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Cheng Ho

**Introduction**

Cheng Ho, also commonly known as Zheng He, was a Chinese sailor, explorer, mariner, fleet admiral, and diplomat. He also served as a court eunuch doing the era of one of China’s earliest dynasties, Ming Dynasty (Dreyer). Cheng was originally born as a Muslim and named as Ma He. He later changed his name to the conferred surname Zheng, conferred to him by Emperor Yongle.

Cheng Ho or Zheng He loved to go on expeditions and led many treasure voyages to South East Asia, Western Asia, South Asia, and East Africa. He has a huge fleet of ships which included both large and small ships. His larger ships stretched up to 120 meters or more in length and contained three to four tiers of decks. These ships accommodated hundreds of sailors and tourists.

Although Cheng Ho’s voyages are largely neglected in the Chinese history, the world came to know of his expeditions through the publication of Liang Qichao’s book, *“Biography of out Homeland’s Navigator; Zheng He”*. The book was published in 1904 and gave significant insights about the expeditions and voyages of the great admiral.

**Discussion**

Cheng Ho or Zheng He was a great sailor and explorer. He loved seas and oceans and was fond of going to sea expeditions from the very beginning. His passion for sea journeys can be attributed to his devotion towards Tianfei, the patron goddess of sailors and seafarers. He had a very rough childhood, as he was abducted and castrated at a very young age of 10 (Wilson). He was then put in the services of the young prince Zhu Di, who later became the Emperor Yongle. He was inducted in the military at a very young age and gained the confidence of the emperor. The emperor trusted him in sending on long sea voyages and as an ambassador to the other countries. According to some scripts, Zheng He led a total of seven epic sea expeditions, whereas some pieces of literature describe that he went on five voyages in total. Details of the sea voyages have been elaborated below (Vade).

First Voyage (1405-07)

Zheng He’s very first sea voyage was done as an ambassador or diplomat. It was a two year trip to Southeast Asia from 1405 to 1407. This expedition consisted of 317 ships and more than 28000 individuals.

Second Voyage (1407-1409)

Zheng He did not lead the second voyage personally but he organized all the procedures. The second voyage consisted of 68 ships and took place during 1407-1409. This voyage was directed to the court of Calicut.

Third Voyage (1409-1411)

Chang Ho lead the third voyage composed of 48 large ships and 30000 troops. In this trip, he visited the same old places that he had already visited in his previous voyages but touched Malacca on the Malay Peninsula and Ceylon in Sri Lanka.

Fourth Voyage (1413-1415)

The fourth sea voyage of the brave admiral took place from 1413 to 1415, when he went to thirty different foreign states and brought envoys with him to pay homage to the emperor. This voyage consisted of 63 ships and more than 28000 men.

Fifth Voyage (1417-1419)

The fifth voyage took place from 1417 to 1419. This was actually a return trip from 17 states of South Asia. Zheng He visited many places like Aden, Mogadishu, Brawa and Malindi. He also touched the east coast of Africa.

Sixty Voyage (1421-1422)

The adventurous court Eunuch took his sixth voyage in 1421 to 1422, to Southeast Asian and Indian region. It was a very short trip, in fact, less than a year, and the primary purpose of this trip was to return nineteen ambassadors to their homelands, that had come along with him in his fifth voyage.

Seventh Voyage (1431-1433)

It was Zheng He’s last voyage and as per many resources, he immediately passed away after the completion of this voyage in 1433. In this voyage, Cheng Ho paid a visit to the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean along with the beaches of Hormuz and Aden. It consisted of more than a hundred large ships and above 27000 men.

Chang Ho’s Voyages and Christopher Columbus’s Voyages

History has seen two brave voyagers in the form of Cristopher Columbus and Zheng He. Both were very famous and well known for their adventurous nature. Although both loved sea journeys, the way they started their path in sea voyages is very different (Gómez). Chang Ho or Zheng He was well-equipped with the latest technology of that time and maps that could guide him about the routes of the journey. Christopher Columbus, on the other hand, had no maps and technology like Chinese. Zheng, He commandeered properly planned voyages whereas Columbus did not plan his voyages. He did not intend to discover America, in fact, he only wanted to discover a new and shorter route to Asia.

**Conclusion**

In a nutshell, it can be seen that Cheng Ho or Zheng He, was a brave admiral and a very famous sea voyager. Although he had a rough childhood he never gave up and turned out to be a very ambitious traveler. He led a total of seven expeditions and learned something new from all of his journeys. Many people compare his trips to the voyages of Christopher Columbus, who was also a well-known sailor himself; but the expeditions of Zheng He differs in many respects from the sea voyages of Christopher Columbus.

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