

# Analysis of the Historical Significance of Zheng He's Voyages to the Western Seas

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**Abstract.** Intercultural communication has its long history when viewed as human phenomenon. The development of intercultural communication has facilitated the world progress and people's contact in many ways as economy, politics, education, ideology, religion and etc. In the history, some important events changed the face of the world such as the Great Discovery and the Industrial Revolution. It is those events that have made the world become smaller and smaller, which culminated what is we call Global Village. In this paper, the author aims at cultivating awareness and enhancing understanding of intercultural communication from the perspectives of Chinese culture by taking example of Zheng He's voyages to the western seas. In addition, the paper is intended to value the influence on the world brought about by Zheng He who led his large fleet to explore in the Ming Dynasty, which demonstrated the contribution to the development of intercultural communication.

## Introduction

In the world history, each event has driven the development and progress for humanity. In terms of intercultural communication, people from different parts of the world understand each other through the changes and revolution brought about by geographical discovery, industrial revolution and internet. Nowadays the whole world is characterized by its globalization with everything integrated to each other. Communication is increasingly more important than ever before thanks to the application of internet. It is obvious that all people living in this world find it comfortable and convenient when communication is performed. However, there is one thing should be kept, which is history. Here history means that what contributions or achievements those influential figures made for the sake of the world. Through the literature review, the ancient Chinese famous sailor whose name is Zheng He in the Ming Dynasty did a remarkable contribution to the development of intercultural communication. The following will describe how he did in his times.

### The Social Background.

The international situation was serious in the 15th century. In Europe, it was chaotic and turbulent. There came to the economic recession, the black death, and war between Britain and France, which resulted in social instability and poverty.

On the contrary, China as an eastern country had taken on a new look. From the third year of emperor Zhu Di's reign (1403) to the eighth year of emperor Zhu Zhanji's reign (1433) in the Ming dynasty, Zheng He, a famous navigation hero in the history of China, led large fleets for seven times to visit more than 30 countries in the western seas( that is, the southern ocean and the Indian ocean). The scale of seven voyages to the western seas is unprecedented in the Chinese history. It is more than half a century before the famous voyage completed by the Portuguese and Spanish sailors. Why was such big event happening in the Ming dynasty of China. The answer to this question is listed as follows.

In the 15th century when Zheng He sailed to the west, the world pattern was that the east was far ahead of the west in terms of prosperity and China was at the center of the world. In Yongle period of Ming Dynasty, China was unified and strong. There was a good atmosphere of politics and economy. The government was committed to restoring and developing friendly relations with foreign countries and carrying out large-scale diplomatic and foreign trade activities. The mission of

the voyage was to establish international peace and tranquility in southeast Asia and South Asia, which laid a basis for sailing to other parts of the world. Opening up new routes and conducting trade with those overseas countries was another major reason. Therefore sailing to the western seas became a milestone in the history of China in the Ming dynasty.

### **Achievements Made During the Seven Voyages**

With seven voyages to the western seas, Zheng He had made a tremendous contribution to showing that China in the early Ming Dynasty was strong in terms of economy and navigation compared to other parts of the world. The voyages strengthened the contact between Ming Dynasty and overseas countries, spread advanced Chinese civilization to the outside and promoted the image of China in the world stage. In order to have a better understanding of these influence, some detailed events will be listed to highlight it.

The voyage was a prelude to the era of world navigation and a symbol of China's embrace of the outside world. The voyage covered more than 30 countries and regions including the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific Ocean. Zheng He led more than 200 ships with 27,000 crews to arrive in Java, Sumatra, Siam, Adam, Africa, Red Sea and Mecca. When passing these countries, Zheng He and his staff had a friendly communication in trade and culture with local officials and people. This greatly initiated cooperation and exchanges between China and those countries. In particular, the government of Ming dynasty established diplomatic ties with those countries, which laid a solid ground for next successors.

Some legendary stories and historical facts prove that the voyage now has its influence. There are many legends about Zheng He in Malacca. The people there believe that Baoshan Pavilion was built in memory of Zheng He. One well named after his name, Saobao Well is believed to be a well left by Zheng He. In Semarang, Indonesia, Zheng He has been worshipped as a god for centuries. The statue of his is enshrined in the temple, alongside the statues of two of his closest aides, Wang Jinghong and Ma Huan. In Thailand( formerly known as Siam, the local Chinese called Zheng He the Lord. The Phanan Cheong Buddhist Monastery in Ayuthaya, Thailand, is a place where local Buddhists worship him. There are many temples dedicated to Zheng He in the southeast Asia, which are quite special cultural and religious phenomena. Moreover, the belief in Zheng He has become popular, which is a symbol of civilization and religion. From the above historical facts, it is not difficult to understand why the people of Southeast Asian countries have profound feelings towards Zheng He. People built temples to deify his deeds and regarded him as a protective god for protecting property and keeping safety.

### **Communication Has Been Strengthened Thanks to the Voyages**

Intercultural communication plays a historical role in making country prosperous. Zheng He 's sailing to the west has opened the door to the outside showing ancient Chinese desire for communication. The following is listed to show the great achievements made by this voyage.

To introduce Ming Dynasty to those overseas countries.

Intercultural communication is viewed as exchanges of ideas, systems, education, values, etc. In the fifteenth century, the Ming Dynasty was prosperous in its economy. In order to develop further, the emperor Zhu Di initiated this unprecedented campaign which showed his willingness to introduce his kingdom to the world. This introduction itself had its enormous influence upon the whole world, which facilitated the development of economy at home and abroad.

### **To Spread Living Skills to Other Countries**

Intercultural communication aims at cultural exchanges. In Zheng He's voyage, he not only introduced Chinese culture to those countries, but also learned a lot from them. First, Zheng He taught the local people how to live a better life. When the fleet arrived in Malaysia, the crew taught

the natives how to drill wells. Until now, there are many Zheng He's Wells there to commemorate his outstanding contributions.

Zheng He's voyages to the western seas opened the prelude of the world navigation and symbolized China's embrace of the outside world. He took the multi-religious culture as the guide and opened up the sea silk road in southeast Asia, which became the milestone in the world maritime history. Due to the advent of world navigation, transportation between the east and west was greatly changed, which promoted the exchanges and broke closed and isolated barriers among nations. In this critical period of human social development, Zheng He's navigation enabled a large number of Chinese people to go abroad, which wrote a magnificent chapter in the history of human civilization.

The historical fact of Zheng He's sailing to the western seas once again clearly tells us that exchanges, cooperation, integration between countries will become increasingly important for the development of times and progress of society. Openness, inclusiveness, determination and strive for peace have forged a path of national prosperity. On the contrary, self-closure and arrogance will destroy the vitality of the nation. Chinese culture, whether in the past, present or future, will be a major force in the field of world culture. It will play a pivotal role in spreading the advanced culture and enhancing cultural exchanges worldwide. The history of this voyage proves that China's economic boom is not a threat but a positive opportunity to promote the development of other countries. Since Malaysia took the lead in establishing diplomatic ties with China among Asean countries in 1974, bilateral economic and trade relations have made great progress. China has become an important exporter to Malaysia, which has exerted profound influence on Malaysia's politics and economy.

## Summary

Through the analysis above, it is our pride to say that Zheng He's voyages to the western seas has exerted positive influence on the communication with outside world. Its significance is so great that the Initiative of One Belt One Road initiated by the Chinese government will promote our deep links and understanding with more and more countries.

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