

Camille Pinheiro

Professor Lyndell O'Hara

World Civilization

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15th Century Mariners

Zheng He was a Muslim mariner. He was also a eunuch, and he rose from humble beginnings to lose both of his testicles and become the greatest admiral in Chinese history. Between 1405 and 1433, he led seven voyages throughout the Indian Ocean, the expeditions of the treasure ships, which were over 400 feet long and had 7 or more masts. He led an armada of over 300 ships with a crew of over 27,000. He visited many countries, including Africa, the Middle East, and India. However, his journeys were not for exploration but for trade missions. China did not need to import anything because they were the center of trade at that time. They needed prestige and respect so that other countries would see them as the center of the economic universe. They had a tribute mission system, which brought many things to China, such as exotic animals from Africa.

Vasco da Gama was a mariner from Portugal, which has a fair bit of coastline and is relatively resource-poor. This means that they had to rely on trade to grow. He was the first of Henry's protégés to make it around Africa and into the Indian Ocean. In 1498, he landed at Calicut, a major trading post on India's west coast, and when he got there, he said he was looking for gold and Christians. They also caught and controlled several coastal cities, creating what historians call a "trading post empire." They were able to do this because of their well-armed ships, which captured cities by firing cannons into city walls. However, since the Portuguese did not have enough people or boats to run the Indian Ocean trade, they had to rely

on extortion. Portuguese merchant ships would capture other ships and force them to purchase a permit to trade called a cartaz. For people, they were glorified pirates, extracting value from trade without adding to its efficiency or volume.

Columbus overestimated the size of the Earth, Asia, and the oceans. He also navigated completely unknown waters, primarily using a technique known as dead reckoning, in which you figure out your position based on your direction, speed, and time from an hourglass. He also had a huge, largely negative impact on the people the Spanish encountered in the Americas.

From this information, I like Zheng He more than the others because he is a successful and capable administrator and a brilliant sailor.