploration. However, for hundreds of years, his deeds were almost lost in the mist of time. In the last one hundred years, his memory has been revived and his extraordinary achievements celebrated. Today, he is celebrated as a national hero in China as people celebrate Maritime Day on 11th July each year to celebrate the memory of Zheng He. Furthermore, he is credited with building stronger ties between China and the Islamic world. In Indonesia, a postage stamp was produced in his honour. All this demonstrates how the legacy of Zheng He has endured in south-east Asia.

Questions

1. Why was Zheng He given as a slave?

2. Why was Zheng He promoted by Zhu Di?

3. Why was Zheng He's name changed from the one he was given at birth?

4. Why do you think the Chinese sent treasure ships?

5. List three facts about the largest ships in the fleet of Zheng He.

6. How do you think Chinese people would have reacted to the animals Zheng He brought back?

7. Why did the Chinese golden age of exploration end?

8. What was Zheng He's greatest achievement? Explain your answer using ideas from the text.

9. Why do you think Zheng He was forgotten for a long time?

10. How does Zheng He's legacy endure today?

Answers

1. Why was Zheng He given as a slave?
Zheng He was given as a slave because his family were important Muslim leaders in the Yuan dynasty.
2. Why was Zheng He promoted by Zhu Di?
Zheng He was promoted by Zhu Di because he had gained the prince's trust.
3. Why was Zheng He's name changed from the one he was given at birth?
Zheng He's name was changed from the one he was given at birth because he distinguished himself during several wars, capturing cities and defending important places from the enemies of the Ming dynasty. In recognition of his achievements, the Emperor first changed his name to Ma Sanbao, meaning 'three protections', then finally he settled on the name Zheng He.
4. Why do you think the Chinese sent treasure ships?
Answers will vary, for example: The Chinese sent treasure ships to show how wealthy they were and to create links with the countries Zheng He visited.
5. List three facts about the largest ships in the fleet of Zheng He.
The largest ships in the fleet of Zheng He were more than 120 metres long, had nine masts and four decks.
6. How do you think Chinese people would have reacted to the animals Zheng He brought back?
Answers will vary, for example: I think Chinese people would have been awestruck because, at that time, they believed that giraffes were mythical creatures.
7. Why did the Chinese golden age of exploration end?
The golden age of Chinese exploration ended because famine then danger from the Mongols drew Chinese attention away from sea exploration. Instead, China dedicated itself to a massive expansion of the Great Wall of China.
8. What was Zheng He's greatest achievement? Explain your answer using ideas from the text.
Answers will vary, for example: I think Zheng He's biggest achievement was to explore the Indian Ocean because this made China a powerful country.
9. Why do you think Zheng He was forgotten for a long time?
Answers will vary, for example: Zheng He may have been forgotten because the Ming dynasty changed their policy by turning away from exploration.
10. How does Zheng He's legacy endure today?
Tomb, temples, books, postage stamps, TV shows, computer games.